

# Expert group joint opinion

Evaluation Procedure: Assessment of Study Field

Higher Education Institution: Baltic International Academy

Study field: Social Welfare

Experts:

1. Inga MILLERE (Chair of the Experts Group)
2. Dalibor Dolezal (Secretary of the Experts Group)
3. Rūta Butkevičienė
4. Ruta Klimkāne (Employers' Confederation of Latvia)
5. Agate Mačtama (Student Union of Latvia)

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

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

The Baltic International Academy is a privately-owned educational institution founded in 1992 as the Baltic Russian Institute. In 2006 the Baltic Russian Institute was renamed the Baltic International Academy (hereinafter referred to as the BIA). The BIA is the autonomous institution of higher education and science with the right to self-government. In August 2021, the Board of the BIA took the decision that the BIA complies with the title of the University of Applied Sciences. In 2022, it has been established that the initial strategic specialisation of the BIA is the academic and scientific work in the branch group "Social Sciences" which include the study field "Social welfare" implemented by the BIA and anticipates science branches and study fields to be primarily developed.

Study field "Social Welfare" of BIA is one of the nine study fields and is focused on a set of quality social work education, which provides higher professional education which meets the needs and the development trends of the society and national economy. The group of experts formed to assess the study field "Social Work" and the two relevant study programmes under the field at the BIA examined the provided self-assessment report (SAR) prepared by the academy and participated in evaluation on-site visit. In the report, the group of experts assess the compliance of the study field and study programmes according to the relevant requirements and criteria for such programmes. Experts highlight the strengths and weaknesses of each component and suggest possible steps to be implemented to ensure the sustainability and improvement of the evaluated programmes and study field in general.

The aims of the study field are clearly defined, BIA has identified the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, however there is a lack of comprehensive and detailed examination, and the strategic plan of study field could be more concrete. The management structure is unclear and ineffective, the prepared documentation tends to be inconsistent and insufficiently developed, implemented processes tend to be inconsistent with the legislation.

The expert group has analysed the internal quality assurance system and has come up with an opinion that BIA quality assurance system is the central component of the Academy Management System, and recently the Academy has made new steps in developing the Internal Quality Assurance System at BIA. BIA has a good collaboration and a lot of agreements on traineeship with national employers (mostly municipal social offices).

BIA has established quality policy and management structure as well as is in the process of improving it by taking concrete steps to implement and coordinate the process. However, according to the experts group observation, involved parties do not know or understand the described system which raises concerns about the actual operation and effectiveness of the system and does not allow to claim that the established management is effective and sustainable. In connection with this, the realisation of the study field is not comply with many regulatory documents and laws - Implementation of programmes do not comply with the MC Regulation Nr.111 "The procedure for organising and implementing distance learning"; Article 56.1 of the second part, paragraph 5 of the Law on Higher Education Institutions; Regulation of the Cabinet of Ministers No. 932 of 16 November 2004 "Procedure for Starting Studies in Later Study Stages"; Cabinet of Ministers No. 505 of August 14, 2018 "Regulations for Recognition of Competencies Acquired Out of Formal Education or Professional Experience and Previous Educational attainment" etc. It should be added that The bachelor's degree (BA) programme is offered to graduates of high schools. It provides general social work on the basic level. BA Study programme is based on the professional standard of "Social worker" there is a need to make the compliance with professional standard closer.

During analysis, site visit and discussion with several groups, expert team concluded that the master's degree (MA) programme of "Social work" does not correspond to the professional standard

of “Leading social worker”, so obtaining qualification is not justified.

BIA teachers use e-learning platforms to conduct classes, however, the expert team found that the courses are completely online, which is not in line with the law, and it should be noted that it is impossible to reach necessary competence in a professional programme.

It should be noted that there is a lack of academic staff with qualifications in the field of social work.

BIA's contribution to the analysis of recommendations of previous accreditation and their application and implementation to the specifics of the study field and corresponding study programmes is insufficient and inappropriate. It should also be noted that the documents submitted for accreditation do not contain answers to all recommendations, which can be considered as misleading the Experts and shows the general attitude of the BIA towards the quality of studies.

After receiving Expert team Joint opinion the BIA, developing comments on factual errors, the expert team received from BIA, among other comments, the equalization protocol of prior education.

Received protocol does not correspond to the protocol which experts received during the visit, but it should be noted that it has been developed to ensure a more transparent process. However, its content does not correspond to the relevant legislation.

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

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

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

##### **Analysis**

1.1.1. The Baltic International Academy (hereinafter referred to as the BIA or Academy) is a privately-owned educational institution founded in 1992 as the Baltic Russian Institute. In 2006 the Baltic Russian Institute was renamed the Baltic International Academy. The BIA is the autonomous institution of higher education and science with the right to self government. In August 2021, the Board of the Baltic International Academy in accordance with the provisions of the Article 3 of the Law on Higher Education Institutions "Types and strategic specialisation of Higher Education Institutions" took the decision that the BIA complies with the title of the University of Applied Sciences. On 2022, it has been established that the initial strategic specialisation of the BIA is the academic and scientific work in the branch group "Social Sciences" which includes the study fields "Hotel and Restaurant Service, Tourism and Recreation Organisation and "Social Welfare" implemented by the BIA and anticipates science branches and study fields to be primarily developed.

The study field “Social Welfare” of BIA is one of the nine study fields and is focused, according to the SAR, on a set of quality social work education, which provides higher professional education based on the Constitution of the Republic of Latvia, Education Law, Law on Higher Education Institutions, Law On Scientific Activity, other regulatory enactments of the Republic of Latvia and the BIA Constitution and other regulatory enactments, which define the goals, tasks and basic principles of the Academy and meets the needs and the development trends of the society and national economy. The previous accreditation of the field took place in 2017, where the accreditation period for “Social Welfare” field was determined for two years.

According to the BIA’s application to the Quality Agency for Higher Education for the assessment of the study field "Social Welfare" on 30.09.23. and submitted study programmes documents, Study field "Social Welfare" implements two study programmes - the professional Bachelor's study programme "Social Work" (code 42 762) and the professional Master's study programme "Social Work" (code 47 762) and according to SAR comply with the latest applicable professional standards Social Worker and Leading Social Worker implemented in Riga and Daugavpils. In general, the expert group sees that social work specialists are in demand at the national level, which was also indicated by the representatives of employers during the visit, at the same time, it is essential that

the knowledge, skills and competences acquired by graduates meet the needs of the labour market, which, among other things, are also determined in professional standards. However, inconsistencies with professional standards have been discovered during the analysis of the programmes, this will be analysed in the appropriate sections.

According to the information in the SAR in section 2.1.1. (p. 28.) there is also information about the first-level higher education study programme of the Social Welfare field: "the study programme of the first level of professional higher education included in the study field ensures faster preparation of qualified specialists for the labour market. It also provides lifelong learning opportunities for people wishing to change careers or upgrade their qualifications." In the same way according to the Attachment Nr.5." ACCREDITED Baltic International Academy study fields and the study programmes included in them: on 01.12.2022 " the study programme of the first level of professional higher education "Organizer of social assistance" is included, in addition on the BIA's web page during the accreditation visit was possible to apply for studies in this particular programme. <https://eplatforma.aika.lv/index.php?r=expert%2Fspc-app%2Fview&id=1334&part=16> However, considering that application for study field assessment includes only bachelor and master study programmes, the expert group did not analyze first level professional study programme and, taking into account information in BIA applications concluded, that BIA will not continue to implement this programme.

The goals of the study field development (attachment 2.1.) are defined, contain five sections, but partly correspond to the BIA strategy 2022-2025 ( [https://bsa.edu.lv/docs/nolikums/strategija\\_2022.pdf](https://bsa.edu.lv/docs/nolikums/strategija_2022.pdf)). For example, the study field development plan 2023 to 2029 does not foresee research-based studies in content and nature to ensure that students receive appropriate competencies to apply evidence based practices developed based on the best research available in the field. BIA development strategy 2022-2025 paragraph 2.2. foresees Integration of science and research in all fields of study which also means teaching evidence-based and research-based practices throughout the overall course of study. At the same time Development plan for the field of study "Social Welfare" (SL) from 2023 to 2029 don't cover this topic at all. Likewise the Study field development plan does not contain precisely measurable achievable results or indicators for each activity, the execution of which can be determined in a certain time and scope.

1.1.2. The SAR (p. 29-30) includes a SWOT analysis, which provides a general idea of how those involved in the SWOT process see the current state and development conditions of the study field from different perspectives. Both strengths and weaknesses as well as opportunities have been identified. However, a more comprehensive and detailed examination of the identified weaknesses and threats would have provided a more convincing picture to assess whether their reduction was actually considered. It is not clear how the SWOT analysis has been used to reflect what should be done about the weaknesses and threats identified. For example, SWOT analysis highlights weaknesses mostly related to students, but SAR hardly addresses their possible resolution or mitigation. A critical analysis of BIA regarding academic staff and research development is missing. It gives the impression that attention has also not been paid to mitigating the identified threats to the BIA activities. It should be noted that the threat description includes problems with the social assistance organizers programme, which has been discontinued, which creates the impression that the analysis is outdated and has not been renewed, and also creates the impression of a formal attitude of the BIA.

1.1.3. The management, responsibility, and decision-making structures of the study field are described in the SAR (p. 30-33), including the roles of administrative and technical personnel to ensure the needs of the study field. According to the SAR (p.32) the management process structure of the study field "Social Welfare" defined in general the processes necessary to use the quality

management system. In the Attachments, the governance structure of the study field is the structure of the management processes of the "Social Welfare" study field, which reflects the relationship between processes and relevant performers. BIA management system is shown in the attachment in the Section 1.2. The activities of the Daugavpils branch in all areas are organised centrally from Riga. The study process in the Daugavpils branche is centrally coordinated with the study programme managers by jointly forming the teaching staff for the study process.

During discussions with the director of the study field and directors of the study programmes, as well as academic staff, the expert team realised that all parties involved do not have a clear vision of the decision-making processes related to the study field and BIA development. For example, about the different roles of Study field Council and Study methodological council, some of the discussion participants did not even know that Study methodological council exists, let alone its role in the study process. Expert team did not find any specific tasks or documents, or aims for the Study methodological council. Meeting with management, teaching staff and Study field and Study programmes directors showed gaps of information exchange. In summary, the expert team sees that management structure is described in internal documents, however, involved parties do not know or understand the described system which raises concerns about the actual operation and effectiveness of the system and also does not allow to claim that the established management is effective and sustainable. The support provided by the administrative and technical staff for the study field and corresponding programmes is unclear, the given information differs from one to another group.

1.1.4. BIA has defined terms and procedures of admission and matriculation, which has been approved by the BIA Senate meeting and is compliant with the relevant Latvian law on Higher Education Institutions. The document provides clear admission procedures for candidates as well as for foreign candidates ([https://bsa.edu.lv/docs/admission/uznemsanas\\_noteikumi\\_BSA\\_2022\\_23.pdf](https://bsa.edu.lv/docs/admission/uznemsanas_noteikumi_BSA_2022_23.pdf)). The mentioned document provides conditions for linguistic requirements to be met by candidates. Admission conditions differ according to the level of study.

Also, in the mentioned document there are rules regarding candidates who have previously obtained their education outside the study programmes provided by higher education institutions and or practical activity in a particular field. In turn according to the SAR (p.33) recognition of professional experience, previously acquired formal and non-formal education for students who want to continue their studies at the Academy at a later stage of study is by following Regulation of the Cabinet of Ministers No. 932 of 16 November 2004 "Procedure for Starting Studies in Later Study Stages" (LV only), regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers No. 505 of August 14, 2018 "Regulations for Recognition of Competencies Acquired Out of Formal Education or Professional Experience and Previous Educational attainment".

Analysing the available documentation, the experts found several significant inconsistencies. First of all - Regulations approved by the BIA Senate - "Enrolment Rules and Matriculation Procedure at the Baltic International Academy" for the study year 2022/2023 point 26 stipulates that enrollment in the BIA professional master's study programme "Social Work" for persons who have a bachelor's degree are eligible for the standard study duration of 1 year and 6 months and acquired degree or second-level professional higher education (or equivalent higher education) in the thematic group of health care and social welfare education, in turn persons with obtained an academic bachelor's degree in humanities and arts, education, social sciences, commerce and law and those with a bachelor's degree or second level professional higher education in another thematic group of education and at least half a year practical experience in the field of social welfare, professional experience may be enrolled in the master's degree programme "Social Work" with a regulatory study duration of 2 years. These rules are significantly different from those presented in the documentation to the Expert team for assessment. According to SAR p.96 admission requirements are - Professional bachelor's degree or second-level professional higher education and obtained the

5th level social worker's professional qualification for 1,6 year programme or Academic or professional bachelor's or equivalent degree, or professional higher education with qualifications in the following fields of education: humanities and arts, social sciences, commercial sciences and law, healthcare and social welfare, services for 2 year programme. Applicants for this particular programme should have at least 6 months work experience in the field of social welfare. So it can be concluded that admission rules are much wider than defined in the programme.

Regarding the recognition of previous education during discussions with the management of the study field and students, the expert team made sure that the process is organised and that the students are very satisfied with the given opportunity, but by examining the protocol of the previous education recognition expert team came to the conclusion that the recognition process does not correspond to the Regulation of the Cabinet of Ministers No. 932 of 16 November 2004 "Procedure for Starting Studies in Later Study Stages" (LV only) .

Admission to the later stages of studies takes place in accordance with the mentioned Cabinet of Ministers Regulations Paragraph 3. "It is allowed to start studies at a higher education institution or college at later stages of studies in a study programme of the same or a lower level. After the first level (short cycle) of professional higher education, studies may be continued in a higher education study programme leading to a bachelor's degree or a second level of professional higher education." Article 8 of the corresponding MC regulation determines that the study course could be equated if the corresponding volume in credit points in both comparable study programs is the same or the number of credit points in the previously learned relevant subject is greater.

The documentation provided during the visit during the accreditation process convincingly indicates that the process of equalization of studies does not take place properly, for example, in the equalization from the 1st level professional higher education study program, which ensures the acquisition of the qualification of a social rehabilitation.

According to the protocol provided to the experts, practice places are equated (Practice I and Practise II), the description of which states that the purpose of the practice is to get acquainted with the specifics social work profession and deeper understanding of social work and the problems of social work in Latvia as a whole. According to experts, it is impossible to equate these study courses from the study program whose purpose is to learn a different profession and obtain a different qualification. It is also not possible to equate the study course "Introduction to the specialty" from the study program of another profession.

It should be noted that the protocol forms developed by the BIA for equating study courses do not create a clear and transparent process, as they do not show which study courses from exactly which study courses are being equated.

As for the protocols for the recognition of previous experience, the expert team did not receive it even after repeated requests. During discussions with study field director and programmes directors experts were informed that the recognition of previous experience is realised on the basis of certain institution reference during a certain period without evaluating the achieved study results which is contradictory to the regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers No. 505 of August 14, 2018 "Regulations for Recognition of Competencies Acquired Out of Formal Education or Professional Experience and Previous Educational attainment".

As a whole it should be mention that there is a need to develop admission rules that meet the requirements of accredited programmes as well as elaborate documentation and process of Recognition of Competencies Acquired Out of Formal Education or Professional Experience according the legislation as well as implement legislation regulation for those applicants who apply for study in a later stage.

1.1.5. In terms of the evaluation methods used in the course of the study programmes, students' performance is evaluated through different methods - tests, exams (written and/or oral), course

work - papers, projects. BA and MA thesis are evaluated by a commission. There are "Regulations for Evaluation of the Study Results in the Baltic International Academy" approved by the Senate of BIA where are described all possible evaluation forms as well as teaching staff responsibilities and students rights and responsibilities in the evaluation process and Procedure for appeal submission and consideration as well. However, it should be noted that the document does not contain information about the processes in a situation where a student fails the tests, exams etc. It should also be noted that not all evaluation forms and types are described and defined in the relevant regulatory document. For example, in the study course descriptions use two terms - Exam and Differentiated test for the same evaluation criteria. This could be confusing for all involved parts in the study process. It also should be noticed that during the Expert team meetings students noted that they don't remember anyone getting a failing grade. The criteria for evaluating the study results in the study course descriptions are general and not specifically related to the outcomes of the study course which is not according to the Article 56.1 of the second part, paragraph 5 of the Law on Higher Education Institutions.

1.1.6. BIA developed Policy Statute on "Privacy" (approved at the BSA Senate, protocol No.137 of 14.02.2019). BIA Internal data protection rules, and "Code of Academic Integrity and Ethics" (approved at the BSA Senate sitting, protocol No.137 of 14.02.2019). Code explains the concept of academic integrity and actions related to it and defines key procedures for dealing with academic integrity violations. Students are acknowledged about the principles of academic honesty, compliance requirements during studies, and sanctions are also explained to students at the beginning of study courses by teaching staff. Upon submitting their final theses, students certify with their signature that the work is not counterfeit or plagiarised. The scientific supervisor of the thesis also certifies it with his / her signature. BIA is using the University of Latvia's Unified Computerised Plagiarism Control System for the control of plagiarism in BIA study papers. All BIA final theses are tested at two levels (before the pre-defense and before the final thesis defence).

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

Study field and the relevant study programmes partially meet the needs and the development trends of the society and national economy. Therefore the aims of the study field are defined according to the current understanding of the purpose of the programmes in general. It should be noted here that in communication with industry representatives, it is possible to conclude that the demand for specialists and their training meets the demand, however, based on the study programme and course descriptions, they only partially meet the goals contained therein and the achievable results specified in the professional standards. Study field and the relevant study programmes partly comply with the main fields of the strategic development of BIA. BIA has identified the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats but more comprehensive and detailed examination is missing, and the strategic plan of Study field could be more concrete. The management structure is unclear and ineffective, the prepared documentation tends to be inconsistent and insufficiently developed, implemented processes tend to be inconsistent with the legislation. BIA has established the principles of academic integrity and mechanisms for their observance.

#### Strengths

1. BIA shows clear awareness of the necessary linkage to the labour market

#### Weaknesses

1. Lack of information flow between structural units

2. Employees' formal attitude towards regulatory documents and their development
3. Non-mutually coordinated decision-making process
4. Development of conflicting regulatory documents
5. Inappropriate realisation of the process of recognition of previous education and experience, contrary to the legislation

## 1.2. Efficiency of the Internal Quality Assurance System

### Analysis

1.2.1. According to SAR [p. 38], BIA study quality assurance system is one whole system for all the study fields, programmes and departments, including branch offices, and is the central component of the Academy Management System (AMS). The document "BIA Study Quality Assurance System" covers BIA quality policy issues and is publicly available ([https://bsa.edu.lv/docs/nolikums/BSA\\_Studiju\\_kval\\_nodros\\_sist\\_eng.pdf](https://bsa.edu.lv/docs/nolikums/BSA_Studiju_kval_nodros_sist_eng.pdf)). The document points out that "the documents regulating activity in the field of study, including self-evaluation process, are defined in the list of the main external regulatory and internal regulatory documents of the Academy. Internal regulatory documents of the direction have additionally been developed for certain study directions". Social Welfare study direction council (approved by BIA Senate on December 11, 2013), pursuant to the provisions of regulations, administers study programmes of all levels relating to the same branch. Study direction council is responsible for the development of the study programmes of the branch carrying out evaluation and implementation analysis of the study programmes, analysing the students' learning achievements, quality/performance of the academic staff. Study direction council works out the strategy for the development of the study programmes of the branch, evaluates annual self-assessment of the study programmes, changes made, applications for the new study programmes, and submits to the study council. [SAR, p. 38]

The BIA has implemented important steps towards assurance of Academy quality policy: this year (2023) BIA got a Committed to Excellence certificate (British standard Investors in Excellence) and newly recruited the specialist in charge of the implementation of the BIA quality policy. During the expert meeting with the management team, this specialist identified ideas and plans to improve the Internal Quality Assurance System at BIA. However, in the discussion with the Social Welfare field management team of the BIA and other meeting groups, the experts did not get a clear idea of the management's vision in the quality assurance area. The experts were asked to ask a question about the quality management system of the BIA in another meeting group. There was only one person who commented on the system and this was the specialist in charge of the implementation.

BIA has established quality policy and is in the process of improving it by taking concrete steps to implement and coordinate the process. However, according to the experts group observation, the stakeholders of Social Welfare field study programmes, including study programmes management team, are not involved in this process enough.

1.2.2. According to the SAR, development and review of social work study programmes is regulated by "Regulations for the development, approval and amendment of the study programmes at the Baltic International Academy" (approved at BIA Senate on 09.07.2020). Study programmes are developed on the basis of recommendations from students, graduates, practice supervisors, employers and professional organisations [SAR, p.39]. Table 2.2.2.1 "Mechanism for obtaining and providing feedback" [SAR, 39-40] presents methods and tools used to obtain and provide feedback regularly however, it is not clear what specific changes were made to improve quality of the study programmes based on the results of methods and tools presented (experts could not find the appendix "Improvement of the study programme" SAR, p.39) or other specific examples of the review of study programmes). The procedures for providing feedback to students, employers, and

graduates are not clear as well - Table 2.2.2.1 lists only the study programme activities that involve collaboration with stakeholders and tools (surveys) for obtaining feedback.

The procedures for the development and review of the social work study programmes and the feedback mechanisms to all stakeholders are not clearly defined and available on the BIA webpage.

1.2.3. The mechanism developed for submission of student complaints and suggestions is established by the BIA study quality management system based on the excellence model of the British Standards Investors in Excellence. SAR presents a detailed description of rules, requirements and processes included in this procedure. Students can submit complaints and suggestions personally to the recipient of the complaint / suggestion at the BIA study information centre (SIC), the BIA branches or by sending the scanned copy of completed form by email to [info@bsa.edu.lv](mailto:info@bsa.edu.lv). The document "Procedure for submission and consideration of student applications, proposals and complaints" is available on the BSA home page [https://bsa.edu.lv/docs/nolikums/Procedure\\_submission\\_consideration\\_student\\_applications\\_proposal\\_s\\_complaints.pdf](https://bsa.edu.lv/docs/nolikums/Procedure_submission_consideration_student_applications_proposal_s_complaints.pdf)

The mechanisms and procedures for submitting students' complaints and suggestions are clearly developed. The process of examination of students' complaints, making the decision and informing the recipient is presented in SAR (p. 42-43).

