

# Expert group joint opinion

Evaluation Procedure: Assessment of Study Field

Higher Education Institution: Malnava College

Study field: Agriculture, Forestry, Fishery, and Food Hygiene

Experts:

1. Marta Kontiņa (Chair of the Experts Group)
2. Felix Arion (Secretary of the Experts Group)
3. Danute Rasimaviciene
4. Iveta Dzīvīte (Student Union of Latvia)
5. Andrejs Vītolīņš (Employers' Confederation of Latvia)

# Summary Assessment of the Study Field

## Summary Assessment of the Study Field

Malnava College is the only higher education institution that provides comprehensive training of specialists in the field of agriculture in the Latgale region. This unique position together with years-long experience (HEI celebrates its 100th anniversary this year) provides a competitive advantage among other HEI in the region. The study program "Agricultural Entrepreneurship" is a unique study program for the region. It is the most obvious choice of the agricultural training in the region for the family farms as providing a good professional education. In general, there is a high satisfaction of students and graduates about the study process. They especially emphasize the individual approach. Competition for budget places also attracts paying students which means that there is a demand. Also, employers emphasize the importance of the program for the region and themselves specifically.

From January 2022 Malnava College will exist as an agency of the Latvia University of Life Sciences and Technologies (LLU). Experts see this as a positive impact as it will strengthen research capacity, attract qualified academic staff and raise internationalization capacity.

The study field has a strategy for growth including the development of other study programs. However, there is no well-established mechanism to annually improve the study field. There is a lack of indicators to assess the improvement of various aspects and activities.

Unfortunately, the professional standard of the study program "Agricultural Entrepreneurship" is outdated. The current version was approved in 2003, which means that it doesn't correspond with the trends of the agriculture sector. For example, there is nothing about precise agriculture, robotics, automatization, and technologies used currently.

The College has developed a system for determining the financial resources required for the implementation of the study field and the respective study program, however, as the school indicates, their amount is insufficient for regular renewal of material and technical resources. There is a good level of technical resources in some areas (for example, tractors, machines, etc). Also, there is an active collaboration in place with employers that provide resources. However, laboratories are outdated and there is a lack of new technologies in classrooms. Additionally, there is a very low amount of information resources available in English including books and electronic resources.

There is a lack of guest lecturers and mobility in general in the study field including national and international. That has been caused by the lack of funding, contacts, and also a low level of English knowledge. The development of the competencies of the academic staff is irregular.

There are no mechanisms established to attract academic staff to research. They lack information, training and in general don't feel ready and motivated. Those that represent agriculture currently have difficulties accessing laboratories as they are too expensive.

## 1. Management of the Study Field

### Analysis

The aim of the study field is clearly defined - to prepare competent agricultural specialists for the needs of the Latvian economy in accordance with the requirements of the labor market. In the Latgale region, Malnava College is the only higher education institution that provides comprehensive training of specialists in the field of agriculture. This unique position together with years-long

experience (HEI celebrates its 100th anniversary this year) provides a competitive advantage among other HEI in the region.

The aim of the study field corresponds with “2021-2027 Development and investment strategies of Malnava College” that was approved on 26.05.2021. and highlights the importance of providing innovative and qualitative education for the Latgale region. This strategy has been developed in accordance with regional, national, and international strategic documents that comply with development trends of the society and national economy (i.e. “Latvia 2030”, “National Development plan 2021-2027”, “Strategy of Latgale region 2030”, National guidelines of digital transformation 2021.-2027., National guidelines of education development 2021.-2027. and others). During the site visit, employers admitted that the study field and the relevant study program are very important for the region of Latgale and provide them with specialists that are well prepared for the labor market needs. Many students come from families with long agriculture traditions and after graduation, they can develop their family-owned businesses. Also, the results of the graduate survey (carried in 2020) demonstrate high demand for graduates in the labor market - 76% of graduates work in their chosen profession in agricultural enterprises, 14% of graduates work in related professions.

The head of the study field is also the director of the study program. The Director of the Study field is responsible for the day-to-day management of the study field. Her direct supervisor is the Deputy Director of Studies and Research. She is also supported by the director of HEI, especially when it comes to the strategic development of SF. Changes in the study field are approved by the College Council that consists of 14 council members including representatives of academic staff, employers, students, and general staff. During the visit, experts met with all the stakeholders involved and were assured that the decision-making process is effective. During the site visit, students admitted that they feel supported during the study process and highlighted the positive environment, personal approach, and quick problem-solving. Also, members of academic staff assured that they feel supported by the administration of the Study field.

There is also an Internal Audit Commission established within HEI that at least once a year checks the compliance of Malnava College with the regulatory enactments, the Regulations of Malnava College, as well as the decisions adopted by the Council and the Director of the College.

The support of administrative staff is mainly ensured by the Department of studies and research, which plans the study process (lesson planning, lecturers' work, etc.), records the progress, provides students with information, etc. Technical staff (for example, IT specialist) is available to support the management of the Study field.

There is a clear system and procedures developed for the admission of students. Also, it is possible to recognize previous education and professional experience. “Student Admission Regulations and Matriculation Procedure of Malnava College for the 2021/2022 academic year” have been developed in accordance with the Cabinet Regulations No. 846 “Regulations on Requirements, Criteria, and Procedures for Admission to Study Programs”. Applicants for full-time studies are matriculated in study programs according to the general competition procedure, based on the average evaluation of the certificate/diploma transcript, the centralized exam (mathematics, foreign language), and the results of similar exams. The Statute of Commission of admissions has been approved by the Council of HEI this year (approved on 16.06.2021.). The commission consists of at least 3 members that are approved by the director of HEI for 1 year. The main tasks include providing the admission process, providing necessary information to interested applicants, accepting and checking submitted documents, and taking the final decision. Malnava College has approved the “Regulations on the academic recognition of study courses at Malnava College” (approved on 16.06.2021) that provide

the academic recognition of study courses when transferring from another accredited higher education institution to Malnava College, transferring from one Malnava College study program to another, resuming studies after a break and in another higher education institution.

Regarding the evaluation of the achievements and learning outcomes of the students - there is a clear understanding of the procedures among the stakeholders involved. The evaluation is developed in accordance with the study results set for each study course. The final mark of each study course consists of the results of formative assessment during the semester and summary assessment at the end of the study course. This approach helps to follow the progress of students. On 16.06.2021. The College Statute on the Procedures for Studies and Tests has been approved by the College Council. During the site visit, students and academic staff admitted that the used methods for evaluation mainly include grading presentations and tests. More student-centered approaches could be integrated into the study process, for example, self-evaluation, peer-to-peer evaluation, and others.

The HEI has approved the regulation of academic integrity (approved by the Council of HEI on 22.11.2017.) that covers responsibilities for students and academic staff. Also, "Regulations on Ethics and Conduct" have been approved by the Council of HEI on 26.05.2021. During the site visit, academic staff and students demonstrated knowledge of principles of academic integrity. However, currently, there are no digital tools used that detect plagiarism.

The website of the HEI is quite well developed and it includes information that corresponds with information available in official registers. Additionally, the main strategic documents and regulations of the study process are published. However, the website is currently available only in Latvian, which means that potential foreign collaboration partners can't access the information. That, of course, also impacts the interest from potential foreign exchange students (who would be interested only after at least some study courses are offered in English) . On the positive side, HEI has well-developed social media platforms, for example, Facebook page, where stakeholders can follow the news of HEI.

It is important to note that from January 1st, 2022 Malnava College will exist as an agency of the Latvia University of Life Sciences and Technologies (decision taken on July 7, 2021, the Cabinet of Ministers Order No. 487 "On the Reorganization of Malnava College"). Experts see this as a potentially positive impact as it will strengthen research capacity, attract qualified academic staff and raise internationalization capacity.

## **Conclusions. Strengths and weaknesses**

Conclusions:

The study field and the content of its relevant study program hold a unique position on a regional level that is supported by high demand for specialists in the labor market. The aim of the study field corresponds with the strategy of HEI that complies with regional, national and international strategic documents. The study field is managed efficiently, administrative and technical staff supports the study process. The college has established a clear system of admission of students and recognition of study courses. The evaluation system is established in a way that helps to monitor the progress of the student during the semester. There is an established regulation that ensures the integration of academic integrity within a study process. However, there are no digital programs used to monitor plagiarism. The website of HEI is well developed and provides information in Latvian that complies with official registers.

### Strengths

1. Unique study program in Latgale region.
2. High demand for specialists in the labor market in the Latgale region.
3. Well-developed structure of the management and efficient decision-making process.
4. The head of the Study field and relevant study program provides necessary support to students and the academic staff.
5. Well-established system and procedures for admission of students.
6. Clear evaluation procedure established.
7. Consolidation with Latvia University of Life Sciences and Technologies.