1.2.4. The statistical data collected by the BIA are regularly summarised and submitted to external institutions and internal departments. The information covering students enrollment, status, mobility, international relations, etc. is submitted to external institutions such as the Ministry of Education and Science, Central Statistical Bureau, National Education Information. Information covering students, employers and graduates survey results is regularly summarised and analysed by BIA computing and analytical centres and submitted to the internal departments - BIA Board, BIA management and programmes directors. SAR points out that, based on the information provided, the directors of study field and study programmes take the measures to improve the study programmes [SAR, p.46].

The survey for students "Field of study "Social Welfare" Survey" presented in The Annex 2.2.4 includes questions/items about the whole study semester. It has been indicated by BIA that there is an individual course evaluation questionnaire embedded in the moodle system, but the rules of the programme due to implementation of this questionnaire are not clear. As the programme managers have stated during the meeting that it is an individual decision of the lecturer. I.e. it is not clear if students are prompted/invited and if/how the programme is being improved in response to student feedback and insights.

The clear rules and mechanisms considering the evaluation of individual courses should be developed. On-site meetings with graduates and employers showed that the majority of participants are not involved in giving feedback on the improvement of the programmes, although they shared their suggestions and recommendations for programme improvement during the meeting.

During the meeting, students confirmed that after each semester they are invited to fill in the survey which is available on-line, although the study field director noted that students are not motivated to fill in the survey. Students noted that they do not receive feedback on whether and what has been renewed in the study programmes based on the feedback they have given. The expert group missed students' opinions and insights on study programmes improvement during on-site meetings.

The statistical data collection mechanism established by BIA ensures regular collection and analysis of information (statistics) on the both levels of social work study programmes. However, the mechanism for assessing the quality of individual courses is not defined clearly and should be addressed. The procedure of providing feedback to all stakeholders about study programme updates is not defined clearly enough. Students, employers and graduates are not involved enough in giving

the feedback on improvement of study programmes.

1.2.5. General information about social work study programmes can be found on the BIA homepage only in Latvian but the information provided is incorrect. (<https://bsa.edu.lv/index.php/lv/magistra-studiju-programmas/socialais-darbs.html>). According to the SAR, more detailed information about study plans, performance of studies for students is provided in the NEXUS system and available for authorised users [SAR, p. 46-47]. The experts did not find any information in English about the Social welfare study programmes published on the BIA website. According to experts, the availability of information in English about the direction of “Social welfare” can make other universities aware of the existence of a study programs. This, in turn, can encourage them to reach out to the BIA for joint research or projects. Thus, could also find out whether students from other countries have an interest in studying social work at the BIA. The higher education institution is engaged not only in attracting students but also in conducting research, thus contributing to the sustainability and familiarity of Latvia. It's commendable that BIA's plans are to improve the website.

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

The BIA quality assurance system is the central component of the Academy Management System, and recently the Academy has made new steps in developing the Internal Quality Assurance System at BIA. Based on the excellence model of the British Standards Investors in Excellence, BIA developed the mechanism for submission of student complaints and suggestions. The procedures for the development and review of the social work study programmes of the Social Welfare study field and the feedback mechanisms to all stakeholders are not clearly defined and available on BIA website. Only the surveys are identified as the instruments for obtaining feedback from all stakeholders from both study programmes. Other instruments are not presented. The students, employers and graduates are not involved enough in giving the feedback on improvement of study programmes. There is no clear mechanism for informing these groups about study programme updates. Information in English about the Social welfare field is not available on the BIA website.

#### **Strengths**

1. Steps made toward renewal of Internal Quality Assurance System at BIA.
2. Surveys for all stakeholders are developed.
3. The complaints and suggestions procedure is presented clearly, in sufficient detail, and with examples.

#### **Weaknesses**

1. Insufficient cooperation with students, graduates and employers in receiving feedback.
2. No information presented about the specific changes made to improve quality of the study based on stakeholders surveys and their recommendations.
3. There are no clear procedures and mechanisms to introduce all stakeholders with changes that have been made in the study programme based on their feedback.
4. There is no clear mechanism for the evaluation of individual courses.
5. There is no information available in English about the Social welfare field published on the BIA website.

### **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:** Non-compliant

Based on the report provided by the BIA, the Academy operates a study quality mechanism based on the guidelines of the European Excellence Model (EIM), in parallel integrating the quality conditions from the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education of the document "Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area" Part 1: "European standards and guidelines for internal quality assurance for requirements incorporated in higher education institutions." (ESG-2015)

Although the BIA indicates the existing hierarchy for the management of quality assurance mechanisms, nevertheless, based on observations in discussions with academic staff and students, experts conclude that there is no strict understanding of the basic principles of the established bodies, especially highlighting the non-transparency of the "study-methodical council" operation and the inability to distinguish between its functions from the "Study directions council." Information about their specific goals and tasks is partially available, for example, the percentage distribution of representatives and their election procedure is not available.

In addition, there is no specific data available on the number of participating academic staff, students, and graduates in study quality evaluation surveys, indicating only percentage satisfaction with the realised study courses, which in the relevant context does not provide a complete understanding of the overall evaluation of the study field. In addition, the presented report does not give an insight into the explanation of the feedback transfer mechanism, thus not creating an understanding of the interaction of the collected data with the introduced innovations in the study process. Apart from questionnaires, no other instruments have been indicated in the study quality management processes.

It is particularly desirable to point out that the described feedback processes do not mention the mechanism by which the collected data would be presented to the decision-making institutions, including providing feedback to students, graduates and other involved parties. The lack of such a tool significantly harms the conclusion of the feedback loop.

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

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

BIA has demonstrated its commitment to quality assurance based on the specified document, as part of the European Excellence Model (EIM) and European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education document "Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area": "European Standards and Guidelines for Internal the integration of the requirements embedded in higher education institutions for quality assurance" into the quality review body created by it, which is supervised by the BSA Senate. The "Quality Policy" is also publicly available on the BIA website, which justifies its creation. In addition, the presence of various councils and committees indicates the procedures for quality assurance of higher education.

Although it formally meets the requirements regarding the established policy and procedures for quality assurance of higher education, it is still important to point out the fact that the "Study Quality Assurance System" was approved only on September 6, 2023, additionally mentioning the "Quality Policy", the changes of which were approved in 2023 on February 23, preventing a strong assessment of their effectiveness in ensuring the quality of studies. There is no clarity between the range of issues to be managed by the participating bodies, such as the "study-methodological council" and the "study direction council", and thus the importance in quality assurance. The final stages of the procedure are not described in the received documents, for

example, specifying the processes for analysing the obtained results, for providing feedback.

- 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:** Non-compliant

Based on [https://bsa.edu.lv/docs/nolikums/Studiju\\_programmu\\_izstrade\\_09072020.pdf](https://bsa.edu.lv/docs/nolikums/Studiju_programmu_izstrade_09072020.pdf) BIA has created councils (Study Field and Study Methodological Council) which are involved in the development of study programmes, revision and provision of feedback mechanisms. These bodies ensure that the study programmes meet the goals of the university and the regulation of the normative acts of the LR, and are reviewed and monitored. The regulations mention that changes in the study programme can be proposed by the head of the study programme, prompting consideration of the desired changes in the study programme council, as well as upon the proposal of the study programme council. The Studies Methodological Council examines the proposed changes, and in case of approval, submits the decision to the BIA Senate. Although the documentation mentions the frequency of conducting surveys, no information is found on the regularity of internal evaluation of study courses, which in turn adds to the above-mentioned challenges in transferring feedback and integrating the improvements, and innovations expressed in it into the study process. During the visit it was made clear that there is no strong understanding of the connection between the established mechanisms, especially mentioning also the performance of the unclear functions for which the interviewed parties were unable to give concrete statements or show understanding.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Partially compliant

The information provided by the BIA on the regulations on the evaluation of study results, as well as the available study course descriptions, indicate the existence of the student evaluation system and the availability of information for students. The BIA has determined the criteria, procedures, and conditions for evaluating the results, consistent with the expected study results of the study programmes.

BIA's developed evaluation systems may lack correspondence with demands in external criteria e.g. that are mentioned in profession standards etc., therefore there are doubts that the system works in a complete way from all perspectives. It is necessary to review the emphasis placed in the study programmes in order to adapt the study content to the professional standard set in the state. Although conversations with academic staff mention conversations with students during study courses, their effectiveness and practical nature cannot be assessed.

- 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

Based on the documents provided by the BIA, such as "Regulations on the Academic Posts of the Baltic International Academy" and "Regulations on the BIA Professors' Council and the Election of Professors and Associate Professors at the Baltic International Academy," it is concluded that the mechanisms for evaluating lecturers' qualifications and their effectiveness are carried out by regularly using student surveys, as well as the study field council carries out the evaluation and implementation analysis of the study programmes of the field, analyses the learning achievements of the students, analyses the quality/performance of the work of the academic

staff involved in the study field, as well as promotes the integration of scientific work in the study programmes.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Partially compliant

The SAR states that the questionnaire is primarily used as a data collection instrument, which is carried out at the end of each semester, in addition to the head of the study programme collecting data on graduates and their employment. Record-keeping documents have been introduced within the SAR. It should be noted that "(..) at the end of study programmes, students sign a cooperation agreement with the BIA on employment information giving. Graduates provide information about employment progress using the survey questionnaire embedded on the BIA website"; however, the mechanisms for incentives for filling out the questionnaires need to be disclosed, and the approximate number of resources involved is not provided, nor is the approximate number of resources involved, preventing judgement on the effectiveness of in this process is not observable, based on the information provided in the discussions about providing feedback using study course evaluation questionnaires, or individually communicating with study course lecturers, but not engaging in the decision-making process or discussions about them. Although the report mentions the proportion of student representatives in the decision-making process, the ratio of the study programmes represented in them has yet to be available.

It is important to mention that it is strongly recommended to improve the availability of feedback questionnaires. Experts were not offered to familiarise themselves with the content of the questionnaire.

- 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:** Non-compliant

In the SAR the BIA indicates the mechanisms that ensure quality (questionnaires, discussions in the study field council), thus providing a basis for continuous improvement and a relationship that promotes effective study. However, there are specific points that raise concerns about the quality of existing processes:

1. It still needs to be determined how stakeholders are actively encouraged and engaged to provide feedback. Meetings with various interested parties (students, employers, employees, etc.) demonstrated a specific resistance in communication and this attitude was observed in all named groups, for example in critical evaluation of the situation, by which we mean not criticizing, but an objective evaluation noting both positive and strong points as well as possible improvements and weaknesses likewise avoiding answering questions by redirecting them to others or talk about other things when answering direct questions. A kind of organizational resistance and desire to maintain the status quo was visible.

The repeatedly emphasised responsiveness from the academy's side prevents a full assessment of the role of feedback in improving the study process.

2. There are uncertainties about the availability of questionnaires, for example, for students who use the BIA website sparingly and how the results are used for continuous improvement of studies. No specific mechanisms for integrating recommendations are seen, except for conducting individual conversations, which is emphasised by the students involved in the discussions.

3. There are no unique mechanisms for stimulating academic staff, including the promotion of students' research work, as an additional element of study quality;
  4. Application of feedback to strengthen marketing, not emphasising the need for continuous improvement of study quality in the 2022-2025 strategy;
  5. In discussions with management, students, and graduates, a feedback mechanism was avoided - discussion during study courses, making changes in the study process; however, there is no precise mechanism or implemented changes based on the effectiveness of such a tool, the removed advantage of remote studies. The availability of the remote study process is mentioned in the discussions as the only implemented tool.
  6. There needs to be a greater understanding of decision-making processes, including its structural units, at the level of students and graduates, which, in turn, affects the accuracy of providing feedback and the transfer of potential improvements.
- Such shortcomings leave potential gaps in the adaptability of the study field and contribute to the weakness of the provision of continuous development and improvement.

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

#### **Analysis**

1.3.1. BIA indicates that "The analysis shows that financial resources to ensure implementation of study programmes corresponding to the study field "Social Welfare" are sufficient and ensure sustainability of the study field and study programmes". SAR (p.50).

Revenues of the BIA study field are made up of the following main funding sources:

- 1) income for studies (tuition fees and other services related to the learning process);
- 2) revenues for scientific activity (project financing from the state budget, income from scientific works, EU structural funds and other revenues);
- 3) other income (funds of Latvian and international projects, income from renting, selling of books, organisation of various courses, etc.) (SAR, p.47).

The main source of financing of the study process is the revenue from the tuition fee. The tuition fee for the Bachelor of social work study programme in the Daugavpils branch is lower than in Riga, as well as the tuition fee is lower for part-time studies – in both Bachelor's and Master's level study programmes (SAR, p.47 – p.48). Tuition fees have not been increased in 2022-2023. BIA does not have state budget places, however BIA has a regulatory framework that provides for a system of tuition fee discount, including the number of budget places financed by BIA for full-time studies. During a meeting with the students, experts gained confidence that students knew about the discount system on tuition fee and it was being used. Experts were provided with a specific example when a student was informed of being exempt from the tuition fee due to his outstanding academic success. BIA students have the opportunity to apply for study and student credits.

According to SAR the number of students in the field of social welfare studies in 2022/2023 has decreased by 47 students compared to 2016/2017, while during the last two years it has stayed almost unchanged (SAR, p.8). As the BIA's primary source of financial revenue is derived from the tuition fees, it follows that if the total number of BIA students decreases, the overall revenue of BIA will also decrease.

During expert visits in a meeting with the management of the Daugavpils branch, it was mentioned that adequate financial resources were at the disposal for the branch's operations, as well as financial support from BIA had been received for mitigating the consequences resulting from a fire incident in Daugavpils branch. Additionally, it was indicated that three students had been enrolled in the Bachelor 1st year programme in the academic year 2023/2024. The SER does not contain a document regulating (or information about) the minimum number of students in any of the study field "Social Welfare" study programmes. During the visit, no clear answer was given to the experts' question about the minimum required number of students in the group to ensure an optimal study

process. Although the minimum number of students is not mandatory, according to experts, this can make the financial flow more targeted so as not to distract funding from study programmes where the number of students is higher. The BIA indicates that a study program can also be implemented with one student. It was explained that BIA cross-finances programmes if necessary. When implementing study programmes, it is necessary to assess whether teaching methods related to discussions, group work, visits, to get acquainted with social service providers, to work with a very small number of students can be used effectively. In the same way the number of students also affects the processes of ensuring the quality of studies, this applies both to the organization of academic work and its provision - development of teaching materials and simulations, provision of scientific literature, digitization, continuing education of lecturers in the specific field, development of scientific research in the specific field.

The founders of BIA use their right to control expenses and determine the minimum number of students in the study programme, thus giving the right to train students from small groups. (SAR, p.118;). The number of students enrolled in the shortest (90 CP Professional Master "Social Work" programme is insignificant - during the reference period there have been academic years when no student has been admitted, one or two students have been enrolled (Table 3.1.4.2.). The BIA is reducing the places where the study field is being implemented. The bachelor's social work programme will no longer be offered in Jēkabpils and Jelgava, while the master's study programme will no longer be implemented in Daugavpils. This change might impact the number of students in the future. During expert meetings (with students, employers, faculty), it was pointed out that students are aware that their studies take place close to where they live.

BIA has not yet formulated a strategy aimed at attracting a higher number of students to the study field "Social Welfare". Interest in exclusively online studies was notable during expert visits and interactions with the students.

According to the information provided in Appendix No. 7 of SER, in 2022 revenues from the state budget and EU structural funds are the lowest in the reporting period, the BIA's own financing in 2022 amounts to EUR 392.3 thousand. Consequently, expenditure on scientific work in 2022 totals to EUR 406.1 thousand, which is about EUR 7 thousand more than in 2021, but less compared to the period from 2016.

During the meeting of experts with the BIA management it was mentioned that in 2023 one of the students for a scientific doctorate degree in economics and business has been conducting a study related to the evaluation of the effectiveness of long-term social care institutions and predicting size (need) in the regions of Latvia. The experts have at their disposal the presentation of the mentioned study. The research conducted on social services serves as a valuable resource for implementing the study field "Social Welfare".

Revenues for scientific activity consists of project financing from the state budget, income from scientific works, EU structural funds and other revenues (SER, p.47). In the period from 2016-2021 the study field "Social Welfare" participated (with the support of the European Social Fund) in the project "Development of professional social work in municipalities" implemented by the Ministry of Welfare (No. 9.2.1.1/15/I/001) in order to provide methodological support for social work specialists (SER, p. 50). There are no other examples directly aimed at the development of the study field "Social Welfare". During the expert meeting with the BIA management group and study programme directors, no other examples were mentioned. At the meeting, BIA representatives mentioned that they planned to participate in the NORDPLUS project programme.

It is mentioned also in SAR (p.89) that it is planned to enter the NORDPLUS project programme, but during the meeting with the responsible staff of the BIA, no information was received as to how exactly this could affect the students or teaching staff of the study field "Social welfare".

As the main financial income of the BIA comes from tuition fees, the overall reduction in student numbers negatively impacts the academy's budget, including affecting the study field Social Welfare. Moreover, the decrease in the number of implementation cities for the study field Social

Welfare complicates increasing the number of students in the coming years, even in a situation where social workers are in demand in the job market. Previous experts also indicated in their recommendations that there is insufficient participation in projects and grants. Available information only suggests plans to engage in projects, there is no information about securing funding from external grants.

1.3.2. BIA infrastructure is notably good, with a sufficient number of study and research spaces available. There are conference rooms, well-equipped computer labs and computers in the libraries both in Riga and Daugavpils. The computers have a wide range of software. The libraries are equipped with copying facilities that students can access free of charge, along with the convenience of printing and binding final works.

Riga has a separate methodological office for students of the study field “social welfare”. The infrastructure in Riga spans across two separate buildings. Experts gained information during their meetings with the students and teaching staff that due to technical capabilities, implementing an online learning system would not encounter significant obstacles. Support personnel were available to assist. Teaching staff mentioned the availability of financial support during the COVID-19 pandemic to facilitate the transition from on site to remote work. Students shared that they had not sought support from BIA to facilitate online learning, with the exception of a single student who reported occasional problems with good internet connection at the student’ premise.

The premises are not fully accessible to persons with all types of functional disorders, there is no elevator in Daugavpils branch. BIA has separate experiences with students who have had functional disabilities. During the expert meeting it was pointed out that if a student had been a wheelchair user, then other students and the teaching staff provided support. There was an example provided in Riga that there have been students with visual impairments and also in this case individual support has been provided by students and staff. BIA does not have a diversity management programme designed to establish a unified approach and understanding of individuals with diverse disabilities.

The profession of social worker requires specific knowledge of communication with persons with hearing and vision impairments, communication and care of persons with dementia, adaptation of the dwelling to various persons with mobility difficulties, different methods used for work with persons with mental disorders or persons with autism spectrum disorders. Since BIA has extensive infrastructure at its disposal, it is necessary to think about the creation of training classes where different practical skills and knowledge can be acquired under the guidance of specialists. Many of the skills and knowledge needed by a social worker can only be acquired through on-site classes.

In general, both in Daugavpils and Riga, the infrastructure is suitable for implementing the “Social Welfare” study field. The availability of physical environments becomes less relevant when classes are conducted remotely. Technical support is provided if information technology needs to be used or when working with library resources. Efforts are made to ensure the modernization of information technology resources. Environmental accessibility, especially for persons in wheelchairs or with mobility impairments, is better adapted in Riga due to the presence of elevators. If a person has visual impairments, infrastructure accessibility needs to be reviewed at both implementation locations. Overall, students with functional impairments heavily rely on support from other students or staff. Thus far, BIA lacks experience in providing remote studies for students with visual or hearing impairments.

1.3.3. BIA libraries are operational in both Riga and Daugavpils branches. During a meeting with library administrators, experts were informed that both teaching staff and students had expressed a need for assistance in finding relevant literature.

At the beginning of the 2022/2023 academic year, the Scientific Library of the Baltic International Academy consists of the Central Library in Riga and 5 Information and Service Points (ISP) (libraries)

including Daugavpils. Educational literature, periodicals, electronic databases, as well as other resources needed by students and academic staff are available in each ISP (library). The entire collection of the BIA library is included in the electronic catalogue. You can also order a book or a scan of necessary chapters from it, or a necessary article from a scientific journal from the BIA Central Library in Riga at any Information and Service Point. Information and Service Points (ISP) have been created to facilitate access to information for BIA students living far away and are also available to students of other LATABA member universities. (SAR, p.53).

Since 2018, titles of documents have been purchased for the Social Work programme for a total amount of 1,600.80 euros. Also, titles of documents were purchased for the amount of 693.48 euros. During the reporting period, 119 titles of documents from a private collection were purchased for the programme (57 in Latvian and 62 in English) SAR (p.57). Literature sources are not separately analysed for bachelor's and master's level programmes within the Social Welfare field. Despite using the term "Social Work" (SAR p.57), experts assume that the literature is compiled for both Study field programmes. The master's level study programme in Social Work, offering qualifications for a leading social worker, is in a very early stage of development. Therefore, there is a call to particularly assess the available literature resources that would help achieve the objectives of the study programme.

Experts observed that the library had a large number of books in Russian and insufficient in Latvian and English, especially in the field of social work.

Subscribed databases are available for students and academic staff for research and studies: EBSCO, SCOPUS, The Digital Library of the National Library of Latvia, ScienceDirect and others mentioned in the SAR (p. 56. -p. 57).

During a meeting with the teaching staff, experts did not receive information about lecturers actively involved in the preparation of methodical materials for students pursuing the "social welfare" field. Encouraging such an approach could promote the development and improvement of evidence-based practices in the field of social work.

During the meeting of experts in Daugavpils (with employers, some of whom are guest lecturers), information was received that students are having difficulties with their proficiency in the Latvian language. Students who use Russian in their daily lives but have limited knowledge of Latvian can be a valuable resource for offering support to social worker clients who primarily speak Russian. However, this should not affect the quality of studies. Only a few students in Riga and Daugavpils were able to communicate with the experts in English. There are no methodical teaching materials in Latvian language developed by the BIA teaching staff. Professional translations from English to Latvian language might help in the study process, particularly for precise use of social work terminology.

1.3.4. The BIA has developed and implemented two learning platforms (e-learning and Big Blue Button, based on the Moodle platform). During the meetings with the experts, students and teachers in Riga and Daugavpils pointed out that both teachers and students are highly satisfied with the implementation, usage, and communication methods through these platforms.

1.3.5. The BIA has developed and operates a personnel policy, as mentioned in SAR (p.61. - p.64) The BIA academic staff policy includes events of improvement of professional skills at least once a year, that is:

- 1) participation in scientific conferences, scientific researches, methodological seminars.
- 2) development of methodological materials;
- 3) events of exchange of experience in Latvia and abroad.

BIA academic staff consists of a core of professors and associate professors, as well as other qualified teaching staff and scientists (docents, lecturers). Elections of academic staff are conducted in accordance with the BIA regulations "REGULATIONS on ACADEMIC POSITIONS OF THE BALTIC

INTERNATIONAL ACADEMY". With the elected person, the BIA rector concludes an employment contract with a salary corresponding to the person's academic position. Vacancies are advertised in an open competition by following regulatory enactments. The documents submitted by the applicants are evaluated by following the "Regulations on the Academic Positions of the BIA" and "Regulations on the BIA Council of Professors and Election of Professors and Associate Professors at the BIA". " (SAR, p.61).

According to Appendix 2.3.7 "For the teaching staff of the Social Welfare study direction", it can be concluded that out of 41 faculty members listed, 17 are guest staff or non-elected - 14 lectures, one docent, two professors. The remaining 24 teaching staff members are elected to academic positions at BIA and include: 5 Associate Professors, 12 Assistant Professors, 3 Professors, two Lecturers, and two Leading Researchers. Out of the 41 faculty members, two hold qualifications in social work and have elected positions at BIA - one is a Docent and the other is a Lecturer. According to "Appendix List of scientific publications of academic staff" one person has no publications, while the other's last publication was in 2018.

Recruitment of personnel is carried out through the free market policy. Since personnel with the qualification of a social worker play an important role in the implementation of the study field "Social welfare", a special strategy and approach is needed to create motivation for these lecturers to build a career that would allow them to apply for and occupy academic positions. There are 40 CVs included in SAR appendix "Faculty Biographies (Curriculum Vitae in Europass format)" (one CV is not updated as it indicates that the person is the head of the BIA Social Welfare study field, which does not correspond to the current situation), 14 of them (from the study field "Social welfare") have a qualification of a social worker, including those with a Master's degree, list of faculty staff publications, patents, artistic creations. In SAR appendix "List of publications, patents, artistic works of teaching staff for the reporting period" it is stated that 41 persons of the teaching staff have scientific publications, although the list includes persons who only have professional experience and no scientific publications, and not all publications that are enlisted could be considered as such according to the requirements. All 14 teaching staff holding qualifications in social work have professional experience in social work for at least 5 years, except for one. Simultaneously, as per the professional standards for social workers, one of the required competences is the ability to conduct or partake in applied and scientific research, specifically to cultivate evidence-based practices in social work. Hence, teaching staff with this expertise are indispensable.

The BIA website contains information about vacancies in the BIA <https://bsa.edu.lv/index.php/lv/par-bsa/vakances.html>. Information regarding available vacancies cannot be found on the website of the publication 'Latvijas Vēstnesis' [www.vestnesis.lv](http://www.vestnesis.lv) (accessed 29.11.23). No differences in personnel policies between Riga and Daugavpils were identified.

1.3.6. SAR provides information that the BIA regularly organises educational events for the teaching staff to learn new teaching methods, and once a month a methodical seminar is held, where the most attention is paid to innovative teaching methods. During the meeting the teaching staff indicated that the BIA supports English language courses and that the teaching staff has participated in a methodological seminar at Daugavpils University. The lecturers indicated that the content of the study courses and teaching methods are discussed in the Study field Council, where they also share their experiences. Attention was drawn to the information provided by the teaching staff who are external social work professionals. They mentioned that professional development takes place in accordance with the Regulation of the Cabinet of Ministers' No. 338 of June 13, 2017 "Requirements for Social Service Providers".

It should be noted that only some lecturers could speak English with the experts, most of them needed interpretation. This indicates not only insufficient English language skills of the lecturers, but also raises concerns about the possibility of getting involved in international research activities or in preparation of project applications. During the visits, the experts were not convinced that the BIA

has an approach and strategy that would motivate and support the lecturers to get more involved in research and projects.

The teaching staff confirmed that they receive financial support from the BIA for participating in conferences and payment for their publications. The experts undoubtedly agree that social work practitioners are an important resource in the implementation and development of the study field "Social Welfare", however, during the meeting with the teaching staff, there was no assurance that social work practitioners involved received support or training for pedagogical work with adults. The experts conclude that the professional and didactic development needs of all teaching staff are not purposefully recognised, appropriate training improvement measures are not offered as well.

Several methodical seminars have been mentioned in SAR (p.63), which are provided by the BIA teaching staff themselves or in cooperation with Daugavpils University. However, these methodological seminars are not primarily focused on the topics of the study field "Social welfare" and only touch these topics in an intermediate or secondary manner. No educational seminars directly for the BIA teaching staff could be identified, provided by the teaching staff of the study field "Social welfare" or which would allow for improvement specifically in the field of social work. It was mentioned during the meeting with lecturers and study programme directors that the BIA staff participated in the summer school organised by the Ministry of Welfare in 2023, which could be considered as participation in a methodical seminar.

1.3.7. The analysis of the academic and research workload of the BIA teaching staff is carried out both in the planning of the study process, in the development of self-assessments of the study fields and study programmes, and in the evaluation of the self-assessment questionnaire of the teaching staff prior to their election to an academic position. (SAR p. 65).

The procedure for determining the remuneration of BIA teaching staff, the amount of remuneration and the size of the workload is determined by the "Regulations on the organisation of remuneration and types of teaching load at BIA" approved by the BIA Senate on 25.08.2016. (accessed 11/28/23 Zinātniskās aktivitātes veicināšanas sistēma (bsa.edu.lv).

The remuneration of the BIA teaching staff depends on the type of teaching load: classroom load (lectures, seminars, consultations, semester and final examinations) and non-classroom load (participation in various events, organisation and management of conferences; publications; writing, editing and reviewing of scientific, teaching and methodological materials). The hourly rate of remuneration shall be calculated by dividing the monthly salary by the prescribed workload, which corresponds to one month salary rate expressed in hours of work per month. (SAR p.65).

The remuneration of the BIA academic staff complies with the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No 445 "Regulations Regarding Remuneration of Teachers" of 05.07.2016. The workload (hours per year) depends on the position (professor 900; assistant 1000) and complies with load restrictions specified in the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations No 445 "Regulations Regarding Remuneration of Teachers" of 05.07.2016 - 600-1000 hours per year. (items 12 and 13 of Annex 3 to the Regulations). (SAR p.65.). Experts point out that the SAR provides an incorrect reference to the number of the Cabinet of Ministers Regulations and the information indicated in the annex.

It should be mentioned that the lecturers work remotely, i.e. there is no need to travel from Riga to the Daugavpils branch, which saves time. The involvement of lecturers in research is not considered high. It is planned to implement the programmes of the study field only in Riga and Daugavpils, and no longer in other cities, as before.

The BIA regulates the academic, research, and administrative workload. However, experts believe that improvements are necessary to motivate lecturers to engage more actively in research work and publications, especially considering the varying degrees of involvement among the teaching staff in research activities.

1.3.8. According to SAR (p.66-p.68) the BIA offers extensive support to students and provides

information about studies. This includes organising open door days, offering individual consultations, hosting events to introduce selected professions and providing access to library resources. The university also assesses students' information technology skills. The BIA recognises that students have varying levels of knowledge and language proficiency, including their proficiency in Latvian. As a result, individualised learning plans for the study process are developed. The Admissions commission at the BIA is dedicated to assisting students with various study-related matters, and the teaching staff play a crucial role in supporting students by providing individual consultations.

BIA should consider how to alleviate the teaching staff from providing individual support to students by attracting additional resources. If the workload of the teaching staff is one of the reasons for the lack of lecturer mobility, then steps need to be taken to mitigate that workload.

During the visits students expressed high appreciation for the cooperation with the head of the study programme and lecturers, their support and understanding. However, experts are alerted by the fact that the majority of students who participated in the expert meeting are working, combining their jobs with study traineeship. While students mentioned that their employers are accommodating, this situation requires increased attention from the BIA because it can be an additional burden for students and may potentially impact the overall quality of the study process. That leaves the question of the quality of their traineeship and supervision. This is the real issues, not the fact that student combine work and study at the same time.

BIA has established a Study Information Centre in Riga with the purpose of providing advisory assistance to students.

During the visits the teaching staff in Daugavpils highlighted that students face challenges related to their proficiency in the national language, which can hinder their successful integration into the study process. The experts do not have information indicating that these students would receive specific support, such as improving their Latvian language skills. Teaching staff noted that they take into account the insufficient proficiency in the Latvian language.

In meetings with the students the experts concluded that students are aware of and utilise certain types of study support or self-management practices. They seek help from the study programme director, actively engage with teaching staff of the study subject, convey information to the BIA management through the seniors of the course and express their opinions by completing surveys on satisfaction about the study process. However, students did not provide specific examples of what they would like to be done differently or suggest additional measures. There's also uncertainty about whether students recognise the significance of self-management in improving the study process or participating in decision-making.

The BIA website lacks information about potential forms of student support, invitations to cooperate with former graduates of the BIA, details on employers hiring social workers, and information regarding traineeship opportunities.

BIA owns a student hotel/hostel which can provide accommodation for the students in need of it.

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

The BIA has a well-developed infrastructure, including classrooms and conference rooms. In Riga, there is a methodological office for the study field "Social Welfare". The library provides good technical support and assistance to both teaching staff and students. The MOODLE system is operational, providing access to scientific databases. Students and teaching staff have opportunities to participate in international conferences organised by the BIA. Lecturers are offered the English language learning support. The BIA has implemented a tuition fee discount policy.

The main source of income for the BIA is derived from tuition fees, and there is a declining trend in the total number of BIA students. This decrease has an impact on the BIA's overall budget, although it does not apply to the number of students in the study field "Social welfare" for the academic year 2022/23. It should be noted that for the academic year 2023/24, the Daugavpils branch received

three applications for the Bachelor's study programme. This is probably because the programmes in the study field of "Social Welfare" are not currently accredited.

The number of students enrolled in the shortest (90 CP) Professional Master "Social Work" programme is insignificant - during the reference period there have been academic years when no student has been admitted, one or two students have been enrolled (Table 3.1.4.2.).

The tuition fee covers study expenses, and the BIA provides studies for small groups of students if it is necessary, indicating that it can be afforded (SAR. p.118.).

At the meeting, BIA representatives mentioned that they planned to participate in the NORDPLUS project programme but by 2025, the plan is for the BIA to pursue membership in the North Baltic regional resource centre of the International Association of Schools of Social Work. This will facilitate application to projects under the annual competition announced by The European Association of Schools of Social Work. (SAR, p.82). There's no information regarding any ongoing external projects related to the "Social Welfare" study direction that could serve as an additional financial resource for the institution.

Literature sources are not separately analysed for bachelor's and master's level programmes within the Social Welfare field. The library has a website (<https://bsa.edu.lv/>) where literary sources are categorised by sector, and this includes a section specifically dedicated to social work literature. It is desirable to have more recent literature in English or other European Union languages on social work (focusing on books published within the last five years). Strategies need to be devised to facilitate the utilisation of this literature by students despite their English language proficiency barriers.

Out of the 41 faculty members, two hold qualifications in social work and have elected positions at BIA - one is a Docent and the other is a Lecturer, 14 of them have a qualification of a social worker and they are in no elected position. All 14-teaching staff holding qualifications in social work have professional experience in social work for at least 5 years, except for one. The experts conclude that the professional and didactic development needs of all teaching staff are not purposefully recognised. While reviewing the CVs of the social work teaching staff, it becomes evident that these professionals consistently seek to enhance their qualifications. There are numerous instances where practitioners actively participate in various projects, develop methodological materials for social work with different target groups, acquire teaching methods for adults, and even take courses to engage in pedagogical activities. They have attended conferences or events to exchange experiences. However, it is notable that these activities have predominantly taken place outside the BIA's support system. There is a lack of examples demonstrating social workers utilizing the faculty growth system provided by the BIA.

The BIA regulates the academic, research, and administrative workload. However, experts believe that improvements are necessary to motivate lecturers to engage more actively in research work and publications, especially considering the varying degrees of involvement among the teaching staff in research activities.

The BIA website contains limited information about student life, student support, and cooperation with employers and social workers.

The infrastructure at BIA is only partially accessible to individuals with varying levels of functional impairments. While there have been efforts to support students with functional impairments on a case-by-case basis, there is a lack of a comprehensive diversity management policy at the BIA.

### Strengths

1. The study infrastructure provided to the staff and the students at BIA is good.
2. The study fee discount system has been developed and is currently operational.
3. Throughout the studying process, the teaching staff (including library staff) offers significant support to students.

## Weaknesses

1. The didactic development of the teaching staff (with social workers qualification) is not developed.
2. The number of students in certain programmes is relatively small, posing a risk that tuition fees might not generate adequate profits. Moreover, the decrease in the number of implementation cities for the Social Welfare study field complicates increasing the number of students in the coming years, even in a situation where social workers are in demand in the job market. The BIA has not determined the minimum number of students required in the group for the study programme to be profitable.
3. There has been insufficient proactive action to attract external funding through grants and projects in the study field.
4. No information on the BIA website about social work practice, the student life etc.
5. No diversity strategy for students with different special needs.
6. Accessibility of building in Daugavpils to people with disabilities is not provided. The accessibility of the environment (buildings) for people with visual and hearing impairments has not been considered.
7. There are not enough books available in the field of social welfare in foreign languages (English or EU languages).
8. BIA lacks a strategy on how to attract more students to the study field.

## 1.4. Scientific Research and Artistic Creation

### Analysis

1.4.1. The SAR p. 69 mentioned 40 teaching staff involved in the implementation of the study field, of whom 3 professors, 5 associate professors, 10 docents, 2 lecturers and 2 researchers have been elected to academic positions in the BIA, which accounts for 55% of the total number of teaching staff who are tenured at BIA.

In the SAR P.69-72 there is a great emphasis on the scientific research involving both the teaching staff and the students. Furthermore, there is mention of the Scientific and Methodological Council and the Scientific Research Institute for Social and Humanitarian Problems that are functioning to ensure the successful research process. However, in the meetings with the teaching staff of the BIA in Riga and Daugavpils, the present teaching staff was not aware of the existence of the Scientific and Methodological Council nor the way it functions within the BIA.

The members of the teaching staff are involved in the research activities which are connected with the overall goals set by the higher education institution (Long-term Strategy for Activities and Development of Baltic International Academy 2022 - 2025 annex, SAR p.71) in terms of being part of the international and national level projects.

Furthermore, BIA's "Long-term Strategy of Activities and Development of Baltic International Academy 2022-2025" promotes research activities in the areas important for development of Latvian economy and culture and, according the SAR, the basis of the research is "primarily related to economic development" [SAR, p.71-72]. Also, according to the SAR p. 75 The scientific activity of the academic staff within the field "Social welfare" can be divided into 4 main areas: Social policy; Social entrepreneurship; Interpersonal and intergroup communication and Social psychology. However, the SAR does not disclose whether/how the BIA strategy foresees strengthening and developing research in the study field "Social Welfare".

1.4.2. Scientific research is partially integrated in the study process in the study programmes of all levels.

In the annex document 2.4. "Compilation of data on scientific, applied research activities of the study field "Social Welfare" in the years 2016-2022." there is information regarding scientific and applied research activities of the study field. According to the available data, there are 12 published

monographs or collective monographs, 5 learning materials (not specified what kind, i.e., textbooks or scripts), 311 publications and 504 participation in conferences

The majority of the published work of the teaching staff relevant to the study field is not connected with the study field "Social Welfare". Most of their work belongs to the fields of psychology, economy, tourism and law. This can be observed in the SAR p. 74-75 through the list of the papers presented at the BIA and the in annex "List of scientific publications of academic staff".

As for the project activity, in the SAR p. 71 and p.75 there is mention of several international and domestic projects (i.e. "Transmission of values and social attitudes between generations in different culture environments", "Interaction of the Individual, Society and State in the Common Historical Process of Latvia: Value Conflicts and the Formation of Shared Values at Historical Turning Points") in which the BIA staff has actively participated. From the names of the projects it can be concluded that the area of the projects is related to social sciences, more precisely sociology.

1.4.3. From the SAR p.73, 75 it is visible that the teaching staff is involved in international cooperation through participation in the international conferences and projects (SAR p. 71). From the meetings with the teaching staff and students, there is information regarding cooperation with international institutions. However, the meetings with the teaching staff and students provided only the information about the cooperation with the Polish institution with whom the BIA has signed the agreement. No other international institutions have been mentioned.

Furthermore, the list of the conferences where the teaching staff has participated and published their papers mostly refers to the conferences organised by BIA. Other conferences where the teaching staff has participated with papers and published were conferences organised by the similar academic institutions in Latvia. There are almost no other international conferences outside of Latvia mentioned (annex List of the publications, patents, and artistic creations of the teaching staff over the reporting period).

In the SAR p. 75 regarding individual research activities connected to the study field, only one member of the teaching staff has been mentioned to have been involved in the international projects work. However, there is no information about other members of the teaching staff involved in such activities. From the meeting with the teaching staff, there is no information about members of the teaching staff being involved in the mobility schemes or that foreign experts have used the mobility scheme to teach or conduct research at BIA. Also, there are no courses offered in English. From the meeting with the management staff, the information is obtained that sufficient level of English to conduct courses in English is not mandatory since the study is relevant to Latvian experience. However, in the meeting with the management staff and the teaching staff information was obtained that the courses are offered for those wishing to improve their English.

From the meeting with the undergraduate and graduate study programme, as well as from the former students, information has been obtained that there were guest lectures from foreign researchers. Those lectures were possible to be followed via online services such as Zoom if interested parties were not able to be present for them in person.

1.4.4. The SAR p. 76 specifies that the BIA ensures that there is sufficient scientific capacity for the performance of the scientific activities through writing books and publishing papers in a variety of journals and scientific publication. From the meeting with the management staff and the teaching staff there is enough information about the BIA's support (financial and other types) for conducting research, presenting and publishing papers at the scientific conferences. Sufficient funds are available to teachers to conduct research and publish and present their work at conferences. Furthermore, it is possible for a teacher to ask for a leave (sabbatical) to conduct research or be involved in the mobility scheme like Erasmus.

In order to maintain a good balance of teaching, research and administrative responsibilities of the staff, there are regulations that are helping teachers not to be overwhelmed with too much

administrative work that can impact their teaching and research activities (information obtained from the management staff meeting and teachers meeting). For example, there is an internal document called “Regulations on academic positions of the Baltic International Academy” and “Regulations on the BIA Board of professors and elections of professors and associate professors of the Baltic International Academy”.

1.4.5. It is clear from the SAR p. 76-77 that the students are encouraged to be involved in the scientific research with the teaching staff or on their own. This information has been verified within the meetings with the management staff and both current and former students. There are ample opportunities for students to be involved in various kinds of research activities on both undergraduate and graduate level of studies. Teaching staff openly invites the students to participate in their projects. The final paper (diploma and graduation thesis) has a strong emphasis on research activities and students of graduate level are required to present their work at a scientific conference organised by BIA. Furthermore, in order to help them with their research, the BIA has ensured access to the relevant scholar databases in order to help students and teaching staff as well keep track with up to date relevant research data. However, from the meetings with the teaching staff and students, these mobility options are not used mostly because all of the students are fully employed and cannot take time off to be a part of these mobility schemes. Furthermore, from the meeting with the teaching staff, the information has been obtained that most students are not interested in additional research activities other than those that are mandatory by the programmes since they are fully employed and have other duties that are not making enough time for these activities.

Thus it is the experts opinion that the mechanisms regarding student’s involvement in scientific research are present, but from the information obtained from the interviews with the students, they are involved in such activities mostly as a requirement for the course or for their final diploma. Otherwise, almost no students are involved in the research projects with the teaching staff. Furthermore, the information obtained from the CV’s of the teaching staff, the majority of the research projects are not related to the social welfare field since most of the teaching staff do not have their expertise in social welfare.

1.4.6. From the SAR p.77 it can be seen that the BIA has implemented several innovative solutions in the study field. The BIA has developed and implemented two learning platforms (e-learning and Big Blue Button, based on the Moodle platform) in order to improve the teaching and learning outcomes. Both teachers and students are very satisfied with the implementation and ways of using and communicating through these platforms. Furthermore, a Study Information Centre (SIC) was established, where students and academic staff can receive any informative support. BIA continues to optimise its management by organising the Quality Management Department in order to improve the quality of studies. There is also mention in the SAR p.77 of the BIA-created Neurocognitive Implicit Laboratory, however it is not clearly stated how this is relevant to the study field.

The introduction of the e-learning platforms made a significant positive impact on the study process. The students and the teaching staff use it on a daily basis for communication and teaching purposes. It has made the study process more easy, flexible and adaptive.