### Weaknesses.

1. Plagiarism can not be detected with digital tools or programs.
2. Evaluation methods don't include such student-centered approaches as self-assessment or peer-to-peer assessment.
3. The website of the HEI is available only in Latvian.

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

### **Analysis**

Quality Management Policy (further - QMP) has been developed at Malnava College. It has been approved on April 21, 2020, in the Malnava College Council meeting. The QMP includes the structure of the quality management system of Malnava College and sets guidelines for the establishment, maintenance, improvement, and evaluation of the quality management system. These guidelines are binding to all College staff (SAR, p. 27). The QMP is publicly available on the Malnava College website (only in Latvian).

There are 16 points with measures included in the internal quality assurance system (SAR, pp. 30.-31.):

1. The structural units ensuring the operation of Malnava College are reflected in the structure of the college;
2. The responsibilities, powers, and duties of the employees are specified in the Rules of Procedure of Malnava College, in the job description of each employee, in the employment contract;
3. To ensure the quality of the study content, the study content is updated. The Study Council considers the necessity of updating both the program and the study courses;
4. A mapping of study results is performed, which is reviewed in cases of study content revision;
5. The head of the study program can attend the classes of the teaching staff;
6. Faculty members are provided with opportunities to attend professional courses and seminars;
7. Consultative support of teachers on the possibilities of using the e-environment is available;
8. The Study Council analyzes the dynamics of the number of students (number of enrolled students, reasons for dropping out, etc.);
9. Once a semester, students' progress is checked;
10. The availability of information to all involved parties is improved by updating the college website [www.malnavaskoledza.lv](http://www.malnavaskoledza.lv): information about study programs, organization of the study process for students, internal normative documents, etc.
11. Information for students on the content of the study course, requirements for the acquisition of the study course, and evaluation criteria are provided by each lecturer at the beginning of the study course. It is planned to place the descriptions of the study course in the e- environment;
12. Information on processes and procedures, as well as current events for all college staff is ensured by organizing meetings and using e-environment (Microsoft Teams platform);
13. Feedback is provided by organizing surveys of students, graduates, and employers. The results

of the survey are summarized in the study council, administration meeting;

14. Informative support is provided to students both in-person and using digital solutions;
15. At the beginning of studies, a lesson "Introduction to studies" is organized for first-year students. The student self-government organizes a consolidation event at the beginning of October;
16. During the studies, before the practice and preparation of the final work, meetings and consultations are organized. Consultations are also available within the study courses both in-person and remotely.

By evaluating the aforementioned, it is clear to the experts that the internal quality system has been developed and certain guidelines have been set and it seems to be enough to ensure continuous improvement, development, and efficient performance of the study field and the relevant study program. However, based on the analysis in this and the previous chapters, as well as chapters 3-5, the real-life implementation of points set in quality assurance needs further improvements when looking at contribution to the achievement of the aims and learning outcomes of the study field and the relevant study program.

The development of a new study program can be initiated by the College Council, Director, head of the study field/program, representatives of the academic staff, at the initiative of graduates or students' self-government, representatives of cooperation partners, including employers, industry associations. During the reporting period, Malnava College has not developed new study programs but has reviewed and updated the existing study program "Agricultural Entrepreneurship" (decision of the College Council on 12.09.2018) (SAR, p. 31). To update the study program to meet the requirements of the stakeholders, the feedback received from students, graduates and employers is especially important. Stakeholders evaluate the courses of the study program, as well as the applicability of the acquired knowledge, skills, and competencies in professional activities, thus the feedback becomes a valuable element of the improvement of the study process. Employers give feedback through internship evaluation surveys. As an example - based on the stakeholders' feedback changes have been made within the study courses "Agricultural Machinery" and "Agricultural Project Management" (SAR, p. 31.). During the onsite visit, an example was also mentioned about scientific research methods being added to study courses, additions were made based on the feedback of the stakeholders in the courses regarding agriculture. The processes about how the improvement and review of the study programs are organized are dictated in the Malnava College document "Regulations on the development, implementation, and improvement of study programs" (Approved in Malnava College Council meeting on the 28th of January, 2019) (SAR, p. 32). The results of the surveys are summarized and the results are shown to lecturers. Survey results are communicated to students at the beginning of each semester during a joint meeting, which is more of an unofficial way of communication. In experts' view, it would also be beneficial to additionally post the summarized survey results and/or changes made in the courses in Moodle or another system available for Malnava College students (so-called reverse feedback mechanism). In the words of the study field director during the onsite visit - 60-70% of students fill in the survey, but it was also mentioned that graduates are more active. In experts' opinion, the procedure dictated in the aforementioned document and the information provided in the SAR is logical, coherent, and available for all of the involved stakeholders, however only available in Latvian. This point is important, taking into account that the College has developed an extensive internationalization strategy. In order to achieve the goals defined, such as to attract foreign students, guest lecturers etc., the main documents concerning the quality assurance system and the basic information about development of study programmes should be available in English as well.

Malnava College collects data in concordance with the Cabinet of Ministers' regulations and by considering data protection principles. Data is collected by using the Electronic Data Collection

System (EDV) once a study year until the 1st of October (SAR, p. 34). The College creates databases for internal use, for example, students enrolled in the study year, the total number of students, graduates, expelled students, lecturers, results of students' progress, etc. The head of the study department is responsible for the collection, storage, and processing of statistical data. The data is used in the process of awarding state scholarships, to analyze the success of students, to analyze the reasons for students dropping out, to determine the proportion of graduates in relation to students (SAR, p. 34). For example, from the year 2015, there has been a 40% decrease in the number of students, as mentioned in the onsite visit, the goal for the College is to increase the enrolled student count (so that in 3 years - 75 students are enrolled in the program). Points in strategy are put in to achieve this goal. The aforementioned usage of the gained data is a good example of how the College uses statistics to improve the study field.

In the view of experts, Malnava College has integrated all standards and guidelines of Part 1 of the ESG for internal quality assurance in the study process (SAR, p. 35). The College has identified that ensuring adequate funding for continuous development and the availability of modern teaching resources as well as finding adequate funding for research can be seen as a major challenge (SAR, p. 35). In experts' opinion, the College has put the first steps towards the limitations of these challenges. During the onsite visit, the management disclosed that in the future participation fees of conferences, as well as the costs for publications will be covered. Large amounts of money (5 million is mentioned) are going to be invested in the College from the Ministry of Agriculture the following year.

### **Conclusions. Strengths and weaknesses**

#### Conclusions

The College has established a quality assurance system, which they maintain to improve the study program within the study field. It is available publicly and in experts' opinion could ensure continuous improvement for the College and the study field. The processes for review and improvement of study programs are regulated through specific internal regulations of the College and seem efficient and logical. The College has integrated standards and guidelines of Part 1 of the ESG for internal quality assurance in the study process.

#### Strengths:

1. Gained statistical data is efficiently used to improve the study field and set performance indicators for the future.
2. Close connections with the stakeholders help to continuously improve the study field.

#### Weaknesses:

1. The regulations regarding and relating to the Malnava College Quality Assurance System are only available in Latvian.
2. Official reverse feedback mechanisms for students are not in place.

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

#### **Analysis**

Within the study field, only one program in Agriculture is implemented, respectively the availability of resources and material and technical equipment is analyzed taking that into account. On the other hand, experts also took into account the availability of material and technical equipment in other areas of Forestry, Fishery, and Food Hygiene, but only to assess how realistic the College plans to develop the study field as a whole are.

The College has developed a system for determining the financial resources required for the implementation of the study field and the respective study program, however, as the College indicates, their amount is insufficient for regular renewal of material and technical resources. The sources of funding for the College are specified in the regulations of Malnava College. The full list can be found in section 3.1 of the self-assessment report and AIC annexes (16.Malnavas koledžas studiju daļas akadēmiskā personāla darba samaksas kārtība.pdf, 17.Nolikums par stipendijām Malnavas koledžā.pdf). The material and technical provision for the study field is provided from the State budget and within the framework of EU fund projects, but some funding comes from tuition fees, premises, and land lease. During the experts' visit and evaluating the information included in the self-assessment report, the experts were able to verify that in the College there is good material and technical equipment in agriculture, especially in mechanization subjects. The most significant shortcoming is mentioned in the context of the livestock laboratory - its equipment is morally and physically outdated. According to expert observations, renewable and more modern teaching aids would also be desirable in the crop production training room. The items related to mechanization were the best of equipment that was shown to experts during the visit. However, during the accreditation, significant funding of € 5.6 million from the Ministry of Agriculture's budget for the refurbishment of school materials and the strengthening of the school at the national level was publicly approved. After getting acquainted with the planned investment directions, it becomes clear that many shortcomings will be eliminated in a significantly short time.