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

The BIA has a strong inclination toward research which can be seen from published work of the teaching staff. However, what can be concluded from the SAR and the annexes, most of the published work and research is not relevant to the study field. Furthermore, there is no clear strategy on how the BIA proposes to develop and strengthen research activities that are connected to the social welfare field. Students are also encouraged to participate in research activities,

however from the interviews with the students, almost no students are currently involved in projects with the teaching staff. There is institutional support for participation in scientific conferences for both teaching staff and students. Through library resources access to scientific databases is available. BIA also uses e-learning platforms to conduct teaching but also communication with students.

However, there is a lack of teaching staff from the field of social work. The BIA has practitioners from the field practice as teachers but they do not have academic titles as teachers. Only one member of the staff has an academic title in the field relevant to the Social work field. Classes are conducted online in full capacity which makes questionable the possibility to fulfil the outcomes of the courses through this type of teaching. Very small number of teachers are involved in researching activities on the international level, and there is no clear strategy on how to improve it.

#### Strengths

1. Strong institutional support for research activities to the teaching staff and student
2. Resources for conducting research are provided for and available
3. Excellent use of the e-platforms for teaching and communication

#### Weaknesses

1. Low number of teaching staff from the field relevant to the study field
2. Teaching staff not fully familiarised with the governing bodies of the institution
3. Low number of incoming foreign researchers
4. No clear strategy in order on how to attract more visiting researchers and students.
5. Lack of international cooperation

### **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

Although BIA has a strong inclination to a research based study programmes and has implemented some structural bases (e-learning platforms and institutional bodies and services) and research services that can be used by both the teaching staff and the students which is visible from the SAR and clarified with the interviews with the teaching staff, management staff and students, there are still some areas that raise concerns. There is no clear strategy on how to attract more foreign students and researches, how to more effectively use mobility grants and Europe level project grants. Furthermore, there is a lack of the teaching staff from the scientific field relevant to the study programmes. The majority of publications from the teaching staff involved in the study programme are not in the field of social work.

### **1.5. Cooperation and Internationalisation**

#### **Analysis**

1.5.1. The SAR provides more general information on the cooperation of the BIA with Latvian institutions, which hold a significant role in the development and implementation of the study field "Social Welfare". Annex 2 indicates that the BIA has cooperation with 121 institutions and five additional agreements with other institutions regarding provision of resources, including the State Probation Service. Notably, the majority of cooperation agreements on traineeship are with social services of Latvia and municipal social administrations, which is positive because social services are the most important workplaces for social workers. Other cooperation agreements on traineeship are

with long-term social care and social rehabilitation institutions, day care centres, shelters, pre-schools and other educational institutions, medical establishments, as well as with prisons. At the same time, cooperation agreements on traineeship are tripartite and are concluded among the BIA, the student and the hosting institution. However, it is essential to note that separate cooperation agreements between the BIA and these partnering institutions, which is more than provision of student traineeships, are not in place.

Such an approach does not promote targeted cooperation with important cooperation partners, for example, in common research initiatives, developing evidence-based practices, educating and informing the BIA teaching staff about the profession and social work practice (for example, staff traineeships at social service providers, as a large proportion of teaching staff lack qualification of a social worker), representation of the interests of the social work profession at local, national, and the European Union levels, etc.

During their visits experts gained confidence that the BIA maintains strong cooperation with social services and various other social service providers. Employers have shown a keen interest in partnering with the BIA and have conveyed a high level of contentment with the readiness of social workers. They also appreciate the BIA's approach to organising the study process, noting its flexibility in accommodating working students.

It was noted that the BIA offers tuition fee discounts to working students. The majority of the employers with whom the BIA's cooperation was discussed during the visits, have direct affiliations with the institution, namely they include the BIA alumni, providers of student traineeship places, the BIA faculty staff or they provide guest lectures. This prevents critical evaluation of employer satisfaction, not only concerning their interaction with the BIA but also regarding their overall contentment with the BIA students and graduates. This also encompasses their perceptions of the quality of student traineeships and the feasibility of work-study balance. It is essential to note that there is a substantial shortage of qualified social workers in the country and the employers are interested in hiring social workers possessing the necessary qualifications as mandated by the Social Services and Social Assistance Law.

The SAR does not encompass practices with various other institutions that serve as workplaces for social workers, including orphan's courts, healthcare facilities, human rights advocacy organisations, the State Inspectorate for the Protection of the Children's Rights, the Latvian Prison Administration, research institutions and others. During the visits, experts also encountered difficulties in obtaining information regarding the BIA's co-operation with a more diverse spectrum of employers beyond social services and a limited number of other social service providers. The leading social worker works in state and municipal institutions, non-governmental and private-sector organizations that provide social services and are engaged in the formulation, implementation, and evaluation of social policy. They also work in educational, healthcare, health promotion, law enforcement, and penitentiary institutions. Their professional competence is sufficient for carrying out social work in international organizations as well. The BIA offers a new profession, that of a leading social worker. While it is undeniable that leading social workers can work in Local Government Social Service. There are also research institutions and organizations implementing projects at the national level (for example Society Integrations Foundation of Republic of Latvia, Youth International Programs Agency, Ministries). These institutions play a crucial role in shaping state policy and defending human rights. They are necessary partners for cooperation in establishing the profession of a leading social worker. From the expert meeting visits, it became apparent that students mostly undergo study placements at their workplaces. Consequently, the BIA should purposefully develop its cooperation with a more diverse range of employers. This approach will enable offering students internships or implementing joint activities crucial for the study direction of "Social Welfare" in the future. Experts acknowledge the participation of the Chairman of the Orphan's Court of Ventspils in the expert meeting. However, according to the information contained in the SAR, no student undergoes traineeships at the Orphan's Court.

Employers' surveys are conducted to elucidate employers' satisfaction with student performance. The BIA's engagement with the leading ministry of the sector is evident through its representation at the Social Labour Specialist Co-operation Council of the Ministry of Welfare of the Republic of Latvia (viewed on 21.10.2023, <https://www.lm.gov.lv/lv/sociala-darba-specialistu-sadarbibas-padome>). During the period from 2016 to 2022 in cooperation with the Ministry of Welfare of the Republic of Latvia, the BIA facilitated the publication of the periodic journal "Social Work in Latvia" (SAR., p. 75). During the experts' visit, it was also revealed that the BIA staff have participated in seminars organised by the Ministry of Welfare of the Republic of Latvia, although confidence was not gained about the ongoing purposeful cooperation with the leading ministry. It should be noted that the BIA is currently implementing a Master's study programme which envisages acquiring the qualification of a leading social worker, the essential competence of which is definition and evaluation of social policy, including at the national level.

Professional organisations that hold significant importance within the social work profession such as the Latvian Society of Social Workers and the Latvian Association of Supervisors are notably absent among the BIA's cooperation partners. However, during the site visits, experts did ascertain that certain employer representatives cooperating with the BIA are members of the Latvian Society of Social Workers.

According to SAR the BIA has established cooperation agreements with several Latvian higher education institutions, including Alberta College, Turība University, Daugavpils University (see Annex 2), Liepāja University, and University of Latvia agency, "Latvia University P. Stradins Medical College." Among the BIA's cooperation partners there are no other higher education institutions of Latvia that implement social work study programmes. Furthermore, there is a lack of cooperation with higher education institutions that provide study programmes in disciplines crucial for interdisciplinary cooperation, such as healthcare and rehabilitation (with the exception of the University of Latvia agency, "Latvia University P. Stradins Medical College"), architecture, education, construction and information technology. This absence of cooperation hinders the potential for mutual enrichment of students' knowledge in areas like universal design, housing adaptation, practical utilisation of welfare technologies, integrated social services, and other.

The SAR of the BIA demonstrates a number of mechanisms for attracting partners from Latvia and international partners: (joint participation in scientific conferences, research activities and projects; participation in other events, such as summer schools, international weeks, intensive programs; attending meetings with university representatives during their visits to Latvia, both individual and those organised by such organisations as the Investment and Development Agency of Latvia, the State Education Development Agency, the Employers' Confederation of Latvia, foreign embassies and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia; international visits within the boundaries or marketing activities; direct contacts between university representatives and international departments with the Academy's International Department. (SAR, p. 80; p.83). Confirmation that the BIA is indeed implementing these mechanisms in the context of the study field "social welfare", was obtained in some, including participation in the scientific conferences organised by the BIA, the plan for Daugavpils branch to visit the Bygdoszcz School of Economics (Poland) in 2023/2024 and an agreement on joint work in the project with social services of Poland and Augsdaugava municipalities (SER., p. 83), organising summer camps for children with behavioural disorders.

The BIA collaborates extensively with numerous social service providers, offering diverse partnerships with existing and potential employers for students. This collaboration facilitates student internships. Experts anticipate continued strong cooperation between the BIA and social service providers. However, social workers are employed not only within social service institutions but also in various sectors like educational institutions, orphan courts, ministries, human rights organisations, and hospitals. Unfortunately, there is a lack of established cooperation with these institutions, and there is no evident plan for expanding collaboration. Additionally, there's a dearth of examples showcasing BIA's collaboration with other Latvia higher education institutions that also train social

workers for joint research and guest lectures or other cooperation. Presently, there's a notable absence of planned partnerships with a broader spectrum of institutions, such as research institutions, policy planning organisations. Establishing such collaborations is crucial for meeting the study programmes objectives, especially pertinent to the master's level study programme.

1.5.2. In SAR the BIA points out that international cooperation of the study field "Social Welfare" and its training programmes align with the Development Strategy of the Academy for 2022-2025, the objectives and tasks, including increasing international visibility, developing and maintaining new international relations, mobility of students participating in ERASMUS + programme, internationalisation of curriculum, encouraging participation of training staff in projects both in Latvia and globally, elevating engagement in international scientific activities, bolstering the number of internationally recognised publications and active participation in international conferences dedicated to social work (SAR, p. 81).

According to SAR and during site visits also experts verified several of these assertions above. For instance, a planned visit by teaching staff from the Daugavpils branch to the Bygdoszcz School of Economics (Poland) in June 2023, along with an agreement to have teachers from the Daugavpils branch attend in the autumn of 2023-2024 and engage in co-operative work on a project alongside with social services in Poland and Augsdaugava municipalities (SER., p. 83) exemplify such cooperation.

The BIA holds memberships in various international organisations, for example, the BIA has been a permanent member of the International Association of Social Work Graduate Schools and the BIA has been a permanent member of the European Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) (SAR., p. 84). While the BIA's membership in these associations holds significant value, finding specific examples of how the BIA has currently benefited proves challenging. However, by 2025, the plan is for the BIA to pursue membership in the North Baltic regional resource centre of the International Association of Schools of Social Work. This will facilitate application to projects under the annual competition announced by The European Association of Schools of Social Work. (SAR, p.82).

According to the information available on the BIA website (see 29.10.23), The XII International Scientific and Practical Conference "Transformation of Society in the Field of Social Sciences and Humanities" (bsa.edu.lv) includes a section dedicated to "Inclusion solutions in translation, pedagogy, and social work." Other conferences organised by the BIA also envisage sections focused on social work. Both the teaching staff and students are expected to pay a participation fee to attend these conferences, which contributes to the BIA's revenue. Additionally, the 2021 conference agenda incorporates student presentations from the study field "Social Welfare." (See 29.10.23, Legal Science Section 1, bsa.edu.lv).

The objectives of international cooperation have been well-defined for the BIA. These include promoting short-term mobility of teaching staff, fostering collaboration with foreign universities, engagement in projects and research, and participation in international conferences. However, there is a lack of specific examples outlining ongoing and future plans aimed at advancing international cooperation within the study field. This absence could significantly impede progress at both the research and practical levels.

1.5.3. During expert visits a number of factors have been identified which prevent the achievement of the objectives set for the Academy's Development Strategy 2022-2025 regarding the study field "Social Welfare". Students who participated in expert visits informed that they were aware of mobility opportunities but did not get involved in ERASMUS + because it was difficult to combine studies with work and family life. Experts did not receive information that any of the students in the "Social Welfare" study programmes had taken advantage of the opportunities offered by ERASMUS +. This raises concerns about the potential success of the BIA's ambition to further promote foreign

practices among students through ERASMUS + programme by 2025 (SER p. 83). Students could not recall specific examples of hearing lectures from foreign guest speakers or participating in international conferences or studies, either independently or with BIA teaching staff.

According to SAR (p 81 to 82) the BIA has successfully established an international network for exchange studies. This network comprises 15 bilateral agreements under ERASMUS+ programme, encompassing partnerships with 10 countries. Furthermore, beyond ERASMUS+ bilateral agreements, BIA has entered into additional 30 cooperation agreements, 18 supplementary agreements for scientific and research collaboration, and six agreements facilitating student exchanges with partner universities.

SAR notes that from 2016/2017 to 2022/2023, 28 students participated in ERASMUS +, including students from First level professional study programme "Social assistance organiser", which is no longer implemented in the BIA. During 2021/2020, 3 undergraduates of social work and one student of the master's study programme have participated in ERASMUS + program in Lithuania within the framework of traineeship (SAR, p.85). Experts did not receive any information during their visits that any of the students in the "social welfare" study field intended to take advantage of the opportunities offered by ERASMUS + in this or future years of studies. Low engagement is explained by students being already employed and preparing students for the regional labour market. According to experts, exposure to international experiences does not impede the readiness of Latvian students for the regional job market, instead, it offers valuable opportunities to observe different practices and approaches that can enhance their ability to critically evaluate and improve their professional skills.

BIA has a system in place to attract and enrol foreign students (SAR, p.84). Attraction of full time foreign students is not relevant considering that the study programmes within this field are implemented only in Latvian language. However, it would be encouraged to have separate study courses in English language in order to be able to attract foreign mobility students. This approach would also help Latvian students to be more open to English language and would also indirectly encourage internationalisation, which could also encourage the desire of students to use opportunities for outgoing mobility.

Between 2016 and 2022, the teaching staff have carried out 41 trips (guest lectures, administrative exchanges) through ERASMUS + exchange program. 6 teachers have identified Social Welfare as the main field of mobility (SAR, p.83). According to the information provided in the annex 2.5.3. one non-elected docent, who holds qualifications as a social worker, participated in pedagogical mobility during the 2018/19 academic year.

Participation in guest lectures by the BIA teaching staff in the study field "Social Welfare," which is one of the growth directions outlined in the BIA's personnel policy, can be identified according to SAR appendix "Statistical Data on Incoming and Outgoing Mobility of Teaching Staff." The data reveals that in certain reporting periods, there were years when mobility related to pedagogical work did not occur (specifically in 2017/18 and 2020/21). In other years, there were 2 to 6 instances of mobility. In 2022/23, the same teaching staff travelled twice to engage in activities related to the study field "Social Welfare".

Gradual internationalisation of the field's curricula is carried out by means of integrating lectures in English by practising tutors and ERASMUS+ guest lecturers. The programmes of the field of study have been supplemented with practising tutor-led courses on the Methods and Problems of Social Work (course 1) and International Social Work (course 2) in English" (SAR, p.87). The conclusion drawn is that there were four specific incoming academic mobility cases within the social welfare field for the 2022/23 academic year. However, there is a lack of information regarding the continuity of this activity and None of the expert meetings mentioned this example.

Also, mobility schemes like Erasmus and visitations to other institutions relevant to the study field are available. However, from the meetings with the teaching staff and students, these mobility options are not used mostly because all of the students are fully employed and cannot take time off

to be a part of these mobility schemes.

From the meeting with the teaching staff, there is no information about members of the teaching staff being involved in the mobility schemes or that foreign experts have used the mobility scheme to teach or conduct research at BIA. Also, there are no courses offered in English. From the meeting with the management staff, the information is obtained that sufficient level of English to conduct courses in English is not mandatory since the study is relevant to Latvian experience. However, in the meeting with the management staff and the teaching staff information was obtained that the courses are offered for those wishing to improve their English.

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

BIA has a good collaboration and a lot of agreements on traineeship with national employers (mostly municipal Social offices). There are no separate cooperation agreements between the BIA and these partnering institutions, which is more than provision of student traineeships are not in place. Such an approach does not promote targeted cooperation with important cooperation partners, for example, in common research initiatives, developing evidence-based practices, educating and informing the BIA teaching staff about the profession. Professional organisations that hold significant importance within the social work profession such as the Latvian Society of Social Workers and the Latvian Association of Supervisors are notably absent among the BIA's cooperation partners.

The BIA has established collaborations with six Latvian higher education institutions, however, there's a lack of joint projects or research endeavours specifically focused on social work within these partnerships. Despite the BIA's membership in two social work-related international associations for over five years, the actual collaboration in project-based initiatives within this field is still in the planning stage.

BIA currently has a collaboration with the institutions from Latvia and with the institutions from abroad that requires improvement. There exist mobility opportunities that are rarely used by faculty and students. Students do not use mobility due to their insufficient proficiency in the Latvian language and they are in employment relationships.

#### Strengths

1. There is a large number of social services which host traineeships.
2. Students, teachers and administrative personnel have the chance to participate in mobility initiatives.
3. Employers are actively involved in the realisation of study programmes at all stages from guest lectures to providing internship opportunities.
4. The BIA organises an international conference at least once a year, which includes topics on social work, students also participate.

#### Weaknesses

1. There is rather a homogeneous cooperation with employers, with a significant emphasis on social services.
2. Guest speakers are not enough involved within the scope of the study field.
3. Poor mobility of the teaching staff and students.
4. Relatively limited scientific and academic cooperation with other universities in Latvia and abroad.
5. There is a lack of international cooperation policy and strategies specifically for achieving the goals of the "Social Welfare" Study field.

### **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

BIA currently has a collaboration with the institutions from Latvia and with the institutions from abroad that requires improvement. There exist mobility opportunities that are rarely used by faculty and students. There is a lack of cooperation with diverse employers, professional organisations of social work in Latvia, little cooperation with Latvian higher education institutions that implement social work study programmes. Haven't been guest speakers involved or specific international projects focusing on social work.

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

### **Analysis**

1.6.1. The SAR Section 2.6. p. 88-89 and Annex 3. "Fulfilment of recommendations of experts for the study field" explains actions taken to react to the weaknesses identified during the previous assessment of the study field in 2017 and Annex 3 "Studiju virziena un programmu akreditācijā ekspertu sniegto rekomendāciju izpilde". Content differences were found in the documentation. It is essential to note that the document does not contain all the recommendations given during the previous accreditation. In the previous accreditation, 5 recommendations for further development of the study field and 7 other general recommendations were noted. It should be noted that the document submitted by BIA (Annex 3) contains information on 7 recommendations, which only partially coincides with the previous accreditation recommendations.

There was a concern that the first level programme of Social assistance organiser will maintain relevance in the future in relation to the demands of the labour market. So BIA decided to discontinue accreditation and to close the first level of higher education in the study field "Social Welfare". In the Annexes there is Application of BIA to Academic Information Centre dated on 29.03.2023. on closing the study program Social assistance organiser.

According to the recommendations a team has been created that operates in the study field "Social Welfare", both the Bachelor's and Master's study programmes have their own programme director and as Study field head was appointed director of the Master's study programme. There was also a recommendation about the need for the head of the master's study programme to have a doctorate degree (which is not mentioned in the report on the implementation of the recommendations). It should be noted that the head of the master's study programme is currently a doctoral student, but the doctoral studies are in communications management not in social welfare field.

Regarding the recommendations on the English language skills of the administration and teachers, according to the SAR, the knowledge has been improved and the recommendation has been marked as fulfilled, however, the team of experts during the visit made sure that knowledge of the English language is not sufficient.

According to the recommendation to use the database wider, both by academic staff and students, there is a possibility to use databases such as EBSCO, however their use is limited because of insufficient knowledge of the English language of the parties involved.

Recommendations on special literature in the library have been fulfilled Cooperation agreements have been concluded with the National Library. However there is still a lack of literature specific for the study field and programmes.

Recommendation to BIA to invest in possibilities to raise the quality of scientific output and so to be able to be competitive in funding applications is not in place. The BIA has a strong inclination toward research which can be seen from published work of the teaching staff. However, what can be concluded from the SAR and the annexes, most of the published work and research is not relevant

to the study field. Furthermore, there is no clear strategy on how the BIA proposes to develop and strengthen research activities that are connected to the social welfare field. Academic staff are empowered and motivated to engage in research work, but this is without success and in-depth analysis of failure paths is needed.

Participation in "Erasmus+", as well as planning to apply for participation in the NORDPLUS project, can be considered progress, but it is still not enough.

In the English version of the documentation there was recommendation Nr.6: to "The number of free-choice/limited-choice study courses should be significantly increased" which is not marked in Latvian version. This recommendation is mentioned in the list but not analysed.

In a previous accreditation there was a recommendation about the necessity to attract young colleagues as a member of staff and to look for diversity of social work lecturers (not mentioned in the report). At the moment there are 14 teaching staff holding qualifications in social work who have professional experience in social work for at least 5 years, except for one.

There was also a recommendation to set up an advisory body of employers in the study field (not mentioned in the report). This is not done.

The recommendation to develop recognition of prior learning is not in place. The recognition is in place but not according to the state legislation (not mentioned in the report).

The recommendation about the difficulty of methods and tasks increasing to reach a higher level of academic standards is not in place (not mentioned in the report).

The recommendation about the development of the master programme to make sure the diversity of bachelor students graduate with the same competence is not in place. After the last accreditation, a new professional standard was developed, which must be taken into account when implementing the social work master's study programme. The mentioned recommendation was not implemented (not mentioned in the report).

The recommendation is about the critical relationship towards practice and the development between practical demand of the labour market and social work as an autonomous profession. This still needs to be developed.

There was also a recommendation to develop in cooperation with other partners in Latvia to organise PhD programme. It is not done. It should be noted that BIA has weak cooperation with other universities in Latvia, which implement this type of programme.

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

BiA's contribution to the analysis of recommendations and their application and implementation to the specifics of the study field and corresponding study programmes is insufficient and inappropriate. It should also be noted that the documents submitted for accreditation do not contain answers to all recommendations, which can be considered as misleading the Experts.

Only some of the recommendations have been implemented fully, but the biggest part recommendations for improving still need to be improved.

#### **Strengths**

1. Greater attention is paid to the organisational work of the study field and the human resources of the programme managers.