No system has been set up to fund research and/or artistic creation activities. The College Self - assessment report covers the period from 2015 to 2020. No funds were allocated for research purposes during the reporting period. It should be noted that the academic staff did show low interest in conducting research activities as such during the interviews. However, The Regulations of Malnava College stipulate that one of the tasks of the College is to conduct research following the study profile and to promote students' scientific research work and support students' research in qualification work.

The college has identified the infrastructure resources and material and technical support required for the implementation of the study field, and these are indeed available in the college. The information provided in The College Self - assessment report is accurate. The available material and technical base are sufficient for the successful implementation of the agricultural programs of the study field. However, extremely outdated equipment and teaching literature were observed in the training room connected with livestock subjects, mannequins and visual aids are outdated, damaged in many places and insufficient to cover the entire livestock sector. The College does not have simulation equipment, specialized livestock equipment, or virtual mannequins. The teacher extensively uses self-created information materials and various internet sources. The teaching materials in the crop laboratory are obsolete, but can still be used in teaching.

The necessary resources are available to students and teaching staff. A unified system and procedure have been established for the improvement and purchase of material, technical, methodological, informative provision, etc.

College Self-Assessment Report point 3.1. describes the procedure for adopting the budget. The highest governing body and decision-making body of the College in strategic, financial and economic matters is the College Council. The College has introduced a budgeting methodology based on national legislation. Based on the mentioned methodology, the college administration, based on the requests of teachers and attracted specialists once in a year, distributes the necessary development investment and funding for the renewal of the technical base and increase of the library collection. The College Council approves the College's annual budget.

Funding granted to Malnava College Library for the period 2017-2020 (EUR) as per self-assessment report point 3.3 is stable, and funds for stock set-up per user are slowly rising. However, experts review the available literature on-site and most of the textbooks available in the library are outdated and a lot of newer ones are available in small numbers. Some examples used in the teaching process: "Piena lopkopība. Rokasgrāmata / A.Jemeljanova red. Sigulda: Jumi, 2001. 191 lpp.", "Piena ražošanas tehnoloģijas rokasgrāmata (Modris Kreilis), Izdeva: Avots, Izdots: 1981." It should be noted that it was in animal husbandry that the largest deficit of new books was observed, but also other basic literature was mostly older than 5 and more years. Newer books were in the field of plant protection, and crop production. Insufficient literature is available in foreign languages, although students in the interview indicated that they did not see any problems in obtaining information in a foreign language.

According to the librarian, the school currently actively uses only two databases (LURSOFT and EBSCO), due to the reason that most of them are paid products. Although the library is connected to the electronic catalog system ALISE, unfortunately, it is not possible to get acquainted with the books available in the library on the Internet. It is possible for teachers to order less available literature using the inter-library subscription system. Teaching staff proposals for new sources of information for the College Library collection are evaluated annually, which was considered by the experts to be insufficient, but as teaching staff points out, this is a formal procedure, and proposals are discussed regularly between the librarian and staff.

The College has developed a procedure for attracting teaching staff. The process of selection and admission of lecturers at Malnava College is determined by "Regulations on Academic and Administrative Positions of Malnava College". Due to the fact that the lecturers do not engage in research and at the same time are teaching in secondary vocational high school, their workload in the college consists only of their daily teaching work.

In interviews, experts learned that the management of the college recognizes the professional and didactic development needs of the teaching staff. Teaching staff members regularly attend various refresher courses and also give lectures outside the college. However, this is not clearly reflected in the available documents and during the interviews, the experts were not convinced that improvements are being made in a targeted way with subsequent controls over results, but rather in response to spontaneous activities offered by others.

The teaching staff members insufficiently take part both in outgoing and incoming mobility. Cooperation in the field of training mainly takes place at outgoing mobility and in various levels of secondary Vocational and Adult Professional Development training. This certainly adds value to the implementation of the study process and the quality of studies, however, lecturing at the higher education level would further improve this process.

The College has identified the support needed by students and has developed a well-functioning support system based on student needs. This was clearly confirmed during the interviews when graduates and those still studying highlighted the good contact with teaching staff and the individual approach to meeting their needs together with individual approach to student training as one of the biggest advantages of the college. As per self-assessment report point 3.7, each full-time academic group has a curator, there is the head of the study department, the deputy director who can help to solve the issues related to the organization of the study process. When developing a study paper, a qualification paper, each student has the opportunity to receive individual lecturer consultations. The College provides psychological, informational, instructional, and career support for every student.

The college uses an e-learning Moodle system environment, which is regularly updated. Although its development is still in its infancy, its potential is visible and new materials are regularly added by teachers. The possibilities provided by Microsoft Teams are also used to organize meetings or online training.

However, despite the excellent support of the College at the local level, at the national level, due to the lack of additional funding, the whole system has a significant disadvantage - no mobility support is provided to students from remote regions of Latvia.

## **Conclusions. Strengths and weaknesses**

Conclusions.

1. The College has developed a system for determining the financial resources required for the implementation of the study field and the respective study program, however, as the College indicates, their amount is insufficient for regular renewal of material and technical resources.
2. In general, despite the constant lack of state funding for the full renewal of the material and technical base, the college regularly renews it. They have good material and technical resource base and students and teachers have the necessary resources to ensure the quality of teaching and learning.
3. The College has developed a procedure for attracting teaching staff. The teaching staff is highly qualified in the professional fields. The partial lack of required textbooks and visuals is compensated by well-designed digital materials from teachers.
4. The College has identified the support needed by students and has developed a well-functioning support system based on student needs. Students have excellent support from the College.

Strengths:

- 1) Good material and technical equipment in agriculture especially in mechanization subjects.
- 2) Interested teaching staff and individual approach to student training.
- 3) With the help of funding from the Ministry of Agriculture, it is planned to significantly renew the college's teaching and technical base.
- 4) The College uses the e-learning environment and is constantly improving it

Weaknesses:

- 1) Insufficient resources available for material and technical base renewal from state funding.
- 2) Livestock laboratory - its equipment is morally and physically outdated.
- 3) No system has been set up to fund research and/or artistic creation activities.
- 4) The literature available in the library in several professional subjects is outdated and little is available in foreign languages.

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

### **Analysis**

The Regulations of Malnava College stipulate that one of the tasks of the College is to conduct research in accordance with the study profile and to promote students' scientific research work, The self-analysis provides a list of three main research priorities: 1) life sciences unit (agriculture), 2) engineering unit (technologies and smart machines, especially in agriculture, forestry), 3) social sciences unit (agrarian and regional economy, sociology, land management - the division comply with the aim of the college and is relevant to the study field and the relevant industry, but at the

same time the self-analysis and its annexes do not provide much data on the research conducted by the academic staff members that might support this declaration. The list of publications presented covers the research activity of just three lecturers (out of 17) and all three of them are guest ones. Although self-assessment report states that applied research has been started in the study direction, meetings with the administration and lecturers of the College during the onsite visit have proved that right now the research, both types - scientific and applied) is seen more as a goal and expectation related with the merger with the LLU than real activity. As main obstacles for the research the lack of expensive research equipment and the lack of experience were mentioned. It is worth adding that a small step is made to the direction of applied research by participating in a project co-financed by the Rural Support Service, European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development "Strawberry growing technology using substrate heating in high tunnels, with or without additional lighting, and optimal plant density assessment in high tunnels to maximize productivity" and in a project "Development of the methodology for the evaluation of the lighting system of greenhouse complexes", that aims to develop a methodology for the selection of greenhouse lighting systems that would meet the economic and quantitative goals set by the company.

As there is no proven scientific or applied research activity in the study field conducted by elected lecturers it is almost impossible to evaluate if there are any relations between research and the study process, but research outcomes of two guest lecturers (modules of plant growing and agricultural project management) definitely contribute to the quality of teaching and are integrated into the study process.

There was no data provided on any international cooperation in the field of scientific research and within the study field neither in the self-assessment report nor in the meetings with the staff and administration. The only international activity has been participation in international scientific and practical conferences in Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Serbia, Belarus, Poland and Latvia. One member of the teaching staff has experience participating as member of scientific committee and reviewer.

There is no established and well-functioning mechanism in place for the involvement of the teaching staff in scientific research. Also, there was no funding planned for the research activities during the self-assessment period. During the site visit, some members of the teaching staff shared that they have received funding to participate in scientific conferences. However, this funding has been more occasional than regular. There are no criteria to obtain it. It is solely based on the initiative of the lecturer. Also, teaching staff acknowledged that they lack collaboration opportunities with other higher education institutions. They would be willing to participate in research groups but are not ready to take initiative.

Students are mainly involved in the research during the development of their qualification papers. Some of them have experience participating in student scientific conferences. For example, in 2017, Malnava College organized a conference "Development of Organic Agriculture and Production of Organic Products in Latgale Region".

In general there is a lack of innovative practices in the study process, however there are some good efforts, for example, during pandemic students were able to submit their home assignments in video format to demonstrate their skills. Also, live video from a farm was used to demonstrate practical skills.

## **Conclusions. Strengths and weaknesses**

Conclusions.

Declared research fields of the study field comply with the aims of the College and are relevant to the industry, but there is no system of planning, engaging teachers, conducting and monitoring research activities in place. Students are involved in research when developing their qualification papers. However, as it is the last stage of the study process often they are not ready to conduct research in high quality. There are some innovative solutions used in the study process, especially during pandemic to improve the study process.

Strengths:

- 1) Some members of the teaching staff are involved in applied research.
- 2) Some participation in international scientific and practical conferences.
- 3) There are some innovative solutions applied in the study process, especially during pandemic, for example, live video from farms, individual assignments in video format.

Weaknesses:

- 1) No specific, research-related training for the lecturers.
- 2) No research contacts with foreign partners.
- 3) No publications written by elected lecturers.

## **5. Cooperation and Internationalisation**

### **Analysis**

Malnava College cooperates with the institutions from Latvia and abroad, but the internationalization activities of the Malnava College was almost exclusively limited to participation in international scientific and practical conferences in countries like Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Serbia, Belarus, Poland, and Latvia, one participation as a member of scientific committees - and reviewer - of international scientific conferences and one international mobility project. International partners are from the same, or connected, study field and study program. The College cooperates with a number of important governmental and non-governmental organizations (LLKC, LO SP, etc.), many well-known companies in the region within the study field and such cooperation promotes the achievement of the goals and study results of the study field and relevant study programs.

Malnava College has developed the "2021-2027 Internationalization Strategy of Malnava College", as a strategic document to guide the process for a deeper internationalization of the college. Also, the "Erasmus charter for higher education 2021-2027" at Malnava College was elaborated to improve the exchanges of staff and students. However, it would be desirable for the academic staff to be more active abroad, for example as guest lecturers (until now, just one lecturer has participated in outgoing mobility) and there was no recognition of courses acquired during outgoing mobility, while the report provided by the experts during the previous accreditation of the study field specifically included the recommendation to improve the level of cooperation with higher education institutions abroad. International cooperation is more related to institutional development than research, as there has been no international cooperation in research during the reporting period. At the moment, the internationalization intentions of Malnava College were insufficiently achieved, as most of the efforts done by management, staff, students, and collaborators were focused on national and, especially, local level. The local cooperation is well carried on, including relevant partners, based on a clear procedure for cooperation and traineeship.

From 2013 to 2020, the faculty members of the direction have participated in 10 scientific and practical conferences with reports (Self-evaluation report, pages 52-53). The scientific activity of the teachers of Malnava College is not active. Improving scientific activity is one of the tasks of Malnava

College in the new planning period, which is reflected in the 1st edition of "Malnava College Development and Investment Strategy for 2021-2027".

5 cooperation agreements have been concluded with higher education institutions of Latvia, 9 cooperation agreements have been consigned with foreign educational institutions and another 30 were signed with employers. (Annex: Cooperation agreements.docx)

Malnava College has developed a system and procedures for the attraction of the teaching staff and students from abroad within the study field. They have the potential to be efficient and to contribute to the improvement of the study process, but the number of incoming teaching staff and students is not enough to be relevant at the moment (for instance, no guest foreign lectures and no students from abroad were attracted). A major reason is the lack of English classes at Malnava College.

The framework for internationalization is, basically, created, even if it hasn't started to be fully applied. For instance, the procedure for the recognition of courses acquired during outgoing mobility is determined by the "Regulations on studies and internships abroad of Malnava College students and lecturers/employees and the academic recognition of their results", approved by the College Council Decision of 19.06.2020. Also, during the expert group's discussions with staff, it was observed a relatively high level of complacency regarding their limits of using the English language. They do not have internal motivations to improve their skills, but they are, unrealistically, waiting for external factors to force them (foreign students, foreign collaborations, etc.)

The "Regulations of the Malnava College regarding the organization of the study and qualification traineeship", as a framework system for the provision of traineeships has been developed within the study field. Malnava College considers the provision of traineeships as being one of the main directions of cooperation (Self-evaluation report, page 56). During the meetings with graduates and potential employers, everyone emphasized the good quality of the traineeship during studies.

## **Conclusions. Strengths and weaknesses**

Conclusions:

1. Malnava College cooperates with the institutions from Latvia and abroad, but the internationalization activities of the Malnava College were almost exclusively limited to participation in international scientific and practical conferences.
2. Malnava College, through its strategic documents, plans to intensively develop internationalization of the study programs, involving staff and students in them but also aiming for strategic cooperation between two or more vocational education institutions.
3. Malnava College has set up a framework system for the provision of traineeships within the study field. The traineeships periods were appreciated as being good for all involved persons.

Strengths:

1. Lecturers and students participate in international scientific conferences organized by cooperation partners.
2. There are cooperation agreements signed with higher education institutions of Latvia, with foreign educational institutions and with employers.
3. It is stated that the College cooperates with foreign HEI that implement similar study fields and study programs (Ukmergė School of Business and Technology, Lithuania - improvement; scientific and practical conferences; attraction of guest lecturers; Pskov Agrotechnical College, Russian Federation; Pskov State University, Russian Federation; Postava State College, Belarus and Gorodok Agrotechnical College, Belarus - Experience exchange events; Cooperation in the field of culture, art and sports; Cooperation in cross-border projects).

4. Malnava College plans to intensively develop internationalization in study programs, involving students in them, to gain foreign experience presented by foreign lecturers.

Weaknesses:

1. There have been no guest lecturers from abroad.
2. There were no students from abroad during the reporting period.
3. Only one lecturer has participated in outgoing mobility.
4. There has been no international cooperation in research during the reporting period.
5. Only one lecturer of the field is involved in the scientific committees of international scientific conferences and collections of articles, also as a reviewer.
6. During the reporting period, there was no recognition of courses acquired during outgoing mobility.
7. The report provided by the experts during the previous accreditation of the study field specifically included the recommendation to improve the level of cooperation with higher education institutions abroad, while the improvement is not so visible, for instance, the mobility for students and academic staff have only just started.
8. There are limited English language skills of the academic staff, and that has a powerful negative impact on international cooperation development.
9. There are no English classes at Malnava College and that fact limits the possibility of attracting international students and the teaching staff.

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

### **Analysis**

Regarding the study field, the recommendations received from the previous expert group as well as their implementation status are listed below as follows.

1. The English language skills of the staff need to be improved.

This recommendation is partially implemented. In the SAR, Annex "Implementation of recommendations" it is said that the academic staff members improved their English knowledge in the training "Improvement of foreign language skills competencies for vocational education teachers and practice managers" organized by the National Centre for Education (NCE) and in the University of Latvia professional qualification improvement program "Increasing the English language competence of teachers of general education subjects involved in vocational education" and other courses. During the onsite visit, the question about English language levels was raised and about half of the academic staff members present in the meetings would be willing to teach students in English. The aforementioned language skill improvement projects happened 2 years ago, since then nothing new has been planned, with an exception for those academic staff members who will apply to participate in mobility (Erasmus) programs - language improvement courses will be offered before they go. As the Internationalization Strategy for Malnava College (2021-2027) also pinpoints more outgoing mobility as well as incoming foreign students, the need for improving English language skills for academic staff members is essential, therefore in experts opinion, a precise plan should be made.

2. The mobility of students and academic staff should be encouraged.

This recommendation is partially implemented. It was said during the onsite visit that there are 4 projects available for the academic staff mobility, however, the activity is still very low - from SAR, Annex "Lecturer mobility" it is seen that only 1 academic staff member has participated in the mobility projects during the reporting period. It was explained by the academic staff members that

the mobility projects mostly are for vocational education level, which is also implemented in the College, however, there are some hopes that in future outgoing mobility will increase for higher education level as well. However, there does not seem to be a strategy in place on how to increase the mobility numbers. Student mobility did not take place at all during the reporting period.

3. More initiatives in the field of cooperation agreements with Latvian and foreign universities.

This recommendation is fully implemented. Based on the information provided for the experts in SAR, Annex "Implementation of recommendations", since the year 2013 cooperation agreements have been signed with Latvian universities (such as Rēzekne Academy of Technologies, Daugavpils University, and Latvia University of Life Sciences and Technologies), Lithuanian (as an example - Ukmergė School of Business and Technology), Belarus (Gorodok Agrotechnical College) and Russian (Pskov Agrotechnical College) HEI. Although the cooperation agreements are in place and have been increased in quantity (from the year 2013 - 11 agreements), they seem to be from more or less the same geographical region - cooperation agreements with a different one might help to further improve the relevant study field.

## **Conclusions. Strengths and weaknesses**

### Conclusions

Based on the recommendations of the previous experts' group improvements have been made in the cooperation agreement field, however, the geographical range covered by the agreements is very narrow. Serious improvement is needed in terms of foreign language skill improvement for academic staff and student mobility as well as academic staff members mobility.