#### **Weaknesses**

1. There is still limited involvement of teaching staff in scientific work.
2. Insufficiency of English language skills of academic staff.
3. Limited involvement of teaching staff in projects.
4. Insufficiency of field specific newest literature.

## 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: Non-compliant

Several recommendations have been partially or not implemented, for example: Insufficiency of English language skills of academic staff, limited involvement of teaching staff in scientific work and in projects. Insufficiency of field specific newest literature. Participation in "Erasmus+", as well as planning to apply for participation in the NORDPLUS project is still not enough.

The recommendation to develop recognition of prior learning is not in place, recommendation to set up an advisory body of employers in the study field (not mentioned in the report) not done, increasing difficulty of tasks not done, recommendation about the managing the master programme taking into account diversity of bachelor students is not implemented as well as critical relationship towards practice is not in place. PhD program development in cooperation with other Latvian HEI is not in place.

## 1.7. Recommendations for the Study Field

### Short-term recommendations

To improve communication between structural units involved in the process of implementation social welfare filed programmes, for example have regular meetings with set agendas, to provide employees full transparency into goals, outcomes and initiatives across departments, to build and implement communication tool to ensure that all communication is centrally located and not buried in email threads.

To improve mutually coordinated decision-making processes : have regular meetings, set key performance indicators (KPIs) that align with the goals of the mutual action plan, and progress updates as well as feedback sessions.

To set documents and processes align with the legislation.

To develop realisation of the process of recognition of previous education and experience.

Number of literature on social work available in the library in foreign languages, more specifically the English language, other than Russian should be increased.

Continue improving knowledge, provide various possibilities for the teaching staff to improve proficiency in English language by organising or refunding attendance of the English language courses and/or organising courses in academic writing in English.

Broaden collaboration networks international level with researchers, employers, professional organisations and other social partners by formalising cooperation with contracts.

Offer courses in English in order to attract more foreign students.

To develop a clear mechanism for evaluating individual study courses.

To provide links to relevant documents for all stakeholders of the study programmes such as complaints and suggestions procedures, surveys for evaluation on BIA website, cooperation with employers.

To provide cooperation with diverse employers (including orphan's courts, healthcare facilities, human rights advocacy organisations, the State Inspectorate for the Protection of the Children's Rights, the Latvian Prison Administration, ministries, research institutions and others) and professional social work organisations.

Support the teaching skills of lecturers (social work practitioners) by providing or offering courses and materials on how to improve teaching skills.

Involve students more in the decision making process, by electing students representatives in the BIA governing body.

To provide correct information on the BIA website about the study field "Social Welfare".

### **Long-term recommendations**

Develop a strategy to attract more foreign visiting researchers and foreign students.

Develop strategy for involvement of teaching staff in scientific work.

Create a strategy in order to attract more students to social work study programmes.

Offer education on project proposal writing in order to compete for bigger EU projects (Horizon 2020 etc.)

Consider balancing publishing in BIA's journal and other journals in order to increase visibility and foster future cooperation with international researchers and institutions from the same study field.

Develop a strategy of collaboration with all stakeholders in receiving feedback and introducing improvements made.

Develop cooperation with students, graduates in receiving feedback.

Develop and implement a diversity strategy for students with different special needs.

## **II - "Social Work" ASSESSMENT**

### **II - "Social Work" ASSESSMENT**

#### **2.1. Indicators Describing the Study Programme**

##### **Analysis**

2.1.1. The Professional Bachelor study programme fully corresponds to the study field "Social welfare which results from the content of the study programme and the qualification to be awarded.

2.1.2. The title, code, obtained degree and professional qualification of the study programme "Social work" are justified. Study programme's aims, objectives and study outcomes are in accordance with the professional standard of "Social worker" and admission requirements are accordingly for both study programme's forms - full time ( 4 years; 160KP/240ECTS; SAR p. 127) and part time studies (4 year 5 months; 160KP/240ECTS; SAR p.127)). It should be noted that when evaluating (during discussions with students and academics) the implementation of the programme, it was found that the study programme is implemented remotely which is not in accordance with the accredited programme and MC regulation No.111 on "The procedure for organising and implementing distance learning" .The experts have specifically asked every student group if they, at any point during their

studies, had face-to-face classes. Only one group stated that they only had one face-to-face class at the beginning of the year. All other classes were exclusively held remotely. This does not concern the COVID period at which time that form of classes were usual.

2.1.3. Since the previous accreditation of the study field, changes in the study programme "Social Work" were made according to the place of implementation of the programme. Part-time and full-time studies are not planned at branches of Jelgava and Jekabpils. These changes are logical. Students from other cities can participate in online studies and during discussions with students they showed their satisfaction with that.

2.1.4. The total number of students in the Professional Bachelor's study programme "Social Work" has slightly decreased for 15% reduction. While at the beginning of the reporting period there were full-time in-presence matriculated and enrolled students, at the end of the reporting period the number of full-time in-presence matriculated students has gradually decreased. There are currently no full-time students studying at the BIA and studies are implemented mostly online. This year 15 students were admitted in Riga and 13 in Daugavpils in the part time programme's implementation option. As it is shown in the Annex 5 "Statistical data on students in a professional bachelor's study programme" in second study year there are 3 students in Riga and 3 students in Daugavpils, in a 3rd year 4 in Riga and in Daugavpils there is no students. At the moment in a 4th study year there are no Students in Riga as well as in Daugavpils. Finally in the 5th year of study there is only 1 student in Riga and no one in Daugavpils. According to the SAR p.136 the most common reasons given are personal of their own free will, financial debts, academic debts, etc. Employers surveyed rate the preparedness of graduates as "excellent" and consider that graduates are immediately capable of performing their professional duties independently, while some employers consider graduates capable of performing their professional duties after a short period of training. Several employers rate the training of graduates as "Sufficient" and consider that graduates have good theoretical training but insufficiently acquired practical skills.

2.1.5. N/A

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

The title, code, obtained degree and professional qualification of the study programme "Social work" are justified. Study programme's aims, objectives and study outcomes are in accordance with the professional standard of "Social worker" and admission requirements are accordingly for both study programme's forms - full time ( 4 years; 160KP/240ECTS; SAR p. 127) and part time studies (4 year 5 months; 160KP/240ECTS; SAR p.127)). It should be noted that when evaluating the implementation of the programme, it was found that the study programme is implemented remotely which is not in accordance with the accredited programme and MC regulation Nr.111 on "The procedure for organising and implementing distance learning".

#### Strengths

1. Specialists in demand on the labour market.

#### Weaknesses

1. The studies are done remotely entirely which reduces the quality of studies.
2. Reduction in matriculated students.

## 2.2. The Content of Studies and Implementation Thereof

### Analysis

2.2.1. The study course descriptions are very general, they do not provide a clear idea of how each specific study course will proceed or what topics will be covered. While the methods to be used in the specific study course are named, it is not clear what their goals are. For example, it's unclear what exactly students will do in group work. In the annotation of the study course description for 'Social work with different target groups,' it is mentioned that the course will focus on social work with addicted (substance) persons. However, the list of recommended literature includes sources related to different target groups. This does not provide a comprehensive overview of the study course. Additionally, the sources used in the literature are relatively old, such as various methodical materials on social work published in Latvia more than 20 years ago. When including such methodical materials in the list of mandatory literature for the study course, it's essential to ensure that they do not conflict with current guidelines in social work, including the terminology used in social work. It should be noted that social work study courses are also taught by faculty who may not have the qualification of a social worker, such as the 'Street social work' study course. The study course 'Social work with a group' adequately describes the knowledge that students must acquire, including how social services are provided within a group context. However, the list of mandatory literature for this course only includes regulatory acts. Consequently, there may be confusion regarding the course's title and content.

The description of the study course 'Social work with families with children' does not mention the methodological material from the Ministry of Welfare of the Republic of Latvia titled 'Social work with families with children' (available at <https://www.lm.gov.lv/lv/metodiskie-materiali-0>), which is currently planned to be introduced as mandatory material in all social service offices from 2028 in compliance with the latest policy development documents effective."

The study course 'Case Management in Social Work' does not include the latest Latvian literature, which is particularly important for students with limited knowledge of English. For example, 'Social work with a case: Theory in practice' published in 2021 (available at <https://www.lm.gov.lv/lv/socialais-darbs-ar-gadijumu>), is missing, while very old methodological teaching aids are included.

Study programme content consists of following blocks of study subjects: General education study courses, Field (area of professional activity) courses of professional specialisation (B) and Elective courses. The proportion of study credits in each block corresponds with Requirements specified in Cabinet Regulations No. 305, 13.06.2023 "Regulations on State Standard for Professional Higher Education".

The study programme has a 3 CP volume for almost all subjects, but the volume of the professional social work core subjects, especially "Social Work Theory", "Values and Ethics of Social Work" or "Psychosocial Counseling", is too low given the programme's learning outcomes [SAR, p. 125-126] and social work professional standards. Meanwhile, the necessity of all subjects dedicated to IT and digital technologies, such as "Electronic Document Management", "Computer Training", "Modern Technologies in Information Work", "IT System in Social Work" is questionable.

Regarding the Regulations on the State Standard for Professional Higher Education, the study programme includes the following courses (total 9 CP) to build professional competences in entrepreneurship: Electronic Document Management (3 CP), Social Entrepreneurship (3 CP) and Basics of Project Design and Management (3 CP) (6 Annex. Compliance with the study programme with the State Education Standard.docx). The course Civil and Environmental Defence (3CP) is included in the curriculum in accordance with the requirements of the above mentioned document as well.

The study course descriptions are very general so it is not clear how each specific study course will proceed or what topics will be covered. There are no defined study course aims and study courses

outcomes are not specific for subjects as well as Criteria for assessing learning outcomes. This is not in accordance with Section 56.1, second parts of the Higher Education Institution.

The sources used in the literature are relatively old. The proportion of study credits in study programme blocks corresponds with Latvian education standards but the volume of professional basics courses within the blocks is not sufficient enough to achieve learning outcomes and comply with professional standards. The study programme includes the courses required to build professional competences in entrepreneurship.

#### 2.2.2. N/A

2.2.3. In meetings with students and graduates, the experts heard a unanimous opinion that the biggest advantage of the study programme is the possibility to study remotely. It allows them to combine their studies with work and family life, and it is also more financially advantageous. Students commented that nowadays all studies are organised remotely and could not remember any event when they had to meet the lecturers in-person. According to the management group of the study programmes, a student survey was carried out after COVID-19 and students wanted to study remotely. The remote studies, which are understandably convenient for students, do not guarantee the opportunity to achieve the learning outcomes and acquire professional competences in accordance with the Professional Standards of Social Workers. The Professional Social Work bachelor programme has not been applied for programme implementation in distance education. Development of students' creative, social and personal qualities, skills and competencies in case work, especially in crisis intervention using professional counselling and communication skills [SAR, p.125-126] requires appropriate study methods. For example, SAR mentions role-play as one of the creative study methods used [SAR, p.138], but the effectiveness of this method in remote studies is questionable.

BIA explains that "students have the opportunity to connect to the lecture online if it is not possible to attend the lectures in person. Students noted this opportunity as one of the best improvements introduced in the study process", this option allows students to choose a way of studying that is more convenient, but does not guarantee the achievement of the study objectives. Graduates in Daugavpils missed the programme's focus on strengthening public speaking skills in front of an audience what's also possible with on-site study.

The content of the study programme consists of more than 60 different subjects spread over 4 years of study. All subjects, excluding practice and Diploma Paper, are 3 ECTS (9 Annex. The curriculum of the study programme). The final assessment in each subject consists of 2-3 different assignments (group work, project, test) [10 Annex. Bak studiju kursi ENG.], so students have to complete too many assignments during the semester, and during the session they have to take 8 exams. Such fragmentation of the content (large number of subjects and diversity of topics) and the number of assignments raise doubts about the implementation of student-centred learning and teaching principles.

In accordance with the SAR, the study programme is planned and conducted in the form of contact hours and independent work and "the importance of students' independent work and responsibility in acquiring the study content has increased" [SAR, p.136]. The SAR does not indicate on what criteria the increase in the importance of independent work is based and whether/how this form of study would lead to a better achievement of the learning outcomes. In meetings with students and alumni of Professional Bachelor study programme participants expressed their satisfaction with the availability and accountability of lecturers - they noted that they can contact lecturers by phone or email (on the moodle platform) whenever they need them. Student-initiated communication with lecturers seems to prevail and there is a lack of a clearly identified systematic (timetabled) time for student counselling and their guidance in the study programmes, especially in the case of high student independent workload (for example, the courses "Social work with Addicts", "Social work

with persons with special needs" include more than 60 independent work hours out of total 80 academic hours) and dominated remote learning. In a meeting with students, the opinion was expressed that more on-site meetings with lecturers are needed. Programme needs clarification on how remote and independent study formats allow development and assessment of professional interpersonal skills.

The descriptions of programme study courses (10 Annex) correspond to the Law on Higher Education Institutions (section 1.8.) where one credit point includes 25-30 academic hours of study work. However there is unclear an unified system in BIA on the exact number of hours the BIA devotes to one credit point and the number (proportion) of hours devoted to contact and independent studies in professional bachelor study programmes. The information provided in SAR (40 academic hours of work for one credit point of which 16 hours (full-time) and 12 hours (part-time) are contact hours and the rest is independent work) [p. 138] is incorrect and doesn't correspond to currently in force the Law on Higher Education Institutions and study courses descriptions in 10 Annex (here 1 ECTS is equivalent to 26.7 academic hours). MC regulations from 26.08.2014. till 13.06.2023. stipulated 40 academic contact hours of work for one credit point, except for the scope intended for practice and the development of a bachelor's thesis or diploma thesis (diploma project). It is still unclear the the amount of hours devoted to practice and how it is controlled, according to information from students "it is convenient to devote 2-3 hours a day to practice" which is not enough.

In the SAR p.150-151 are described opportunities for the teaching staff, strong commitment of the BIA to support the teaching staff in their work and the obligations of the teaching staff to the programme and students. There is no mention or other information in the annexes about the qualification of the staff that is relevant for the teaching and conducting research in the study field. Furthermore, there is no information on how the teachers are using their skills in order to create a learning atmosphere. The SAR in p. 150 mentions the following "The ability of the teaching staff to create a creative atmosphere, to arouse students' interest and curiosity in the learning process, develops students' skills and abilities to find various solutions in non-standard situations. Lecturers, using interactive teaching methods, develop students' communicative skills and teamwork skills", however there is no evidence of this. In the meeting with the teaching staff and the students, the information is obtained that the learning process is exclusively online via Zoom or through other e-platforms. The teachers are using these platforms in order to create groups while in online classes and for homework assignments, however, there are no other examples.

The methods and process of Professional Bachelor programme implementation are equivalent in both Riga and Daugavpils.

2.2.4. Regarding study practice, the bachelor's level programme provides five study practice places.

1) Introduction to the profession 1st course (3 credits) is aimed to familiarise students with a social service provider institution and includes a requirement to interview a social worker. However, the results to be achieved by the study course are described in much broader terms than the specific goals of the internship, and the competencies required for the internship's purpose are not clearly defined. Moreover, the study course lacks compulsory literature, offering only references to databases and two websites of state administration institutions.

2) Internship II (Social Benefits and Services, SOPA) (6 credits): Although the title of the internship suggests that students will become acquainted with the essence of social assistance and social services, it is not mentioned in the course description for social services. The results and competencies to be achieved during the internship are defined much more broadly and do not align with the actual purpose of the internship. The acquisition of social benefits is the competence of the social assistance organiser, not the social worker.

3) Internship III (Case Management) (9 credits): The defined competencies are broader than the practical purpose of the internship, and the study programme does not include mandatory

theoretical literature.

4) Internship IV (Pedagogical) (9 credits). The purpose of the internship is to gain professional knowledge through practical experience in solving a socio-pedagogical case. However, it's not clear in which type of institution students are expected to carry out such internships—whether it is limited to educational institutions or includes social service providers. Furthermore, the description does not provide a clear understanding of the specific activities students will engage in during this practice, the skills they will develop, or the methods they will use. A review of the study course 'Social Pedagogy' suggests that socio-pedagogical activities primarily occur in educational institutions. However, among the BIA cooperation partners, only select educational institutions are listed for student internships. The study programme does not specify mandatory theoretical literature for this course.

5) Pre-diploma internship. The goal of the pre graduate practice is to develop students' ability to conduct research, which includes the creation of a research design, formulation of objectives, tasks, hypotheses, or research questions, selection of appropriate research methods, data processing methods, and the formulation of conclusions based on data analysis (12 credits).

During an expert visit, students indicate that they were responsible for finding internships on their own. Although students did not report insurmountable difficulties in securing internships, it's essential for the BIA to determine its responsibilities in assisting students in finding suitable internships. As of the current regulation 'Provisions for traineeship at the Baltic International Academy,' section 5.1 states that students are responsible for finding their internship placements. Traineeships are short-term, as a result of which only part of the skills can be acquired at work with an individual social case, the incentive would be to review not only the objectives, tasks, skills to be acquired and competences to be achieved, but also to review the duration of the traineeships. Experts concur that the total duration of internships is determined according to the rules. From the experts' perspective, Internship III (Case Management) offers opportunities to acquire crucial skills necessary for working with a social case. The assessment of the social situation of a client (a family with children or an adult person with multiple social problems) can take up to 2 months, followed by an intervention and a assessment of the situation. Consequently, the BIA could review not the total duration of the internships but the distribution of credits among the practices.

References and Cabinet regulations should be updated in the descriptions of the internship study courses - there should be no references to the regulations of the first level professional higher education. The 'Provisions for Traineeships at the Baltic International Academy,' approved at the BSA Senate meeting on 23.05.2018 (Minutes No. 134), should be updated to clarify references to cabinet regulations. In accordance with 08.29.23. Cabinet Regulation No. 481, titled "Prakses organizēšanas kārtība profesionālās izglītības programmās", it is determined that the educational institution shall either provide the trainee with a place of internship or evaluate and accept the internship place selected by the trainee. The institution is responsible for acquainting the trainee with the objectives and tasks of the internship.

The "Provisions for Traineeships at the Baltic International Academy" must be clarified in accordance with Cabinet Regulation No. 481." Delete sentence "This includes specifying the places of internship and outlining the duties of the trainee".

The SAR includes the tripartite agreement for the internship of the master's level social work program. However, the internship agreement for the bachelor's social work program is not included in the appendices of the SER. Experts assume that the internship agreement for the bachelor's level study program is similarly drafted and may encompass the same identified shortcomings. The analysed situation applies to both implementation sites.

2.2.5. N/A

2.2.6. Most students from the study programme are working in the field of Social Welfare and

choose topics for their final thesis that are consistent with their personal practice. Research topics are relevant to the Social Welfare field and correspond to the study programme. Employers from Daugavpils expressed the need for the topics covering municipality services development. According to the SAR, diploma theses are of high quality, most theses are graded from 7 to 9. However, the sample of final theses that were examined by an expert group visiting the library lacked a section about the methodology of the study, and they lacked conventional abstracts of the projects which are an integral part of research work. There are "REGULATION ON THE GRADUATION PAPER DEVELOPMENT AND DEFENCE IN THE BALTIC INTERNATIONAL ACADEMY" approved by the BIA Senate. This regulation describes the elaboration (incl. selection of the topic, structure of the thesis and the content) as well as defence procedure and evaluation criteria of the diploma thesis. It should be noted that this regulation is in some way incomplete. For example, point 4.6. of this regulation "The body of the Graduation Paper" does not contain information about the need to describe the methodology, but at the same time, the chapter for the Evaluation section contains the section on Methodology (10.5.3.) where five important points of the methodology were mentioned. In general, it should be noted that the quality of regulation documents, thesis and appropriate evaluation of a research paper is related to the overall research competence of staff (see related chapter). Reports of research studies usually follow the IMRAD format. IMRAD (Introduction, Methods, Results, [and] Discussion). It is a widely used format for structuring scientific research papers. The methodology section is very essential, which shows the student's data acquisition process and cannot be integrated into other sections. Although the BIA claims that the methodology should be described, the works examined during the visit showed a significant lack in this aspect.

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

The study course descriptions are very general, they do not provide a clear idea of how each specific study course will proceed or what topics will be covered. The sources used in the literature are relatively old. Exclusively on-line organised study programme does not guarantee the opportunity to achieve the learning outcomes and acquire professional competences. Student-initiated communication with lecturers seems to prevail and there is a lack of a clearly identified systematic (timetabled) time for student counselling and their guidance in the study programmes, especially in the case of high student independent workload. Because of too many obligations that students have during the semester, students must complete too many assignments during the semester, and during the session they must take 8 exams. There is unclear an unified system in BIA on the exact number of hours the BIA devotes to one credit point and the number (proportion) of hours devoted to contact and independent studies. During an expert visit, students indicate that they were responsible for finding internships on their own. Although students did not report insurmountable difficulties in securing internships, it's essential for the BIA to determine its responsibilities in assisting students in finding suitable internships. Traineeships are short-term, because of which only part of the skills can be acquired at work with an individual social case.

#### **Strengths**

1. Students can choose final thesis topics consistent with their personal practice.
2. Topics of final theses correspond to the social work field and study programme.

#### **Weaknesses**

1. Excessive fragmentation of subjects, covering both the number and variety of subjects.
2. Studies are conducted exclusively remotely.
3. No regular tutoring for a large number of hours of independent work.
4. Insufficient quality of the final thesis.

5. The objectives set by the traineeships are unclear, competences and skills are not subordinate to the objectives of the traineeship.
6. The study course descriptions are very general. They do not provide a clear idea of how each specific study course will proceed or what topics will be covered.
7. The sources used in the literature are relatively old.