### Strengths:

1. 11 cooperation agreements in place with Latvia's and foreign HEI.

### Weaknesses:

1. Lack of a plan for further improvement of the English language skills of academic staff members.
2. Student and academic staff mobility are very low (both incoming and outgoing).
3. Cooperation agreements are with HEI in a narrow geographical region.

## **7. Assessment of the Requirements for the Study Field**

- 1 R1 - Pursuant to Section 5, Paragraph 21 of the Law on Institutions of Higher Education, the higher education institution/ college shall ensure continuous improvement, development, and efficient performance of the study direction whilst implementing their internal quality assurance systems:

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

The recently approved Quality Management System in Malnava College includes the structure of the quality management system and sets guidelines for the establishment, maintenance, improvement, and evaluation of the quality management system within the study field.

However, based on the analysis in the previous 6 chapters, specifically, the implementation of the guidelines set in the quality system needs some improvements (see recommendations for the study field).

- 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

The College has developed and partially implemented the "Quality Policy of Malnava College"

(SAR, p. 13, analysis of chapters 1.-6. of this report).

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Partially compliant

The mechanism is dictated through the internal document "Regulations on the development, implementation, and improvement of study programs", which also include the written mechanisms for periodic supervision and inspection. However, the weaknesses identified in the chapters analyzing the study field as well as the chapter about the content of the study program - the content/course descriptions of the program, as well as the out-of-date literature sources would indicate that mechanisms regarding the periodic supervision and improvement of the program are not fully efficient when put in practice.

(SAR, p.13, chapters 1 ("Management of the Study Field") and 3 ("Resources and Provision of the Study Field"), and 2 ("The Content of Studies and Implementation Thereof") of this report)

- 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 made public.

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The College has developed "Regulations of Malnava College regarding the procedures for studies and examinations", which formulate the types of examinations and assessment procedures, and the forms of examination of study results. Results of the study course (knowledge, skills, competencies) and evaluation criteria for each result are developed for each study course. The student-centered evaluation methods could be improved in the future by including such approaches as self-assessment or peer-to-peer assessment.

(SAR, p.13)

- 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

Rules for the selection and recruitment of academic staff have been developed and published on the website of the College: "Regulations on Election in Academic Positions" "Internal regulations of Malnava College", "Regulations of the Council of Studies". Assessment of academic staff is organized, taking into account the results of studies and the results of student surveys (SAR, p. 13).

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

Every year, the College conducts a survey of students and a survey of graduates on satisfaction with the study program, study process, growth, and employment. Every year, the available and necessary resources are evaluated, and proposals are submitted to the College management for budget planning purposes. All the obtained data is collected and analyzed when preparing annual self-assessment reports. (SAR, p. 14)

- 7 1.6. The higher education institution/ college shall ensure continuous improvement, development, and efficient performance of the study direction whilst implementing their quality assurance systems.

**Assessment of compliance:** Partially compliant

Justification can be found in “2021-2027 Development and Investment Strategies of Malnava College”, part 3 as well as other sections of this report. For full continuous improvement and development of the study field in regards to the quality assurance system, some improvements should be made regarding the implementation of the defined points in the quality system (see recommendations for the study field). (SAR, p. 14)

- 8 R2 - The cooperation with different organisations from Latvia and abroad implemented within the study direction ensures the achievement of the aims of the study direction.

**Assessment of compliance:** Partially compliant

The cooperation mechanisms and collaboration agreements in place are good on a national level, however, the cooperation with the organizations abroad should be developed and improved. (SAR, p.5, chapter 5 analysis of this report - study field)

- 9 R3 - Compliance of scientific research and artistic creation with the development level thereof (if applicable).

**Assessment of compliance:** Partially compliant

The Regulations of Malnava College stipulate that one of the tasks of the College is to conduct research following the study profile and to promote students' scientific research work. The priority research directions are grouped into three main units of science branches. (SAR, p.4) However, currently research practices are almost non-existing in College and research directions have been defined only on paper.

- 10 R4 - Elimination of the shortcomings and deficiencies identified during the previous assessment of the study direction, if it has been conducted, or the implementation of the provided recommendations.

**Assessment of compliance:** Partially compliant

Of the 3 recommendations given by the previous experts group, 1 is fully implemented and 2 are partially implemented. Serious improvement is needed in terms of foreign language skill improvement for academic staff and student mobility as well as academic staff members mobility.

## 8. Recommendations for the Study Field

### Short-term recommendations

- |   |
|---|
| 1. Within two years, develop an English version of the website of the HEI.  |
| 2. Within two years, introduce the usage of digital tools or programs that detect plagiarism.                                     |
| 3. Within two years create a plan for further improving the English language skills for academic staff members.                   |
| 4. Within two years, establish a support mechanism for research that includes regular funding, informative support, and training. |
| 5. Until the beginning of the next academic year, international promotions of the academic offers should be done.                 |

6. Until the beginning of the next academic year, a process of selection of potential international mobility opportunities (for instance in the frame of the ERASMUS Programme) should be spotted, promoted to internal staff, and the beneficiaries should be selected, to assure larger participation of the staff and students. The courses taken by the students during mobility should be subject to recognition.

7. Taking into account the lack of the latest professional literature in Latvian within two years supplement the library collections with the latest literature in English and include them in the training process. The teaching staff in cooperation with industry companies and associations should initiate and engage in the translation of the most important literature

8. Given that the College cannot directly influence the state funding, and the possibilities to compensate for the lack of funding with EU funding for the renewal of the full material and technical base are limited and unpredictable, experts recommend informing the Agriculture Expert Council and the responsible ministry latest by December 2022 about the necessary material and technical base and resources in need of renewal in the short and long term to find common solutions.

### Long-term recommendations

1. Until the next accreditation the regulations regarding and relating to the Malnava College Quality Assurance System should be publicly available also in English.

2. Until the next accreditation official reverse feedback mechanisms for students should be set, perhaps by publishing the summary of the feedback surveys.

3. Until the next accreditation student and academic staff mobility (both incoming and outgoing) should be encouraged, a specific strategy for increasing it might be beneficial both for the College and the students.

4. Additional cooperation agreements should be signed until the next accreditation outside the Eastern European region. It might be beneficial both for the College and the students.

5. Until the next accreditation official student-centered evaluation mechanisms should be integrated into the evaluation system.

6. Until the next accreditation, some classes should provide alternative teaching in English (and/or some alternative teaching for English-speaking students, as are, for instance, project-based training), to increase the potential to attract foreign students and guest lecturers.

7. Until the next accreditation, Malnava College should prove its involvement in international research (at least by being a partner in relevant international consortiums that apply for research and innovation funds).

8. Until the next accreditation, update the livestock laboratory and find an opportunity to renew and supplement the teaching aids in the crop production laboratory. If this is not possible due to insufficient public funding, replace the missing equipment with internships in companies rather in the College, in cooperation with companies in the field. It is possible to learn without proper on-site equipment. In that case, the College must provide frequent study tours, often internships in companies for the acquisition of practical skills, and create an extensive database of virtual information materials for the acquisition of theoretical knowledge.

## II. "Agricultural Entrepreneurship" ASSESSMENT

## II. "Agricultural Entrepreneurship" ASSESSMENT

### 1. Indicators Describing the Study Programme

#### Analysis

The aim of the study program "Agricultural Entrepreneurship" is to prepare qualified business specialists in agriculture. The aim, objectives, and learning outcomes are interrelated and correspond to the name of the study program, professional qualification, and admission requirements. "Student Admission Regulations and Matriculation Procedure of Malnava College for the 2021/2022 academic year" have been developed in accordance with the Cabinet Regulations No. 846 "Regulations on Requirements, Criteria, and Procedures for Admission to Study Programs". Applicants for full-time studies are matriculated in the study program according to the general competition procedure (there are state-funded places available), based on the average evaluation of the certificate/diploma transcript of secondary education, the centralized exam (mathematics, foreign language), and the results of similar exams. Recently the average competition has been two applicants for one place - for a state-funded place in full-time studies. Part-time studies are implemented for a tuition fee and applicants with secondary education can be admitted. Although the demand for both full-time and part-time studies is still high, there has been a decrease in recent years due to the changes in population, migration, and economic development trends.

Graduates can work in agricultural enterprises, their branches, structural units, or as individual workers in agriculture. They have the necessary skills to organize agricultural production, they know agricultural technologies.

Graduates of the study program "Agricultural Entrepreneurship" obtain the qualification "Business Specialist in Agriculture", which was approved by the Ministry of Education and Science Order No. 262 of June 3, 2003. The program complies with this standard, so the criteria are technically fulfilled. However, the college and experts point out that this professional standard is very outdated and needs to be renewed. For example, there is nothing about precise agriculture and technologies used currently. Management of the College admitted to the experts that a new standard is very much needed as soon as possible. Several steps have already been made - National Expert Council (NEP) coordinates the expert group, there have been various meetings with higher education institutions and employers. Also, a representative of the Business Sector Expert Council has been included in the group. So far it has been concluded that the standard should be completely revised. Also, mapping of the professions included in the structure of the agricultural sector has been developed. "Business Specialist in Agriculture" is included in this occupational map. Given the uniqueness of the program, it is imperative for college professionals to be involved in the development of the new standard and to facilitate the development process as soon as possible.

#### Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses

##### Conclusions

The aim of the study program corresponds to the title of the study program and the qualification to be acquired. The aim, objectives, and learning outcomes of the study program are interrelated. The admission requirements are corresponding to the first level higher education. The graduates obtain the necessary skills, knowledge, and competencies to work in agricultural enterprises, their branches, structural units, or as individual workers in agriculture. However, the professional standard - "Business Specialist in Agriculture" is outdated and needs to be renewed, so that the College can integrate current trends in the content of the program.

##### Strengths

1. The aim, objectives, and learning outcomes are interrelated and well defined.
2. High demand for state-funded places - two applicants for one place in full-time studies.

## Weaknesses

1. The professional standard is outdated and doesn't correspond to current trends of the agricultural sector.
2. Decreasing number of part-time students.

## 2. The Content of Studies and Implementation Thereof

### Analysis

The descriptions of the study courses are clear and comply with the provisions outlined in the regulatory enactments. The content of the study program reflects the objectives assumed by the Malnava College, focusing on the agricultural training of students, but, also, offering entrepreneurial and managerial knowledge (SAR page 66). The objective of the study program is complex, aiming to prepare qualified business specialists in agriculture able to work in agricultural enterprises, their branches, structural units, or as individual workers in agriculture, who perform agricultural production organization, planning, administration, and know agricultural technologies.

The content is relevant and complimentary, and it complies with the complex aims of the study program, basically ensuring the achievement of the learning outcomes. The content of the evaluated study courses is created according to the aim and its established objectives, offering to the graduates' knowledge, skills, and competencies related to farm management and agribusiness. That corresponds to the actual educational and professional standards, the last one is relatively old ("Agricultural business specialist", approved by the Ministry of Education and Science June 3, 2003, Order No. 262) and it is expected to be updated by 2023. The study program is designed to conform with the national education standards, all specific indicators being accomplished. The content of the study program is mainly equilibrated, but some of the economic, management and business-related courses are concentrated in the last semester of studies. That does not allow the logical coherence of the acquired knowledge, for instance, students may need the knowledge from Management and/or Investments and finances for the course of Agricultural project management. Also, practice (traineeship) in the enterprise starts in the 2nd semester of the 1st year, while both the Enterprise course and Marketing course (these 2 courses being the theoretical courses that focus on the practical enterprises' activity) start only in the 1st semester of the 2nd year, so it is not a logical order of courses. The number of elective courses is very limited and does not offer the students the possibility to select their own direction of studies and the competencies, knowledge, and abilities they intend to gain.

The potential outcomes of the study program (mentioned on pages 66-67 of SAR) are focused on technical issues of agricultural exploitations, not on business. Form 11 identified outcomes, 6 are technical, 3 are business-related and 2 are general.

#### a) Technical outcomes:

- he/she has knowledge of Latvian land resources, soil properties, their improvement, seed materials, plant consequences, plant fertilization and plant protection, soil processing;
- has mastered the cultivation of rural crops, vegetables and fruit crops grown in Latvia, observing modern technologies;
- understands the mechanization of agricultural production processes, applicable technologies;
- understands changes in agricultural sectors in the context of global change (globalization, migration);
- knows the development opportunities and trends of agricultural sectors, taking into account the types of support for regional specificities;
- is able to choose the most economically advantageous crop and livestock sectors, has skills in breeding, feeding, keeping, caring for animals, has knowledge about the health and welfare of farm

animals;

b) Economic outcomes:

- understands the preconditions for the production and sale of high-quality and economically advantageous products, observing the legislation on food and environmental safety;
- understands the interconnections of the business process, is able to analyze the business environment and make appropriate decisions, has acquired knowledge and skills in the organization and management, accounting and control of the company;
- understand the essence, meaning and types of the project in attracting financial resources. has mastered the principles of project planning, implementation and management;

c) Generic outcomes:

- is able to professionally improve, solve problems, take responsibility and initiative, perform work individually, in a team and leading the work of other people;
- knows and understands the legal regulation of business, observes the norms of legal labor relations.

Also, from the discussions with potential employers, the experts could observe better internships program on technical subjects compared with the ones related to managerial and entrepreneurial subjects, it can also be seen in the cooperation agreements signed with employers in the Annex Cooperation agreements.docx.

Although teachers mentioned a number of examples of the latest technologies being taught to students during the interviews, the content in the majority of modules lacks reflection of the latest trends in the field. The basic literature, provided for the study courses is published more than 5 years ago (Economic theory - all suggestions; Investments and finances - 4 out of 5; Recordkeeping - 3 out of 5; Business Legislation - 15 out of 16; Sociology - all, the latest - from the year 2002; Entrepreneurship -all, latest 2005; Communication Psychology, Statistics and research methodology, Marketing, Management studies, German - all suggestions) "Plant and animal biology"- the most recent literature is 15 years old. In some modules, descriptions suggested literature is more than 20 years old. These facts make the relevance of the content unreliable. In a meeting with the industry representatives, they said that in general they are happy with the quality of graduates and their entrepreneurial skills, but at the same time pointed out that new teachers are needed, expecting that new knowledge will come with them. This might be a signal for the program director - content has to be contemporary. Also, the program director should review whether the current program is focused on the requirements that describe the profession and take necessary measures to adapt it. ([https://registri.visc.gov.lv/profizglitiba/dokumenti/nozkval/NKS\\_lauksaimnieciba.pdf](https://registri.visc.gov.lv/profizglitiba/dokumenti/nozkval/NKS_lauksaimnieciba.pdf)).

The skills for the course "Processing of electronics data" are too general, not adequate for this level of studies. The "Sociology" course is not focused on the rural community specificities, but only on general sociology. In the "Agricultural machinery" course and "Stock farming production of its output" course, there is content that is duplicated "mechanization of animal husbandry processes" and "Livestock mechanization".

There is no full correspondence between the plan of the study program and the description of the study course - possibly because of the translation - e.g. "Processing of electronics data" vs. "Electronic data processing"; "Crop production, production of its products" vs. "Plant growing, production of its output", "Plant and animal biology" vs. "Biology of plants and animals", "Agricultural project management" vs. "Management of agricultural projects", "Stock farming production of its output" vs. "Livestock breeding, production of its products".

The modules dedicated to practical training are challenging, complex and detailed and assumed by different lectures of studies. For instance "Practice agriculture" module is assumed by 3 different

lectures of studies, the ones related to crop production, livestock breeding and agricultural machinery, while “Entrepreneurship” is assumed by 3 different lectures of studies “Entrepreneurship” and “Marketing” (Annex Course descriptions J.docx).

The traineeships are well organized and appreciated by all involved parties, as was observed during discussions with graduates and employers. The quality of the final comply with the provisions of the “Procedures for ensuring the academic integrity of the Study department of Malnava College”, approved by decision of the College Council of 22.11.2017 (SAR page 25). The final qualifications thesis is generally developed and defended at a good level, but they decreased over the last 6 years (SAR page 75).

A variety of teaching and learning methods (problem-solving, role play, review, discussion, essay, questions, task solving, situation analysis, presentations, independent work with literature, etc.) used by the program lecturers is enough to contribute to the achievement of learning outcomes. In a meeting with students, the introduction of discussions as a study method was mentioned as highly appreciated. And that can be taken as proof that the student-centered approach is taken into account at Malnava College. Doubtful is the choice of some assessment methods, especially in those cases when the achievement of certain competence or skills are assessed by tests (Statistics and research methodology; Recordkeeping etc). In meetings with the graduates and students, it was confirmed that the test is the most common method of assessment. Graduates would have been grateful for more practical experience that cannot be assessed by the test.

Although results of the student surveys, in general, show a positive trend in satisfaction with the study program (SAR), the highest satisfaction - 5 with the content of the study program on a scale from 1 to 5 has changed from 70% in 2018/2019 to 54% in 2020/21. This decrease might be related to the pandemia situation, as the College takes necessary measures to react to the request of students and graduates, for example, a continuing education program for adults created; possibility to receive tractor driving license. Surveys of employers are conducted as a collection of traineeship supervisors' feedback. Meeting with employers confirmed that they are quite happy with the reaction of the College to their suggestions, for example, selling skills were introduced to the entrepreneurial part of the program.