### **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 professional Bachelor study programme "Social work" is implemented both in Riga and Daugavpils, in both places as full-time and part-time studies. In part 3.3 of SAR "Resources and provision of the study programme" prepared by BIA, the provision of resources is not analysed separately in the study programme implementation addresses. Based on the information included in SAR, incl. annexes 2.3.2. and 2.3.3 of SAR "Provision of premises for study and administrative purposes" and what was seen in the expert visits, it can be concluded that the BIA infrastructure is sufficient for effective execution of the social work study programme, both in Riga and Daugavpils. There are a sufficient number of classrooms, well equipped and well maintained, and there are conference halls.

During the experts' visit, it was observed that the premises in Daugavpils were cold, though it was mentioned that heating would be connected and that the largest flow of students is on Fridays and Saturdays. However, the accuracy of this information is somewhat uncertain because, according to students, on site classes are not currently being conducted. Regarding the availability of facilities for persons with functional disabilities, see 2.3 of this report.

As the social work profession requires the acquisition of effective communication skills when interacting with social work clients, including children and teenagers, the BIA should consider the possibility of adapting some of the rooms to facilitate the filming of students engaged in the learning process, for example role-plays. Another example could involve establishing a laboratory that helps to learn the specifics of home adaptation for different client groups, provides prior knowledge about communicating with individuals who have hearing and visual impairments, and helps to learn techniques for psychosocial work, etc.

The study rooms are equipped to allow for remote learning or conferences if the need arises. Since 2015 the BIA has been utilising the Moodle e-learning environment. During the visits, the BIA's management, students and lecturers expressed their satisfaction with the technical support available for integrating IT into the learning process.

NEXUS has a section in which the BIA students can get acquainted with the internal regulations, study programmes, practice programmes, news of the BIA. Complete information on the study programmes, study courses, their volume and content is available on the BIA websites as an important source of information for the students and potential students. (SAR, p. 145).

The libraries in both Riga and Daugavpils are well-equipped, have reading rooms and they offer the necessary technical support for students and study staff. They are accessible for the students with

special needs if they need to use it.

If a particular book is unavailable in the Daugavpils branch library, it can be ordered from the Riga library. During a meeting with library representatives the experts were informed that students can make copies of the required materials and get their study papers bound at no cost. Methodical study materials on social work in the Latvian language developed by BIA teaching staff are not available in the BIA library, which would help students with poor English language skills to learn the profession of social work.

During the expert visits, it was stated that the BIA used the University of Latvia's Unified Computerised Plagiarism Control System to check for plagiarism in BIA study papers. However, as per the SAR, there might be contrasting information regarding this matter. It's suggested that the mandatory literature listed in study course descriptions needs to undergo a review. Specifically, there are concerns about the inclusion of literary sources related to social work practices that might be professionally outdated. Many sources are old and not always are able to represent changes in the profession, understanding of terminology, and shift of paradigm. There is a social work study course where none of the literary sources are in English (Annex 10). The book resources within the BIA Library have limited literature in English or other European Union language that exceeds a five-year publication period. However, the library offers access to databases that might compensate for this lack of recent literature.

### 2.3.2. N/A

2.3.3. Main source of financing of the study process of the study programme is the tuition fees. The tuition fees differ in Riga and in the branches. Amount of the tuition fee and payment procedure for each study year are set and approved by the BIA Senate. Tuition fees may be covered by the following funding: personal funds of the student; personal funds of the student's parents and other relatives; financing of the student's employer; study loan with a guarantee provided on behalf of the state; commercial credit; financing of the sponsor.

BIA does not have reimbursed state - funded study places. At the same time funded seats or very limited from the BIA budget Every year the number of budget places financed by the BIA is set upon the BIA rector's order in the basic studies.

In the analysed period, the study field "Social Welfare" managed to maintain a positive balance between revenues and expenses. The cost of the study field "Social Work" per student is 865 (bachelor's) Euro per year. Thus, expenses for studies per student are completely covered by income per student. (SAR, p. 149).

In the reporting period from 2016/2017 to 2022/2023, students enrolled and studied in the professional study programme "Social Work" in both full-time and part-time forms of site studies in Latvian. The SAR does not contain any information regulating the minimum number of students in the professional master's social work study programme.

The number of students indicated in SAR (p. 134) and Appendix 5 differs. For instance, in Appendix 5, it is mentioned that 55 students were enrolled in the Bachelor level study programme in Daugavpils for the academic year 2022/23, however, in SAR there are 53 students reported. This report does not assess or analyse the number of students in the Jēkabpils and Jelgava branches.

Starting from the 2021/22 academic year, only part-time students have been admitted. In Riga for the academic year 2022/23, a total of 23 students were enrolled in various courses, including 15 students in the 1st year. Correspondingly, in Daugavpils for the academic year 2022/23, a total of 21 students were enrolled, of which 13 in the 1st year.

In 2021/2022, 67 students studied in Riga; 25 were enrolled in the 1st year, however there was a total dropout of 12 students that year. In the same academic year 59 students studied in Daugavpils, 18 students were enrolled in the 1st year, but the total dropout was 5 students. The most common reasons to terminate studies given are personal (of their own free will, financial

debts, academic debts, etc.) (SAR, p.136).

During the experts' visit to Daugavpils, it was reported that contracts had been concluded with 3 students for admission in the current academic year. During the expert visit, the head of Daugavpils branch mentioned that the students were informed that the programme is not accredited.

In a meeting held in Riga with the director of the study field and heads of the study programmes and the Admissions Commission, it was noted that a total of 14 contracts had been signed with the students starting their studies in the Bachelor study programme.

During the meeting with the BIA management and the director of the study programme, no information was provided regarding concrete actions or steps that will be taken to attract a larger number of students to the programme.

In Daugavpils, experts received information that the Municipality pays study grants to 2 students to facilitate social work studies. Experts hear about purposeful cooperation with the Riga Municipality to potentially assist in covering study fees.

During the meeting, students mentioned that the study courses are mixed, with students from various courses studying together so to say that students of different study years study together in different study courses. This is not a problem in itself. The problem is that experts found that junior year students study together with senior year students. The students did not note that this happened as a result of an individual plan or because of a previously unsuccessful study course. Some students expressed during the meeting their satisfaction at being able to repeat the same study course, but this raises concerns about the efficient use of time in the study process.

Based on this information, the experts have reflected on why such an approach is implemented. One of the reasons could be the relatively low number of students in specific courses and the BIA's considerations regarding financial factors when assessing the effectiveness of these courses.

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

In Riga and Daugavpils material and technical provision comply with the requirements of study programme. Through the library's computer there is access to the online scientific databases with up to date relevant materials and modern technologies are constantly improving. However, the literature in the study courses is largely obsolete. The book resources within the BIA Library have limited literature in English or other European Union language that exceeds a five-year publication period. Based on the material obtained during the visit, "Books purchased by the BIA library for the field of study "Social Welfare" in the period from 2017-2023. Extract from the electronic catalogue." to the information contained, it should be added that the relevant literature mostly contains 2017-2019 year's materials, but a proportionally equal part of the new materials have been published in the period from 2000 to 2014. Proportionally, the share of sources in the Latvian language is only slightly higher than the available literature in the Russian language, the materials available in the English language, in relation to the above-mentioned material, are few. A lot of the study program materials are in Russian. However, the library offers access to databases that might compensate for this lack of recent literature. Since students study remotely, the provision of facilities has become less significant in ensuring a qualitative study process. There are no specifically equipped classrooms to facilitate social worker skills. From the experts point of view remote learning prevents effective use of certain teaching methods which are important for practising counselling, observation, etc. While the current student numbers are relatively stable in Riga and Daugavpils, there's a potential concern regarding future enrollments. The reduction in branches offering the bachelor's degree programme in social work might lead to a decrease in the number of students in the future. This decrease could consequently impact the funding available for this academic field. The lack of accreditation for the social work study program is indeed a significant concern to attract students for the 2023/24 academic year.

#### Strengths:

1. The provision of study programmes in the region involves the resources of local governments and employers in development work and thus contributes to the development of social work study programmes and to the preparation of students in the labour market.
2. Availability of financial support for students from local governments.
3. Availability of electronic resources and support services, including consultations for the use of electronic resources.

#### Weaknesses:

1. The BIA has not determined the minimum number of students required in the group for the study program to be profitable.
2. There are not enough social work books available in foreign languages (English or EU languages).
3. The BIA premises are spacious and good, however, there is a lack of a dedicated study room where social workers can acquire professional skills, knowledge, and abilities.
4. No state funded seats or very limited from the BIA budget.

### 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

While the current student numbers are relatively stable in Riga and Daugavpils, there's a potential concern regarding future enrollments. The reduction in branches offering the bachelor's degree programme in social work might lead to a decrease in the number of students in the future. This decrease could consequently impact the funding available for this academic field. There's no ongoing external projects related to the bachelor's degree program in social work that could serve as an additional financial resource for the institution. BIA should consider all possibilities to ensure more English books in the library specific to the field of study. Technical provision complies with the requirements of study programmes and modern technologies are constantly improved

## 2.4. Teaching Staff

### Analysis

2.4.1. As can be seen from the table 3.4.2.1., SAR p.152, currently 33 lecturers are involved in the implementation of the Social Work Professional Bachelor Study Programme. 52% of lecturers have tenure at BIA. Out of the total number of lecturers, 45% of the academic staff is provided by 15 lecturers with a Doctoral degree (11 tenured at BIA, 4 non-tenured). 17 (6 BIA tenured, 11 non-tenured) lecturers have a Master's degree (52%).

The BIA also employs professionals from the practice in order to fulfil the learning outcomes of the study programme, but most of them are not in academic positions and there is no system to change it. However, there is only one member of the teaching staff that is BIA tenured whose area of expertise is Social work (SAR p.70). The teaching staff from the practice is welcome to compliment the theoretical aspects of the social work, however, there is no evidence that those persons receive any course in teaching skills in order to make their teaching more of high quality. In general, the qualifications of the teaching staff are not sufficient enough in order for the learning outcomes of the programme to be achieved.

2.4.2. According to the SAR p. 151-152 the changes of the qualification and number of lecturers employed in the Social Work Professional Bachelor Study Programme comply with the requirements of the Law on Higher Education Institutions and the implementation of the goals and objectives of the BIA strategic priorities. There is information about the members of the teaching staff who have gained additional qualifications and education that is relevant to the study field. However, as mentioned in the SAR, most of the lecturers are practising professionals, not elected staff. From the SAR p.151-152 there are no indications regarding numbers of teaching staff leaving- BIA. Moreover, BIA has employed additional teaching staff. Additionally, some of the teaching staff has also gained additional qualifications, although not entirely relevant to the field of social work (i.e, PhD in pedagogy). However, since the majority of the lecturers are practising professionals in social work, these changes did not have a negative impact on the overall qualifications of the teaching staff.

2.4.3. N/A

2.4.4. According to the annex "List of the scientific publications of academic staff" members of the teaching staff have a substantial number of publications published in peer-reviewed editions or relevant practical experience. Most of the lecturers employed as the teaching staff for the bachelor's programme are not involved in the scientific activities but according to the CV's of the teaching staff, they are involved in practical activities of social work at their job placement and upgrading their professional skills by attending seminars and courses connected with the field of social work (i.e., seminar "Social work with persons with mental disorder"; project "Development of social work in municipalities"; seminar "Working with persons who have committed sex crimes"). However, from the annex "List of the scientific publications of academic staff" the majority of published work is in the publications of the events organised by BIA or other Latvian institutions. There are a very small number of the publications that are published in the other types of peer reviewed publications. Additionally, only a small amount of published work is relevant to the field of social work.

2.4.5. In the SAR p. 154 mechanisms for mutual cooperation of the teaching staff that include various activities by the staff are described. For example, there are activities such as Mutual attendance of the lectures / classes, masterclasses / exams by the lecturers which allows evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of work; Inviting the highly qualified guest lecturers to lead the study courses; Use of the external experts to evaluate the study process and students' knowledge, Strategic planning of the study process, analysing the weaknesses of the study programme, their elimination and opportunities for programme development.

However, for some activities it is not clear how they are contributing to mutual cooperation. For example, on the p.154 of the SAR it is mentioned that "Mutual attendance of the lectures / classes, masterclasses / exams by the lecturers which allows evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of work". However, during interviews with the teachers and the students, it was mentioned that the classes are fully online and no information about having more than one lecturer on the course was available. The experts did not receive any information about teachers attending other colleague's classes. Furthermore, the experts did not receive additional information regarding external experts reviewing the study process. Also, it is not clear how and why would external evaluators evaluate student's knowledge. In the meeting with the management staff, it was mentioned that there are regular meetings with the head of the study programme in order to discuss relevant issues regarding teaching and students.

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

It can be concluded that there is a lack of the teaching staff with the academic titles from the field of

social work. Most of the knowledge regarding the social work field comes from the non tenure staff who are social workers from practice. Furthermore, the classes are conducted online in full which limits teaching opportunities. Teaching staff publish regularly but most of the published work is presented at BIA's conferences or BIA's publications. Social workers from the practice have enough practical experience and additional education that compliments the theoretical part of the study. The management staff mentioned there are regular meetings with the teaching staff regarding the study programme to talk about issues in teaching or any other problems. There are mechanisms established for mutual cooperation of the teaching staff in the implementation of the study programme, however there is no evidence that these mechanisms are taking place regularly. Most of the teaching staff involved in the programme are professional social workers who can contribute to the study programme from a practical side. However, this is not enough in order for the study programme to be implemented as intended. Moreover, only one member of the BIA tenure staff is from the social work field which is not enough for the programme to deliver its desirable outcomes.

#### Strengths

1. Excellent use of e-platforms in teaching and communicating with students
2. Programme employs persons from the practice as teachers

#### Weaknesses

1. Only one member of the tenured BIA teaching staff has his area of expertise in social work

### 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 publication list from the available information about the teaching staff shows that most of them publish papers, but the majority are in publications from conferences organised by BIA or similar institutions. Additionally, only a small amount of published work is relevant to the field of social work.

There is a small number of tenured BIA teaching staff with education in the specific field. Majority of teachers are practicing professionals.

### 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:** Partially compliant

The study programme "Social work" volume is 240 CP of which 30 CP are theoretical courses of humanities and social sciences, with an emphasis on business skills (9 CP/30 CP); study courses of theoretical knowledge of the industry (professional field) and information technology courses make up to - 54 CP out of which 9 CP are aimed to strengthen the IT knowledge; Corresponding specialisation study courses are up to 90 CP, including three study work papers 3 CP each. Free elective courses form 9 CP (6 study courses are offered, each composing 3 CP). The study programme has an internship in the amount of 39 CP and Bachelor thesis has the amount of 18

CP. However, it should be mentioned that the above-mentioned division is reflected in reality in a fragmented distribution of study courses, for example emphasising that it is possible to learn only 3 CP study courses. In addition, the goals and achievable results mentioned in the study courses are not clearly stated in the study course descriptions, which prevents an accurate assessment of the compliance with the results to be achieved in accordance with the basic conditions set in the professional standard.

The programme includes obligatory study courses about Environmental protection in the amount of 3 CP and the course Civil and Environmental Defence (3CP). The description of the submitted documents indicates that the required number of contact hours is achieved according to the description of each study course, however, the proportion of remote studies in the process of mastering the programme should be especially emphasised. As it was repeatedly mentioned in discussions with students and graduates, after the Covid-19 pandemic, the study process was moved online after the students expressed such will in the survey. It should be emphasised that

MK. 111th regulations

[<https://likumi.lv/ta/id/329849-attalinato-macibu-organizesanas-un-istenosanas-kartiba>] stipulate that the distance learning process may take place up to 50% of the number of contact hours determined for the implementation of the relevant study programme, which is significantly violated in this case.

Also there is unclear an unified system in BIA on the exact number of hours the BIA devotes to one credit point and the number (proportion) of hours devoted to contact and independent studies in professional bachelor study programmes. The information provided in SAR ( 40 academic hours of work for one credit point of which 16 hours (full-time) and 12 hours (part-time) are contact hours and the rest is independent work) [p. 138] is incorrect and doesn't correspond to the Law on Higher Education Institutions and study courses descriptions in 10 Annex (here 1 ECTS is equivalent to 26.7 academic hours)

Based on the attachment 6, and 9 the acquirable degree is in compliance with classification in regulatory enactments on paper, nevertheless should be overlooked with the issues mentioned before. Opinions for postgraduate education are mentioned in the "Study programme "Professional bachelor's study programme "Social Work" compliance with the national education standard".

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

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

Study programme is based on the professional standard of "Social worker", which was approved on October 14th, 2020. Social worker is a profession equivalent to the fifth level of professional qualifications (5. PKL), which corresponds to the sixth level of the Latvian qualifications framework (6. LKI).

Study programme partially complies with requirements set in the professional standard, due to: Lack of study courses providing case management skill - Case management as a skill has been explicitly provided only within two study courses such as "Health basics and first aid", and "Case management in social work". (Appendix 8. Mapping of study courses to achieve the study results of the study programme.)

Lack of study courses providing social participation, thus also indicating a lack of political participation and policy planning skills. In the content of the study programmes, there is no improvement in the students' ability to identify the available services in the evaluation community.

Promotion of research in the study process is based on the need to develop the scientific

research provided for in the study programme, but there is a significant lack of motivation to expand the research field beyond them. Students are passively involved in research to participate in scientific conferences.

Within professional standard point 5.5. "Use at least two foreign languages in professional communication" it is essential to point out that during the study courses, students are offered to learn English, German, or Russian; however, based on the available literature, as well as the time of publication of the articles mentioned in the study course descriptions, it seems necessary to point out the lack of professional language. In conversations with student representatives, it is mentioned that the English language is not used during practice or professional work, arguing about the actual implementation of the study course but not continuing to strengthen the language during the period of studies.

Lack of interdisciplinary cooperation mechanisms. Skill development is briefly mentioned in the statement of results to be achieved in practice.

Annex 7. "Compliance of the bachelor's programme with the professional standard" does not align with Annex 9. "Study programme plan SD\_bak." - CP which are depicted for the successful completion of the study courses in the above-mentioned documents differ.

- 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:** Non-compliant

The study programme is implemented in Latvian, its descriptions are translated in accordance with this condition, thus complying with the condition. The study programme and study course descriptions mention the study content and the requirements set in the tests, however, they are general and can be freely interpreted.

Study course descriptions do not comply with the requirements set forth in Section 561 , Paragraph two and Section 562 , Paragraph two of the Law on Higher Education Institutions. The list of proposed literature for reference materials should be significantly supplemented, taking into account that a significant amount of compulsory literature sources contain information in 2012, even earlier, for example, the latest material in the study course "Modern technologies in work with information" was developed in 2012; in the study course "Social and inclusive pedagogy" methodological materials are available in the 2013 edition. In study courses, there is a vital lack of cognitive materials in foreign languages, which contain research, especially on public management, mechanisms of political participation, etc.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Partially compliant

In accordance with the regulations of the MK no. 322 "On the classification of Latvian education", the level of professional qualification indicated in the diploma should be the sixth, not the fifth. In point "3.3. admission requirements: general secondary education or primary education and 4-year secondary professional education", the information indicated does not match the information available to experts, pointing to the part of point 3.3 about "and 4-year secondary professional education," which is shown at the diploma.

On the e-platform the only general secondary education is indicated as an admission

requirement for the programme.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The academic staff has sufficient Latvian language knowledge for implementing study courses and for professional office duties. This is confirmed by a signed Rectors's acknowledgement.

- 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:** Partially compliant

The level of the study programme in the sample of the study agreement specified in the contract is indicated incorrectly.

It is mentioned that the Study programme accreditation sheet No. 44 (AL, ch. XII, p. 48. 2nd app.) and deadline until 31.12.2022., indicating that the stated right to learn the accredited study programme by performing the contractual obligations are not fulfilled.

Other necessary parts set in the legislation (Cabinet of Ministers no.70.) are included - samples of study agreement include general information about the higher education institution, student, the order of financing.

- 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:** Partially compliant

On December 14, 2021, BIA concluded an agreement on bilateral practical, academic and research cooperation with SIA "Latvijas Kristīgā akadēmija" institution reg. from 2943801398, which is valid for six years after the conclusion of the contract. (year 2027). It is mentioned that in case if the study of the LKrA or the BSA is interrupted program implementation, BSA and LKrA mutually undertake to provide opportunities for continuing studies in the corresponding study programs according to the student's choice. In the future, it would be advisable to develop a mechanism for informing the students of the continuity of this cooperation, taking into account that the commitment to introduce students to the established cooperation is not agreed otherwise. Taking into account the students' right to study in an accredited study program, emphasizing the continuity of education from the higher educational institution, the importance of the recommendation is enhanced.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The university has a Board members signed attestation that confirms it will compensate losses to students if the study programme is not accredited or loses its licence and the student does not wish to continue studies in another study programme; however the agreement has been made only this year on August 30th raising a concern about previous obligations in the said case.

It is important to take into account the recommendation to inform students about the changes made, introducing them to their rights and obligations in relation to this situation, which significantly affects their study process. There is no clear outline of the pre-contractual process.

- 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:** Non-compliant

As it was repeatedly mentioned in discussions with students and graduates, after the Covid-19 pandemic, the study process was moved online after the students expressed such will in the survey. It should be emphasized that MK. 111th regulations [<https://likumi.lv/ta/id/329849-attalinato-macibu-organizesanas-un-istenosanas-kartiba>] stipulate that the distance learning process may take place up to 50% of the number of contact hours determined for the implementation of the relevant study programme, which is significantly violated in this case.

**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:** Non-compliant

Taking into account the points of criticism contained in the assessment, for example, regarding the proportion of remote studies, the description of generalised study courses and the presentation of achievable results, as well as the presence of non-transparent feedback mechanisms, the relevant point is assessed as partially appropriate.

Study course descriptions do not comply with the requirements set forth in Section 561 , Paragraph two and Section 562 , Paragraph two of the Law on Higher Education Institutions.

The programme realization does not comply with the Cabinet regulation No. 111.

“Procedure for organizing and implementing distance learning” the study programme is mostly implemented online, so that it is impossible to reach necessary competence in a professional programme.