In order to promote the incoming and outgoing mobilities of students, the “2021-2027 Internationalization Strategy of Malnava College” has been developed and approved. Obtained “Erasmus chapter for higher education 2021-2027” at Malnava College. Taking into account the epidemiological situation in the country due to the pandemic, Malnava College has extended the Erasmus + project No.2020-1-LV01-KA103-077413 for 8 months, within the framework of which student mobility is envisaged. The College plans the next student mobility in 2021/2022. study year. The procedure for the recognition of courses acquired during outgoing mobility is determined by the "Regulations on studies and internships abroad of Malnava College students and lecturers/employees and the academic recognition of their results", approved by the College Council Decision of 19.06.2020. During the reporting period, there was no recognition of courses acquired during outgoing mobility (SAR, page. 77).

## **Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses**

Conclusion:

The procedures of creating, updating, disseminating and applying the study courses contents are created by Malnava College and are complex and involve a large number of significant internal and external stakeholders. The content of study courses provides both theoretical knowledge and

competencies and professional (practical) skills required to work and run an agribusiness, but there are some issues to be reconsidered for the content of the modules (as are: old references, duplication of some content, too general skills assumed, limited elected modules, lack of coherence of acquiring the knowledge and abilities). During the various meetings the expert groups had with staff, students, graduates and representatives of potential employers, it was observed a relatively high level of satisfaction on the skills, competencies and knowledge (both theoretical and practical) that the study program offers.

1. The descriptions of the study courses/ modules, the traineeship, and the final thesis are of quality and comply with the regulations. The content is relevant and complimentary, but insufficient entrepreneurship orientated, and it complies with the objectives assumed for the study program, ensuring the achievement of the learning outcomes. The needs of the relevant industry are, also, taken into consideration, while the scientific trends are not satisfactorily pursued.
2. The variety of study implementation and evaluation methods contribute to the achievement of learning outcomes. Student-centered learning and teaching principles are taken into account but graduates would have been grateful for more practical experience that cannot be assessed by a test.
3. Surveys among the students, employers and graduates are conducted, and positively appreciated. The employers appreciated that their opinions were taken into consideration to improve the quality of studies.
4. The procedure for mobility was created, but there was no recognition of courses acquired during outgoing mobility.

#### Strengths:

1. The study program is created according to the expectation of the local stakeholders, focusing on farm activity and farm efficiency.
2. The content of each study course is included in the study course description, offering the possibility to easily evaluate its content, its aim, its requirements, evaluation, and required work.
3. The modules dedicated to practical training are challenging, complex and detailed and are assumed by different lecturers of studies.

#### Weaknesses:

1. The share of the managerial and entrepreneurial courses in the study program aims is low and the trend seems them to be even more reduced in practice.
2. The number of full-time matriculated students in the reporting period from 2014 to 2020 has been varying, while the number of part-time students is facing a decreasing trend.
3. The number of elective courses is very limited.
4. Some of the economic, management, and business-related courses are concentrated in the last semester of studies. That does not allow the logical coherence of the acquired knowledge, for instance, students may need the knowledge from Management and/or Investments and finances for the course of Agricultural project management.
5. Practice (traineeship) in the enterprise starts in the 2nd semester of the 1st year, while both the Enterprise course and Marketing course (these 2 courses being the theoretical courses that focus on the practical enterprises' activity) start only in the 1st semester of the 2nd year, so it is not a logical order of courses.
6. The literature used for some study courses is rather old and not updated.
7. There is no full correspondence between the plan of the study program and the descriptions of the study courses - possibly because of the translation.
8. The skills for the course "Processing of electronics data" are too general, not adequate for this level of studies.
9. Sociology course is not focused on the rural community specificities, but only on general

sociology.

10. In the “Agricultural machinery” course and “Stock farming production of its output” course there is content that is duplicated “mechanization of animal husbandry processes” and “Livestock mechanization”.

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

#### **Analysis**

The material and technical support required for the studies, with some items to be improved is sufficient. As per SAR and how it was seen by experts during the visit, the physical environment of studies consists of auditoriums, laboratories and a library with the necessary equipment for mastering study courses. Classrooms are equipped with technical teaching aids. Each auditorium has projectors, various interactive whiteboards, audio equipment, tablets. Lecturers are provided with laptops. Printers, copiers, scanners are available for students and teachers. An extensive list of available equipment and technical units can be found in section 3.2 of the self-assessment report.

During the visit, the experts found that renewable and more modern teaching aids would be desirable in the crop production training room. Extremely outdated equipment and teaching literature were observed in the training room connected with livestock subjects, mannequins and visual aids are outdated, damaged in many places and insufficient to cover the entire livestock sector. The college does not have simulation equipment, specialized livestock equipment, or virtual mannequins. There is good material and technical equipment in agriculture, especially in mechanization subjects.

The self-assessment report does not indicate the scientific equipment that would be used in any research work, nor did the experts see the equipment that could be used during the on-site visit. The college does not have a sufficient base of research equipment. Its lack does not hinder the provision of studies, however, from the point of view of raising the knowledge of teachers, it is a considerable fact, as well as does not promote the attraction of new, erudite staff. It must be concluded that the college does not provide practical support for scientific activities.

As indicated in point 3.3 of the self-assessment report and during the on-site visit, the experts observed, that the information provision required for training is sufficient. The college uses an e-learning environment, which is regularly updated. Although its development is still in its infancy, its potential is visible and new materials are regularly added by teachers.

During the visit, the experts were introduced to the auditorium equipment and books available in the library. Unfortunately, the specialized literature in the library mostly is outdated, the latest books are available in small numbers and the literature in foreign languages is little available. Most of the books needed for training were more than 5 years old, and a number were even 10-15 years and more years old. It must be taken into account that the development of technology is continuous and the need for the latest literature is vital for quality training of young professionals. In animal husbandry, the largest deficit of new books was observed. However, teachers can obtain the latest literature through interlibrary loans. The college currently actively uses only two databases (LURSOFT and EBSCO). The library is connected to the electronic catalog system ALISE, unfortunately, it is not possible to get acquainted with the books available in the library on the Internet.

As stated in section 3.1 of the SAR, the material and technical provision for the study field is provided from the State budget and within the framework of EU fund projects, but some funding

comes from tuition fees and rent of land and premises. The financial provision is not sufficient for the large-scale renewal of the material and technical base, however, if carefully planned, it is sufficient to ensure the study process. In the long run, the college's interior, livestock and crop laboratories would need to be renovated. During the interviews, the college administration informed the experts. Significant funding of € 5.6 million from the Ministry of Agriculture's budget planned to add in 2022 the college budget for the refurbishment of college materials and the strengthening of the college at a national level. After getting acquainted with the planned investment directions, it becomes clear that many shortcomings will be eliminated in a significantly short time.

After reading the SAR section 3 and making sure that the information is correct during the on-site visit experts conclude that the study provision is generally in line with the college level - the requirements for the implementation of the 1st level higher education program.

As per SAR p. 5.1 and interviews cooperation with other scientific institutions and universities is being implemented. The College has active cooperation with Riga Technical College, Rezekne Academy of Technology and Latvia University of Life Sciences and Technologies, Daugavpils University, in total with 4 higher education institutions in Latvia. However, although the college indicates that it cooperates with foreign universities that implement similar fields of study and study programs, no guest lectures have taken place.

Theoretical cooperation without practical activities in program alignment, creation of facilitated conditions for the admission of cooperation partners, exchange of experience in the implementation of programs, and without taking over other experience, will result in much more difficult and slower development, with increasing competition for each student. It should be taken into account that college is affected not only by the development of technology or state funding but also by the ever-decreasing number of students willing to study due to demographic factors.

Within the study direction, the College cooperates with industry associations, companies and employers. The main directions of cooperation: provision of traineeships, review of qualification papers, participation in the work of the state final examination commission, assessment of students' knowledge, skills and abilities, involvement of labor market representatives in improving the study process, guest lectures, excursions. However, updating study course content according to labor market needs occurs infrequently and incompletely (the last update of the study program was in 2018).

During the interviews, experts asked questions about teaching staff mobility. Teacher mobility does not take place, which currently does not pose a threat to the implementation of the program. However, it should be noted that teachers are at the heart of the program and that continuous professional development and quality research-based education ensure timely and sufficient renewal of the program based on the latest developments in the field. If the lecturers do not participate in the research, then the quality of the study program will decrease over time.

As per SAR p. 5.1 The College has a total of 19 cooperation agreements with industry, incl. with the Rezekne SEZ Authority, which unites 20 employers, the Association of Agricultural Machinery Manufacturers and Traders, which unites 29 employers, as well as with a number of local companies where students have internships and whose managers are involved in the training process as practice supervisors or examinations members of the commission. As per interviews the College has a database of internship companies but has not included into it information about the students' evaluation of the internship company, and the College comments about the most important material and technical resources available in the company, which students can get acquainted with during

the face-to-face visit. Cooperation with industry, governmental and non-governmental organizations is sufficient to provide teachers with information on the latest trends, but it is certainly necessary to expand in the context of practical training. In the interviews, students point out that in their opinion there is insufficient practical training on-site at the college, as well as that guest lecturers could be invited more often.