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

In the part of the presentation of the criteria, shortcomings are repeatedly observed, which are primarily related to the management and transfer of information to the parties involved, which forms an observation about the presence of an unconvincing system in the process of management of the studies. The presentation of the documents also does not mention the presence of students in decision-making processes or in the monitoring of the study programme.

Study programme partially complies with requirements set in the professional standard, considering the points of criticism contained in the assessment, for example, regarding the proportion of remote studies, the description of generalised study courses and the presentation of achievable results, as well as the presence of non-transparent feedback mechanisms, the relevant point is assessed as partially appropriate.

Exclusively remote, which is not in compliance with the Cabinet Regulations on implementation of remote studies on <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/329849-attalinato-macibu-organizesanas-un-istenosanas-kartiba>, and independent studies prevent students from achieving study aims/tasks and learning outcomes in acquiring professional competences in accordance with the Professional Standards of Social Workers. Study programme content is too fragmented: which means a large number of assignments/tests required in each semester. The final thesis is not of sufficient quality. The objectives set by the traineeships are unclear. The study course descriptions are very general. Social work professionals are involved in the implementation of the study programme, but most of them are not in academic positions and there is no system to change it.

#### Strengths

1. Implementation of students' practical skills in the study process

#### Weaknesses

1. Connection with the professional standard and the goals to be achieved in it;
2. In the study process, foreign literature is used, which is not updated enough for current research on the issues discussed in the programme;
3. Exclusively remote studies prevent from achieving study aims/tasks and learning outcomes in acquiring professional competences in accordance with the Professional Standards of Social Worker.
4. Unclear Study course descriptions do not comply with the requirements set forth in Section 561 , Paragraph two and Section 562 , Paragraph two of the Law on Higher Education Institutions.

### **Evaluation of the study programme "Social Work"**

Evaluation of the study programme:

Poor

## 2.6. Recommendations for the Study Programme "Social Work"

### Short-term recommendations

Create smaller but comprehensive number of courses with relevant competences for the study programme
Provide more information regarding social work practice in Latvia and links to relevant government and professional Internet pages on BIA webpage
Create courses for enhancing teaching skills for lecturers from the practise
Set clear duties and objectives of the traineeship in study course descriptions
Ensure compliance of on-site studies with the regulatory enactments.
Include regular tutoring hours in the study timetable
Develop a transparent mechanism for the involvement of students in decision-making processes in BIA
Regularly review the list of mandatory literature available to students in study courses, as a unified mechanism during study programme learning.

### Long-term recommendations

Make a strategy for attracting more foreign lecturers
Make a strategy for attracting more lecturers from the social work field
Make a strategy to attract more students

## II - "Social work" ASSESSMENT

### II - "Social work" ASSESSMENT

#### 2.1. Indicators Describing the Study Programme

##### Analysis

2.1.1. The Professional Master study programme fully corresponds to the study field "Social Welfare" which results from the content of the study programme and the qualification to be awarded"

2.1.2. The title, code, and obtained degree are justified. Study programme aims, objectives and study outcomes are defined but do not correspond to the professional standard of "Leading social worker", so obtaining qualification is not justified. Admission requirements are defined in programme documentation, but "Enrolment Rules and Matriculation Procedure at the Baltic International Academy" for the study year 2022/2023 do not match them. There are two types of the programme according to duration of implementation - 1 year 6 months and 2 years with different admissions requirements. For this programme, similar to the bachelor programme, it was not established that the programme is provided in a remote form.

2.1.3. According to the SAR (p. 98) since the issue of the previous accreditation sheet of the study

field, the results of the programme have been reviewed in accordance with the renewed standard of social worker. Probably it was meant that the results of the programme have been revised according to the standard of the Leading social worker. At the same time, SAR (p. 98) indicates that there were no changes in the parameters characterising the study programme. This does not correspond to the fact that master's studies in the SAR programme offer the qualification of a Leading social worker. Changes were related to part-time and full-time studies that are not planned at branch Daugavpils. Section 3.1.1 of SAR p. 97 provides the indicators characterising the Master's study programme, which reflects a different period of study, and the information provided in Latvian differs from the English version. There is inconsistency in the use of terms - Senior social worker and Leading social worker, where it should be only the term "Leading social worker" as that is the official title. Therefore it is the opinion of the expert team that these changes are not supportable.

2.1.4. Although there is no reason to question the need of leading social workers in shaping Latvia's socio-economic and development policy, during the meeting with the BIA management, the Master's study programme manager and students, there was no confidence in the vision of the role of leading social workers, what is the specificity of the profession. There was no confidence that the BIA had held a discussion on the offer of qualifications of the leading senior social worker.

Number of students in the programme is very low. Data presented in SAR in section 3.1.4. do not correspond to the data presented in Attachment 5 "Statistical data on students".

Most employers surveyed rate the preparedness of graduates as "excellent" and consider that graduates are immediately capable of performing their professional duties independently, while some employers consider graduates capable of performing their professional duties after a short period of training. Several employers rate the training of graduates as "Sufficient" and consider that graduates have good theoretical training but insufficiently acquired practical skills.

2.1.5. N/A

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

The aims and objectives and outcomes of the study programme are defined but do not correspond to the professional standard of "Leading social worker", so obtaining qualification is not justified. There is a discrepancy between the documents regarding admission criteria. Number of students in the programme is very low.

#### Strengths

1. Specialists in demand on the labour market.

#### Weaknesses

1. Study programme aims, objectives and learning outcomes do not correspond to the professional standard of "Leading social worker".

2. Low number of students.

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

### **Analysis**

2.2.1. The content of individual study courses in Master's study programme does not ensure the acquisition of such professional knowledge and skills as indicated in "Compliance of the study program with the standard of the LEADING SOCIAL WORKER profession" (Appendix 7). Some examples: it is indicated that the study course "Intercultural and community communication" helps

to develop team management methods, the ability to manage inter-institutional work, but according to the annotation, the purpose of the study course is to systematise and improve students' knowledge of cultural processes and their connection with social norms and traditions, understanding of the place of cultural heritage, creativity and innovation in the current cultural and political discourse. It is positive that the study programme includes the study course "Social Entrepreneurship and Management". Annotation reveals that the study course is oriented towards learning the concept of social entrepreneurship. It is not clear how this course helps to provide knowledge about bio-psycho-social functioning and knowledge about mediation, counselling, negotiation methods and techniques, knowledge about evaluation of social functioning of target groups, intervention approaches and other.

The study courses lack focus on acquiring the skills and knowledge necessary for the qualification of a leading social worker, incl. competence to develop new social services. The study courses only partially allow one to acquire knowledge on how to plan and control the distribution and availability of financial and material resources in the field of social services. Financing models of social services and social programmes can be found in foreign funds, charity, various community initiatives, co-financing of people, knowledge of state and local government budgeting, etc. The acquisition of the mentioned knowledge is provided by separate study courses "Management of Social Programmes and Projects" and "International Social Work". During the meeting with the students of the Master's programme, the experts were not convinced that the students understood the core of the qualification of a "leading social worker".

The BIA presents two options for implementing the Professional Master study programme: 90 ECTS for those who previously obtained professional qualifications in social work and 120 ECTS for those admitted from other (non-social work) fields of education. The study programme of 120 ECTS includes additional 30 ECTS of professional practice.

The aims and outcomes of the programme include knowledge and skills in social work methods, professional ethics and values [SAR, p.94-95]. The content of the studies does not ensure that students who are admitted from other (non-social work) fields of study are able to acquire fundamental professional social work knowledge and skills consistent with professional social work standards. During the visit the experts were informed that professional foundation topics are integrated into other subjects. However, the number of hours devoted to these topics in the curriculum is insufficient for the acquisition of the expected competences (for example, in the study course "Community social work theory and methods", 4 hours are devoted to social work with individuals, families and groups, 4 hours for the theories of social work and 2 hours are devoted to social work ethics (along with other topics). The appropriateness of including certain courses (e.g. "Applied foreign language") or volumes (Pedagogy 6KP) in the studies is questionable.

The titles of some courses in the curriculum (Annex 9) and in the course descriptions (Annex 10) do not match. The content of individual study courses in the Master's study programme does not ensure the acquisition of professional knowledge and skills necessary for the qualification of a leading social worker. The core of leading social workers is not clear enough for the students themselves. The content of the studies does not guarantee acquiring fundamental knowledge and skills for the students without previously obtained professional qualifications in social work so the programme doesn't consist with professional social work standards.

2.2.2. The Professional Master's degree in Social Work and the qualification of Leading Social worker is awarded after defending Master's thesis which are elaborated according to the REGULATION ON THE GRADUATION PAPER DEVELOPMENT AND DEFENCE IN THE BALTIC INTERNATIONAL ACADEMY“ [https://bsa.edu.lv/docs/2020/BSA\\_diplomdarbu\\_nolikums\\_ENG.pdf](https://bsa.edu.lv/docs/2020/BSA_diplomdarbu_nolikums_ENG.pdf) In accordance with BIA requirements, thesis defence is possible with prior positive grades for the study courses, internship, study thesis and after completing academic and financial obligations specified in the study agreement [SAR, p.114].

2.2.3. The descriptions of programme study courses (10 Annex) correspond to the Law on Higher Education Institutions (section 1.8.) where one credit point includes 25-30 academic hours of study work. However there is unclear an unified system in BIA on the exact number of hours the BIA devotes to one credit point and the number (proportion) of hours devoted to contact and independent studies. The number of contact hours varies from 12 to 32 hours, as shown in the course descriptions for the 3 ECTS. The information provided in SAR ( 40 academic hours make up one credit and the majority (28 hours) is spent on independent work) [p. 111] is incorrect and doesn't correspond to the Law on Higher Education Institutions and study courses descriptions in 10 Annex (here 1 ECTS is equivalent to 26.7 academic hours).

Professional Master's study programme "Social Work" is organised as full-time studies and, according to SAR [p.110], one site classes are scheduled for one session per semester. During the meeting, students commented that classes are only held remotely, with rare exceptions when the student and lecturer meet face-to-face. It is not clear how studies are organised: for example, in the first semester, there are 7 subjects with about 150 contact hours. It is not clear how contact hour studies work. From the interviews with the students, the information is obtained that the classes are conducted remotely in full, meaning there are no face-to-face lectures.

Study programme emphasises independent work as a significant study method in which students "analyse, interpret, solve problems independently, improve professional skills and develop analysis skills". According to SAR, "Students' tendency to be independent is promoted, at the same time ensuring the guidance and support of lecturers and support staff" ( p.111-112). In meetings with students and alumni participants expressed their satisfaction with the availability and accountability of lecturers - they noted that they can contact lecturers by phone or email (on the moodle platform) whenever they need them. Student-initiated communication with lecturers seems to prevail and there is a lack of a clearly identified systematic (timetabled) time for student counselling and their guidance in the study programmes, especially in the case of high student independent workload. It can be concluded that student work is mostly independent work with guidance if necessary.

Study programme, according to the SAR (p. 110) is implemented using informative methods, practical activities and creative methods. The methods used are chosen by lecturers depending on the objectives and learning outcomes of the specific course.

Study programme emphasises active study methods used in seminars such as discussions, work in small groups, presentations, and projects. Practical classes and independent work are the study forms where students "analyse, interpret, solve problems independently, improve professional skills and develop analysis skills" (SAR, p.111).

Analysis of description of study programme courses (10 Annex) showed that the teaching methods and assessments are more or less the same in all course descriptions dominated by study methods such as lectures, analysis of literature and information sources, seminars, discussions and independent work (several courses include practical work hours). It is not clear what study methods are used to acquire the competencies needed for micro-level social work (SAR, p.100) and leading social workers. To address this, the teaching methods within the study programme should be diversified, for instance, incorporating joint visits to a range of social service providers and key state administrative institutions, including the option for remote participation. Additionally, the introduction of role-play exercises that can be recorded and subsequently analysed would be beneficial. Furthermore, inviting and facilitating interactions with diverse specialists can greatly contribute to a deeper understanding of inter-institutional cooperation.

It is not clear how the predominance of remote study and mainly independent student work in the programme will enable students to acquire the necessary skills and competences to meet professional standards. The remote study is not in compliance with the Cabinet Regulations on implementation of remote studies on <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/329849-attalinato-macibu-organizanas-un-istenosanas-kartiba>.

2.2.4. References and Cabinet regulations should be updated in the descriptions of the internship study courses - there should be no references to the regulations of the first level professional higher education. The 'Provisions for Traineeships at the Baltic International Academy,' approved at the BSA Senate meeting on 23.05.2018 (Minutes No. 134), should be updated to clarify references to cabinet regulations.

The study programme of 120 credit points (80 Latvian credit points) provides for 4 traineeships in the amount of 39 credit points:

1) In the first semester there are 9 credit points allocated for the traineeship. The primary goal of the traineeship is to acquaint students with the chosen profession and its spheres of competence, to get an idea of the specifics, characteristics, problems and content of professional social work by addressing questions about benefits, social problems, aspects of the application of SOPA (Latvian - Pašvaldību sociālās palīdzības un sociālo pakalpojumu administrēšanas lietojumprogramma). However, the description of the study course (in Latvian) requires that students have prior knowledge of social work and the social security system in Latvia; knowledge of different levels of social work in practice and social work organisation; knowledge of different target group clients; knowledge of psychosocial assistance. This raises a question whether there isn't a contradiction that students learn in practice what they should already know.

If the main objective of the traineeship (as stated in the study course description) is to study individual situations, then it contradicts the intended goals of the traineeship.

2) In the second semester 9 credit points - skills in solving social situations should be developed. Traineeship topics do not align with the skills and knowledge that should be acquired for work with an individual social case.

3) In the third semester 12 credit points - students are expected to learn skills for solving socio-pedagogical cases. However, the description does not provide clarity on the practical activities or the institutions where these traineeships are to be carried out.

4) Research practice 9 credit points - unclear what activities the students are expected to carry out. Internships are an essential part of the Master's study programme. The 120 credit programme has 3 study internships, one of them in the 3rd semester, which focuses on the acquisition of socio-pedagogical practice, which is the longest (12 credits). Such a socio-pedagogical practice has its own objectives, but it must be acknowledged that it does not really relate to the qualification of the leading social worker. If one of the tasks of the Master's study programme is to prepare specialists who can work in an educational institution as a social pedagogue, as provided for in Cabinet Regulation No 569 of 11 September 2018 "Regulations on education and professional qualifications necessary for educators and procedures for improving the professional competence of teachers", then it should be taken into account that the BIA Master's study programme offers the qualification of a leading social worker and not a social worker.

In the first practice, students acquire skills to deal with social benefits. Solving social assistance issues corresponds to the profession of social assistance organiser. The Master's level study programme, which aims to provide the knowledge, skills and competences necessary for the leading social worker, does not aim to devote time to solving social assistance issues. Rather, this should be replaced by other skills and competences to be acquired in practice, such as assessing the effectiveness of the social assistance system.

The 120 credit study programme is open to those who have not previously obtained a social worker's qualification. Among the study courses (Annex 9 indicates that the duration of the study programme is indicated 1 year 6 months instead of two years) there are no study courses that would allow one to acquire the basics of micro-level social work practice. Therefore it is not correct for students to "demonstrate students' skills to integrate the acquired professional knowledge into practice in solving a social case" (Annex 10 - Practice II).

60 CP of the study programme includes one research practice in the amount of 9 CP (in the third semester), the content and requirements of which are designed in such a way that students acquire

knowledge, skills and competence in conformity with professional master's studies, supplementing previously acquired in the professional bachelor's studies of social work and specialising in the field of social work of interest to them. Traineeships are a compulsory part of a study programme. (SAR.,113) (it's more probable that the SAR is an error and refers to 90 credit points (CPs)). Research practice, which is provided for in both 90 and 120 credit study programmes, has been defined in very general terms, during expert visits it was not possible to get acquainted with any of the practice diaries, since such practice had not yet taken place in the study programme, which envisages obtaining the qualification of the leading social worker.

Consistent and professional social work terminology should be used in the descriptions of study courses. It should be noted that in 2023 a new social work dictionary (electronically available <https://www.lm.gov.lv/lv/media/23154/download?attachment>) has been published, which can be used when reviewing course descriptions.

Cooperation is underdeveloped, and there is a lack of established traineeships that provide the necessary skills for a leading social worker (apart from social services). None of the traineeships seem to focus on developing the skills of a leading social worker, with the exception of traineeship in research.

Traineeships are short-term, as a result of which only part of the skills can be acquired at work with an individual social case, the incentive would be to review not only the objectives, tasks, skills to be acquired and competences to be achieved, but also to review the duration of the traineeships.

In accordance with 08.29.23. Cabinet Regulation No. 481, titled "Prakses organizēšanas kārtība profesionālās izglītības programmās", it is determined that the educational institution shall either provide the trainee with a place of internship or evaluate and accept the internship place selected by the trainee. The institution is responsible for acquainting the trainee with the objectives and tasks of the internship. The "Provisions for Traineeships at the Baltic International Academy" and the tripartite agreement (trainee, The BIA, and place of internship) must be clarified in accordance with Cabinet Regulation No. 481. This includes specifying the places of internship and outlining the duties of the trainee." The tripartite internship agreement needs to be updated to reflect the title of the Master's level Social Work program.

The Master's level study programme provides for the acquisition of the qualification of the leading social worker. BIA has not developed cooperation with practice places (leading institutions in social policy making, research institutes, organisations dealing with human rights issues, etc.) or cooperation partners, which would allow it to develop an understanding of the role of the leading social worker in Latvia in managing and influencing social processes. Since the research directions of BIA only indirectly relate to social well-being, this affects the provision of a high-quality master's study process. Study internships of additional study programmes are not aimed at acquiring the skills of the leading social worker.

#### 2.2.5. N/A

2.2.6. According to the study programme requirements, the topics of the Master's theses must be relevant to the social welfare field and the direction of social work. The relevance of the topics are evaluated and approved by the faculty council. The final thesis topics include social work with families, children and young people, social work with persons with physical and mental disabilities, special needs, the topics about social worker's role, prestige, stress and burnout. As SAR indicates, only a slightly smaller number of works are about different types of Social Services and their availability [SAR, p. 114]. The final thesis topics presented in 3.2.6 Annex Tēmas SD mg ENG are relevant to social work although more specific topics oriented to leadership would be important both for the development of curriculum content and for the development of social work at community and social policy level.

Acquainting and evaluating master's theses, the team of experts noticed that the format of thesis

did not conform to standards of scientific and professional practice, making it difficult to assess the substance of the research. For example, the sample of final theses that were examined by experts group lacked a section about the methodology of the study, and they lacked conventional abstracts of the projects. There are REGULATION ON THE GRADUATION PAPER DEVELOPMENT AND DEFENSE IN THE BALTIC INTERNATIONAL ACADEMY approved by the BIA Senate. This regulation describes the elaboration (incl. selection of the topic, structure of the thesis and the content) as well as defence procedure and evaluation criteria of the diploma thesis. It should be noted that this regulation is in some way incomplete. For example, point 4.6. of this regulation "The body of the Graduation Paper" does not contain information about the need to describe the methodology, but at the same time, the chapter for the Evaluation section contains the section on Methodology (10.5.3.) where five important points of the methodology were mentioned. Reports of research studies usually follow the IMRAD format. IMRAD (Introduction, Methods, Results, [and] Discussion). It is a widely used format for structuring scientific research papers. The methodology section is very essential, which shows the student's data acquisition process and cannot be integrated into other sections. Although the BIA claims that the methodology should be described, the works examined during the visit showed a significant lack in this aspect.

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

The descriptions of study traineeships are overly general and vague. It is not clear what specific tasks and expectations are for students during these practices. The defined competences for the traineeships appear broader than the stated goals and tasks. The traineeships lack specific references to sources of theoretical literature for research. If students can enter a Master's study programme without prior social worker qualification, it is unclear how they can engage in study traineeships, especially when the programme does not include study courses focusing on work at micro level (with individual social case work, social work with families). Considering that the qualification to be obtained is that of a leading social worker, it is essential to assess whether the study traineeships are balanced between working with individual social case work and acquiring the skills required for the leading social worker qualification. It is necessary to review the objectives and tasks of the study practice so that they are clearly defined, helping to acquire the qualifications of the leading social worker. The format of final thesis did not conform to standards of scientific and professional practice.

#### Strengths

1. Topics of the final thesis are relevant to the social welfare field and the direction of social work.

#### Weaknesses

1. Study programme doesn't ensure professional background knowledge and skills for those without prior social work education.
2. Insufficient quality of final theses.
3. Limited use of teaching methods.
4. Dominant remote and independent studies without systematic guidance.
5. The objectives set by the traineeships are unclear, competences and skills are not subordinate to the objectives of the traineeship.
6. The objectives and tasks of the traineeship only partially enable students to acquire the qualification of a leading social worker.

## **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:** Non-compliant

Study programme doesn't ensure professional background knowledge and skills for students without prior social work education. Final thesis did not conform to standards of scientific and professional practice.

Lack of teaching methods that ensure micro level skills and competences needed for leading social workers.

Dominant on-line and independent studies without system

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

### **Analysis**

2.3.1. The study rooms are equipped to allow for remote learning or conferences if the need arises. Since 2015 the BIA has been utilising the Moodle e-learning environment. During the visits, the BIA's management, students and lecturers expressed their satisfaction with the technical support available for integrating IT into the learning process.

NEXUS has a section in which the BIA students can get acquainted with the internal regulations, study programmes, practice programmes, news of the BIA. Complete information on the study programmes, study courses, their volume and content is available on the BIA websites as an important source of information for the students and potential students. (SAR, p. 145).

The library in Riga is well-equipped, has reading rooms and they offer the necessary technical support for students and study staff. During a meeting with library representatives the experts were informed that students can make copies of the required materials and get their study papers bound at no cost.

The book resources within the BIA Library have limited social work literature in English or other European Union language that exceeds a five-year publication period. However, the library offers access to databases that might compensate for this lack of recent literature. There is little available professional literature in the field of social work in Latvia. The BIA ought to encourage lecturers to enhance their motivation in developing methodological materials in Latvian for the study courses. Methodological materials can be developed together with students.

The Master's social work programme involves 4 teaching staff who have the qualifications of a social worker, however, these teachers do not have or have few publications on social work or little involvement in research, which is very important for achieving the goals of the study programme. Research work is an essential part of the qualification of a leading social worker.

### 2.3.2.NA

2.3.3. The cost of the social work master's study programme per student is 935 euro per year. Thus, expenses for studies per student are completely covered by income per student. The financing system is organised in such a way that every student, regardless of the number of students in the group, has all conditions for quality education. That means ensuring the necessary number of contact hours, availability of library resources, e-study environment, research activities, etc. The founders of BIA use their right to control expenses and determine the minimum number of students in the study programme, thus giving the right to train students from small groups. (SAR, p.118).

Despite the above that the cost of studies per student is covered by revenue per student, and that a

small number of students in the group does not influence the quality of the study process, experts would like to point out that during the meeting with the students, information was received that the study courses are held mixed, for example, for the 1st and 2nd year students together, it was said that they are studying both in the full-time study programme and in the part-time study programme. SAR has no information on how the study process is organised in small groups, such as how group work is organised, which is indicated as a common method of study courses. If study courses are implemented in mixed groups, it raises the question if different previous levels of knowledge does not affect the quality of the course and does not affect the evaluation.

Annex 5 and SAR (p. 103 – p. 106) analyse the number of students in master's study programmes. There are data discrepancies between the annex and the information provided by the SAR, other study programme parameters are indicated in Annex 5, the name of the study programme director differs between the SER and Annex 5. Table 3.1.4.1. indicates that during the reporting period starting from 2019/2020 the number of students in Riga has steadily increased and in 2022/2023 there were 40 students in Riga, of which 32 students studied in the biennial study programme (120 credits), and 8 students in the programme of credits 90. In the shortest study programme, the number of students has been lower than in the two-year study programme for all years. The highest number of students enrolled was in Riga in the academic year 2022/2023 – 22 students (Table 3.1.4.2). The number of students enrolled in the shortest programme is insignificant – during the reference period there have been academic years when no student has been admitted, one or two students have been enrolled (Table 3.1.4.2.). The number of students enrolled in the shortest (90 CP) Professional Master “Social Work” programme is insignificant – during the reference period there have been academic years when no student has been admitted or one or two students have been enrolled (Table 3.1.4.2.). The number of students in the programme with 120 CP is higher, in the academic year 2022/23 the total number of students in Riga was 32 students, of which 16 students were enrolled (in 2021/2022 – 3 students enrolled). The number of enrolled students is uneven, it varies from year to year.

Since social work master's level study programme are not implemented at Daugavpils branch, this may have an impact on the number of students in the coming years. During the meeting with Daugavpils branch management, students and employers, it was noted that due to work and family reconciliation, it was important to learn closer to the place of residence that it would not be possible to go to study in Riga.

The professional standard for a leading social worker was recently approved and is being offered by BIA for the first time in the 2022/23 academic year. Essential research is required for the master's programme in social work to achieve its goals. Currently, BIA only has proposals for attracting additional funding. However, previous experts also highlighted in their recommendations that there has been insufficient participation in projects and grants. It is important to involve lecturers with social worker qualifications in research and publication preparation to address sustainability.

In addition, see section 1.3.1 on the provision of scientific and research activities, the main revenues of the BIA.

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

Although BIA has a lot of good resources and development (good infrastructure, technical facilities,) to develop research activities also in the master study programme and to develop a broader and more targeted cooperation with institutions, including to contribute to the development and improvement of the profession of leading social worker, there are a number of important aspects that raise concerns about the achievement of effective objectives of the study programme. The number of students in the 90 credit programme is negligible and there is no vision of the increase in the number of students, thus also the development of the study programme. The number of

students in both social work master's degree programmes is not large, however, it could be considered sufficient and profitable only in a 120-credit programme. The reduction of the Daugavpils branch offering the master's degree programme in social work might lead to a decrease in the number of students in the future, which could consequently impact the funding available for study programs. The lack of accreditation for the social work study programme is indeed a significant concern to attract students for the 2023/24 academic year.

There has been insufficient participation in projects and grants to attract more finance for study programmes. The book resources within the BIA Library have limited social work literature in English or other European Union language that exceeds a five-year publication period. However, the library offers access to databases that might compensate for this lack of recent literature.

The implementation of the study programme is not visible in the content of the understanding of the purposeful content to ensure the qualification of leading social worker.

BIA has not developed cooperation with practice places (leading institutions in social policy making, research institutes, organisations dealing with human rights issues, etc.) or cooperation partners, which would allow to develop an understanding of the role of the leading social worker in Latvia in managing and influencing social processes. It is not enough that cooperation is mainly with social services. The research directions of BIA only indirectly relate to social well-being.

#### Strengths

1. The study infrastructure provided to the staff and the students at BIA is good.
2. Good provision of information technologies and the library offers access to databases.

#### Weaknesses

1. The number of students in the 90 credits study programme is low and the funding for the master's degree programme largely relies solely on the tuition fees.
2. There are not enough social work books available in foreign languages (English or EU languages).

### 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:** Non-compliant

The number of students in the 90 credit programme is negligible. The reduction of the Daugavpils branch offering the master's degree programme in social work might lead to a decrease in the number of students in the future. The funding for the master's degree programme largely relies solely on the tuition fees, there is no external funding.

The book resources within the BIA Library have limited social work literature in English or other European Union language that exceeds a five-year publication period. The library offers access to databases that might compensate for this lack of recent literature. The study infrastructure (including IT) provided to the staff and the students at BIA is good.

The accessibility of the environment (buildings) for people with visual and hearing impairments has not been considered.

## 2.4. Teaching Staff

### Analysis

2.4.1. According to the information obtained from the annex 9. "The curriculum of the study program SDmg" for the professional bachelor's degree in social work qualification - social worker there are in total 19 members of the teaching staff involved in the implementation of the study. As can be seen from the table 3.4.2.1, SAR p. 120, currently 19 lecturers are involved in the implementation of the Social Work Professional Master's Study Programme. 58% of lecturers have tenure at the BIA. Out of the total number of lecturers, 58% of the academic staff is provided by 11 lecturers with a Doctoral degree (9 tenured at BIA, 2 non-tenured). 7 (2 BIA tenured, 5 non-tenured) lecturers have a Master's degree (37%). Out of these 19 lecturers, 12 are practising professional social workers, which is also mentioned in the SAR p.119-120 that "most lecturers are practising professionals". Although professionals from the practice are a valuable source of knowledge, the theoretical part of the studies is very crucial and from the information gained from SAR, only one member of the tenured teaching staff is from the area of social work. In general, the qualifications of the teaching staff are suitable for teaching in the programme, but the fact that the majority of them are practising professionals is not enough for the study program to achieve desirable outcomes.

2.4.2 According to the information in the SAR p. 120-121 the obtained scientific degrees are relevant for conducting teaching as well as the number of the teaching staff. There is information about the members of the teaching staff who have gained additional qualifications and education that is relevant to the study field. However, as mentioned in the SAR, most of the lecturers are practising professionals, not elected staff. From the SAR p.120 there are no indications regarding numbers of teaching staff leaving BIA. Moreover, BIA has employed additional teaching staff. Additionally, some of the teaching staff has also gained additional qualifications, although not entirely relevant to the field of social work (i.e, PhD in pedagogy). However, since the majority of the lecturers are practising professionals in social work, these changes did not have a negative impact on the overall qualifications of the teaching staff.

2.4.3. N/A

2.4.4. According to the annex "List of the scientific publications of academic staff" members of the teaching staff have a substantial number of publications published in peer-reviewed editions or relevant practical experience. However, from the annex "List of the scientific publications of academic staff" the majority of published work is in the publications of the events organised by BIA or other Latvian institutions. There are a very small number of the publications that are published in the other types of peer reviewed publications. Most publications are not connected to the field of social work but to other fields to which teaching staff belong (law, tourism).

Since most of the lecturers are practising professionals, not all of them are involved in scientific activities. However, they do have practical experience in working with individuals and groups and performing social work duties (working with children, juveniles and adults) in the institutions where they are employed. There is information about the members of the teaching staff who have gained additional qualifications and education that is relevant to the study field through seminars and conference attendance (i.e, education on how to work with people who are substance abusers or working in prison settings). This can be seen from the CV's of the teaching staff.

2.4.5. In the SAR p. 122-123 are described mechanisms for mutual cooperation of the teaching staff that include various activities by the staff (i.e. Mutual attendance of the lectures/classes, masterclasses/ exams by the lecturers which allows evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of work; Inviting the highly qualified guest lecturers to lead the study courses; Analysis and evaluation of the contents of the study programme through the preparation of self-assessment reports for the previous academic year; Use of the external experts to evaluate the study process and students' knowledge). However, for some activities it is not clear how they are contributing to mutual

cooperation. For example, on the p.122 of the SAR it is mentioned that “Mutual attendance of the lectures / classes, masterclasses / exams by the lecturers which allows evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of work”. However, during interviews with the teachers and the students, it is mentioned that the classes are fully online and no information about having more than one lecturer on the course was available. Furthermore, the SAR on p.122 also mentioned that the BIA uses external experts to evaluate the study process and student’s knowledge. The experts did not receive any information regarding these external experts and the way they evaluate the study process and more importantly, students' knowledge.

In the meeting with the management staff, it is mentioned that there are regular meetings with the directors of the study programme in order to discuss relevant issues regarding teaching and students.

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

Teachers at BIA use e-learning platforms to conduct their teaching, however, from the interviews with the teaching staff and students, the courses are fully conducted online. Furthermore, most of the teachers are practitioners from the field which is an addition to teaching theoretical aspects of social work. There is a lack of tenure staff that have qualifications in the field of social work. Majority of the publications are not relevant to the social work field. The staff that published their work mostly did it in BIA’s journals and presented them at BIA’s conferences. According to the SAR, there are mechanisms for mutual cooperation, however experts did not receive any information about how they are implemented, and if they are implemented, in practice.

#### Strengths

1. Excellent use of e-platforms in teaching and communicating with students.
2. Programme employs persons from the practice as teachers.

#### Weaknesses

1. Research papers mostly published in domestic journals.
2. Only one member of the tenured BIA teaching staff is from the relevant field
3. No evidence that mutual cooperation mechanisms are operational in practice

### **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 publication list from the available information about the teaching staff shows that most of them publish papers, but the majority is in the publications from the conferences organized by BIA and it is not relevant to the study field. There is a small number of BIA tenured teaching staff with education in the relevant field.

## **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:** Non-compliant

The study programme does not correspond to the State Academic Education Standard. Also, there is unclear an unified system in BIA on the exact number of hours the BIA devotes to one credit point and the number (proportion) of hours devoted to contact and independent studies. The number of contact hours varies from 12 to 32 hours, as shown in the course descriptions for the 3 ECTS. The information provided in SAR ( 40 academic hours make up one credit and the majority (28 hours) is spent on independent work) [p. 111] is incorrect and doesn't correspond to the Law on Higher Education Institutions and study courses descriptions in 10 Annex (here 1 ECTS is equivalent to 26.7 academic hours). "

- 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:** Non-compliant

According to "Compliance of the study programme with the standard of the LEADING SOCIAL WORKER profession" (Appendix 7), study courses in a master's degree do not guarantee the development of professional knowledge and abilities mentioned in the professional standard. The study programme doesn't put enough emphasis on teaching students the abilities and information required to become leading social workers, including the ability to create new social services. Learning how to allocate and manage the availability of material and financial resources in the social services sector is only partially possible through the study courses. The experts were not persuaded that the Master's degree students grasped the fundamentals of being a "leading social worker" during their interaction with them.

- 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:** Non-compliant

The study programme is implemented in Latvian, its descriptions are translated in accordance with this condition, thus complying with the condition. Study descriptions are not available in English, indicating the unavailability of exchange studies for foreign students. The study programme and study course descriptions mention the study content and the requirements set in the tests, however, they are general and can be freely interpreted and do not comply with the requirements set forth in Section 561 , Paragraph two and Section 562 , Paragraph two of the Law on Higher Education Institutions.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Partially compliant

In accordance with the regulations of the MC no. 322 "On the classification of Latvian education", the level of professional qualification indicated in the diploma should be the sixth, not the fifth.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The academic staff has sufficient Latvian language knowledge for implementing study courses and for professional office duties. This is confirmed by a signed Rectors's acknowledgement.

- 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:** Partially compliant

The level of the study programme in the sample of the study agreement specified in the contract is indicated incorrectly. It is mentioned that the Study programme accreditation sheet No. 44 (AL, ch. XII, p. 48. 2nd app.) and deadline until 31.12.2022., indicating that the stated right to learn the accredited study programme by performing the contractual obligations are not fulfilled. Other necessary parts set in the legislation (Cabinet of Ministers no.70.) are included - samples of study agreement include general information about the higher education institution, student, the order of financing.

- 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:** Partially compliant

On December 14, 2021, BIA concluded an agreement on bilateral practical, academic and research cooperation with SIA "Latvijas Kristīgā akadēmija" institution reg. from 2943801398, which is valid for six years after the conclusion of the contract. (year 2027). It is mentioned that in case if the study of the LKrA or the BSA is interrupted program implementation, BSA and LKrA mutually undertake to provide opportunities for continuing studies in the corresponding study

programs according to the student's choice. In the future, it would be advisable to develop a mechanism for informing the students of the continuity of this cooperation, taking into account that the commitment to introduce students to the established cooperation is not agreed otherwise. Taking into account the students' right to study in an accredited study program, emphasizing the continuity of education from the higher educational institution, the importance of the recommendation is enhanced.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The university has a Board members signed attestation that confirms it will compensate losses to students if the study programme is not accredited or loses its licence and the student does not wish to continue studies in another study programme; however the agreement has been made only this year on August 30th raising a concern about previous obligations in the said case.

It is important to take into account the recommendation to inform students about the changes made, introducing them to their rights and obligations in relation to this situation, which significantly affects their study process. There is no clear outline of the per-contractual process

- 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:** Partially compliant

As it was repeatedly mentioned in discussions with students and graduates, after the Covid-19 pandemic, the study process was moved online after the students expressed such will in the survey. It should be emphasised that MK. 111th regulations [<https://likumi.lv/ta/id/329849-attalinato-macibu-organizesanas-un-istenosanas-kartiba>] stipulate that the distance learning process may take place up to 50% of the number of contact hours determined for the implementation of the relevant study programme, which is significantly violated in this case.

Due to the regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers No. 481., it should be noted that the available documents do not provide a complete evaluation of the compliance of the implementation of the internship with the study programme. Experts do not have the opportunity to familiarize themselves with the content of the practice diary and its evaluation procedure. It should be mentioned that during the consultations with the students, statements were made about the possibility of combining the internship with the existing workplace, which, in turn, indicates a possible conflict of interests and a biased evaluation of the internship. Taking into account the specifics of the programme, it would be advisable to adjust the goals and tasks of the internship to the study year or to the students individually, currently available information on these conditions is general and does not specify specific tasks.

**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:** Non-compliant

The study programme does not correspond to the State Academic Education Standard or the Professional Higher Education Standard and do not complies with a valid professional standard and Cabinet regulation No. 111 "Procedure for organising and implementing remote learning" the study programme is mostly implemented online, so that it is impossible to reach necessary competence in a professional programme and Professional standard of "Leading social worker"

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

Study programme's aims, objectives and study outcomes are defined but do not correspond to the professional standard of "Leading social worker", so obtaining qualification is not justified. Likewise, the study programme does not correspond to the Professional Higher Education Standard point. 36. - the description of the study content and implementation of the master's study programme, the choice of study courses, the content and scope of the study courses, including the content and scope of the studies to be implemented in the working environment, as well as the content of practice in accordance with the degree to be obtained and the qualification to be obtained, are not determined in accordance with the requirements of the professional qualification and professional competence. BIA has not developed cooperation with practice places (leading institutions in social policy making, research institutes, organisations dealing with human rights issues, etc.) or cooperation partners, which would allow it to develop an understanding of the role of the leading social worker in Latvia in managing and influencing social processes. It is not enough that cooperation is mainly with social services. The experts were not persuaded that the master's degree students grasped the fundamentals of being a "leading social worker" during their interaction with them. Study programme doesn't ensure professional background knowledge and skills for students without prior social work education. Exclusively remotely, which is not in compliance with the Cabinet Regulations on implementation of remote studies on <https://likumi.lv/ta/id/329849-attalinato-macibu-organizesanas-un-istenosanas-kartiba>, and independent studies prevent students from achieving study aims/tasks and learning outcomes in acquiring professional competences. The research directions of BIA only indirectly relate to social well-being.

Strengths

1. Specialists in demand on the labour market.

Weaknesses

1. The programme does not correspond to the professional standard of "Leading social worker".
2. The programme does not correspond to the Professional Higher Education Standard
3. The programme is fully conducted remotely.
4. Insufficiency of research done in the Social Welfare field.
5. No cooperation with practice places -leading institutions in social policy making, research institutes, organisations dealing with human rights issues etc.

**Evaluation of the study programme "Social work"**

Evaluation of the study programme:

Poor

## 2.6. Recommendations for the Study Programme "Social work"

### Short-term recommendations

Ensure the compliance of on site studies with regulatory enactments
Set clear instructions regarding content and structure of the thesis
Set clear duties and objectives of the practical work
Revise aims, objectives and study outcomes to correspond with the professional standard
Make a strategy to attract more teachers from the field of social work
Create courses for enhancing teaching skills for lecturers from the field
Make clear distinction between e-learning and remote learning
Revise research courses to prepare students for conducting thesis that conform scientific and professional standards
Develop appropriate documentation and process for the process of recognition of previous education and experience and ensure the development of individual plans for students without previous education in social work
Revise the study plan to correspond with requirements for qualification of leading social worker

### Long-term recommendations

Review the created programme so that it is consistent with the established professional standard
Review the programme according the State Academic Education Standard or the Professional Higher Education Standard
Develop cooperation with practice places - leading institutions in social policy making, research institutes, organisations dealing with human rights issues, etc.
Make a strategy on how to attract more students

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

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

#### Assessment of the Requirements for the Study Field

Requirements	Requirement Evaluation		Comment
<p>R1 - Pursuant to Section 5, Paragraph 2.1 of the Law on Higher Education Institutions, the higher education institution/ college shall ensure continuous improvement, development, and efficient performance of the study field whilst implementing its internal quality assurance system:</p>		<p>Non-compliant</p>	<p>Based on the report provided by the BIA, the Academy operates a study quality mechanism based on the guidelines of the European Excellence Model (EIM), in parallel integrating the quality conditions from the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education of the document "Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area" Part 1: "European standards and guidelines for internal quality assurance for requirements incorporated in higher education institutions." (ESG-2015)</p> <p>Although the BIA indicates the existing hierarchy for the management of quality assurance mechanisms, nevertheless, based on observations in discussions with academic staff and students, experts conclude that there is no strict understanding of the basic principles of the established bodies, especially highlighting the non-transparency of the "study-methodical council" operation and the inability to distinguish between its functions from the "Study directions council." Information about their specific goals and tasks is partially available, for example, the percentage distribution of representatives and their election procedure is not available.</p> <p>In addition, there is no specific data available on the number of participating academic staff, students, and graduates in study quality evaluation surveys, indicating only percentage satisfaction with the realised study courses, which in the relevant context does not provide a complete understanding of the overall evaluation of the study field. In addition, the presented report does not give an insight into the explanation of the feedback transfer mechanism, thus not creating an understanding of the interaction of the collected data with the introduced innovations in the study process. Apart from questionnaires, no other instruments have been indicated in the study quality management processes.</p> <p>It is particularly desirable to point out that the described feedback processes do not mention the mechanism by which the collected data would be presented to the decision-making institutions, including providing feedback to students, graduates and other involved parties. The lack of such a tool significantly harms the conclusion of the feedback loop.</p>

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		Although BIA has a strong inclination to a research based study programmes and has implemented some structural bases (e-learning platforms and institutional bodies and services) and research services that can be used by both the teaching staff and the students which is visible from the SAR and clarified with the interviews with the teaching staff, management staff and students, there are still some areas that raise concerns. There is no clear strategy on how to attract more foreign students and researches, how to more effectively use mobility grants and Europe level project grants. Furthermore, there is a lack of the teaching staff from the scientific field relevant to the study programmes. The majority of publications from the teaching staff involved in the study programme are not in the field of social work.
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		BIA currently has a collaboration with the institutions from Latvia and with the institutions from abroad that requires improvement. There exist mobility opportunities that are rarely used by faculty and students. There is a lack of cooperation with diverse employers, professional organisations of social work in Latvia, little cooperation with Latvian higher education institutions that implement social work study programmes. Haven't been guest speakers involved or specific international projects focusing on social work.
R4 - Elimination of deficiencies and shortcomings identified in the previous assessment of the study field, if any, or implementation of the recommendations provided.		Non-compliant	Several recommendations have been partially or not implemented, for example: Insufficiency of English language skills of academic staff, limited involvement of teaching staff in scientific work and in projects. Insufficiency of field specific newest literature. Participation in "Erasmus+", as well as planning to apply for participation in the NORDPLUS project is still not enough. The recommendation to develop recognition of prior learning is not in place, recommendation to seat up an advisory body of employers in the study field (not mentioned in the report) not done, increasing difficulty of tasks not done, recommendation about the managing the master programme taking into account diversity of bachelor students is not implemented as well as critical relationship towards practice is not in place. PhD program development in cooperation with other Latvian HEI is not in place.

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

<b>No.</b>	<b>Study programme</b>	<b>R5</b>	<b>R6</b>	<b>R7</b>	<b>R8</b>	<b>Evaluation of the study programme (excellent, good, average, poor)</b>
1	Social Work (42762)	Not relevant	Partially compliant	Partially compliant	Non-compliant	Poor
2	Social work (47762)	Non-compliant	Non-compliant	Partially compliant	Non-compliant	Poor

### **The Dissenting Opinions of the Experts**

None