## **Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses**

Conclusions:

Sufficient material and technical base are provided for the implementation of the study program, but in some aspects modernization and improvements are required. The college is developing an e-environment to improve the teaching process, which experts consider reasonable. However, cooperation with industry and other scientific institutions can be improved.

Strengths:

1. The College uses the e-learning environment and is constantly improving it.
2. The College has strong agricultural material and technical base.
3. With the help of funding from the Ministry of Agriculture, it is planned to significantly renew the college's teaching and technical base.

Weaknesses:

1. Specialist guest lectures are organized too rarely.
2. The college does not have a sufficient base of research equipment.
3. Insufficient resources available for material and technical base renewal from state funding.
4. Livestock laboratory - its equipment is morally and physically outdated.
5. The literature available in the library on several professional subjects is outdated and little is available in foreign languages.
6. The internship company database does not contain information on the assessment of the internship company by students and the College comments about the most important material and technical resources available in the company, which students can get acquainted with during the face-to-face visit.

## **4. Teaching Staff**

### **Analysis**

Malnava College takes some measures to avoid negative effects on the quality of the implementation of the study program as a result of the changes in the composition of the teaching staff, respecting the requirements. As it is stated in the self-analysis the qualification of the teaching staff involved in the study program has improved (previous accreditation period - the academic year 2012/2013 - compared with the current situation. The number of lecturers has not increased, but the number of lecturers with a master's degree has increased - now all the lecturers have a master's degree, one, although being a guest lecturer, has a doctor's degree. The teaching staff has become younger, the average age is 48 years (SAR, page 78). No one of the teaching staff is working only for the evaluated study program (i.e. 920 hours per academic year), 4 of them being guest lecturers and the rest working at Malnava College for other study programs, too (SAR, page 81). The maximum workload is 0.93 (for one lecturer), the other two lecturers have a workload of 0.35-0.45, four lecturers have a workload between 0.2 and 0.25 and four lecturers have a workload situated between 0.10 and 0.19. Regarding the assistants, for one assistant the workload is from 0.26 to 0.3, and for the other one is from 0.1 to 0.19. The workload for all guest lecturers is from 0.01 to 0.19

(SAR, page 81). There were 6 courses published by 4 lecturers and used on the Moodle system (Annex Publications.docx). Staff published 18 articles nationally and internationally, some of them in an impressive number compared with the total number of articles (8 articles, respectively 7 articles). That represents only a very limited number of staff that published articles on the evaluated period, while most of them made no proof they had published (Annex "Publications.docx"). Also, it has to be mentioned, that 8 of the academic staff members do not have any publications and/or practical work experience mentioned in their CVs (Annex "CV.docx").

The qualification of the teaching staff members involved in the implementation of the study program generally complies with the requirements for the implementation of the study program (Annex "CV.docx" and Annex "Course descriptions J.docx" ). For example, the lecturer who teaches "Business in agriculture" holds 5th level of the Latvian qualification (LQF) in "Business specialist in agriculture", the lecturer who teaches "Economics, financial mathematics, statistics" holds Master's degree of Social Sciences in Management Science. There are some other cases where the correlation between the qualification of the staff and the course they are teaching is not so clear: for instance the lecturer that is teaching "Agrarian policy", is an agronomist (graduated in 1980), who specialized, after that, in pedagogy, not proving of having published articles and/or research activity in the filed of agricultural policy.

Also, the qualification of the teaching staff members involved in the implementation of the study program complies with the requirements set forth in the regulatory enactments. They are able to achieve the aims and learning outcomes of the study program and the relevant study courses (Annex "CV.docx"). Teachers for 10 study courses have been changed (SAR page 78) because of the measures the College undertakes to increase the number of more qualified lecturers and ensure their connection to the real situation in the agricultural sector. There is a good connection between staff and local stakeholders in terms of curricula development, traineeship and visits. Malnava College assumes the fact that the greatest value of the College is the staff, who are united by common values and close ties with the agricultural industry, pedagogical talent and ability to work in a team, so the College constantly encourages teachers to improve both professional and pedagogical qualifications, by supporting lecturers to participate in seminars, congresses, courses etc. corresponding to their competencies. The college organized professional development courses and in-service training courses in the fields of pedagogy, psychology, IT technologies, for example: "Psychological aspects of modern pedagogy. Conflict management ", " Psychological Aspects of modern pedagogy. Stress Management ", " Motivating Young People to Start a Business ", " Emotional Intelligence in Education ", " Creative Approach to Business and Education ", " Implementing a Competence Approach through Digital Skills ", " Change and Challenges: Teaching English and 21st Century Skills ", "Digital communication with the state: e-solutions useful in life situations", etc.(SAR, page 47).

There are a number of 17 lecturers that are teaching at the study program "Business in Agriculture". Out of the total 17 (SAR, page 79):

17 lecturers teach at the study program "Agricultural Entrepreneurship":

- 11 are elected lecturers and 2 assistants, whose main place of work is Malnava College;
- 4 are guest lecturers;
- 1 guest lecturer has a doctoral degree in economics in the sub-branch of the regional economy;
- 1 lecturer is studying at the Faculty of Agriculture of the LLU in the doctoral study program "Agriculture";
- all lecturers have at least a master's degree;
- 8 lecturers have professional experience corresponding to the study course.
- most lecturers are specialized in a study course, no one teaches more than 3 study courses that are related.

There is a mechanism for mutual collaboration between the teaching staff members in place, which contributes to the improvement of the study courses and their correlation (SAR, page 68-69), as stated in "Regulations on the development, implementation and improvement of study programs" (SAR, page 32). The Department of Studies is responsible for changing the content of the study program and/or the content of study courses, while the changes are made in prior consultation with lecturers and students in study programs. During the reporting period, Malnava College has not developed new study programs but has reviewed and updated the existing study program "Business in Agriculture" (decision of the College Council on 12.09.2018). Changes have been made within the study courses - the study course "Agricultural Machinery" and "Agricultural Project Management").

The involvement of the academic staff in scientific research is very low. Just three out of 17 lecturers published their scientific articles (summing a total of 18 articles). All three of them are guest lecturers. During the meeting with the lecturers, it was pointed out that research requires special funds and special knowledge that isn't present, but the knowledge some of them brought back to the College from the conferences or scientific self-study is integrated into the study process. Only one lecturer of the field is involved in the scientific committees of international scientific conferences and collections of articles, also as a reviewer.

The staff is involved in mobilities, research, and publications but at a low level. For instance, only one staff member was involved in ERASMUS mobilities (a total of 6 mobilities, in 5 different countries: Lithuania, Hungary, Spain, Bulgaria, Slovakia), but the duration of mobilities was just a few days. (Annex Lecturer mobility.docx). From discussions with staff members, it was mentioned that the English language is one of the main barriers. Malnava College assures the improvement of professional qualification - each year at least once in-service training opportunity is provided (training, seminar, traineeship, traineeship, etc.); every semester at least one activity is organized within the framework of professional study courses with the involvement of industry professionals: guest lecture, seminar, creative workshop, study tour, etc.; discussions on various topics are organized to broaden horizons and exchange informal experiences (SAR, page 79). The College has developed a procedure for attracting teaching staff. The process of selection and admission of lecturers at Malnava College is determined by "Regulations on Academic and Administrative Positions of Malnava College".

The lecturers at the same time are teaching in secondary vocational high school and they allocate limited time for research activities. Because of that, their workload in the college consists only of their daily teaching work and does not involve research time.

## **Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses**

Conclusions:

The teaching staff has an appropriate academic background and practical experience. There is a good connection between staff and local stakeholders in terms of curricula development, traineeship and visits, but research and international experiences (institutional development, research, mobilities, etc.) of the staff are limited.

1 Malnava College takes some measures to avoid negative effects on the quality of the implementation of the study program as a result of the changes in the composition of the teaching staff, respecting the requirements,

2. The qualification of the teaching staff members involved in the implementation of the study program complies with the requirements for the implementation of the study program and with the requirements set forth in the regulatory enactments. They are able to achieve the aims and learning outcomes of the study program and the relevant study course.

3. Not applicable

4. Only a limited number of the academic staff is involved in scientific research in the fields related

to the content of the study program both at the national and international levels. The obtained information is used in the study process.

5. There is a mechanism for mutual collaboration between the teaching staff members in place, which contributes to the improvement of the study courses and their correlation.

#### Strengths

1. The qualification of the teaching staff involved in the study program has improved compared with the previous accreditation period: the average age is 48 years and the teachers for 10 study courses have been changed.

2. All lecturers hold at least a master's degree.

3. From CVs and expert group meetings with the teaching staff, it is obvious that they are not only academically educated in the fields corresponding to the study courses, but also have professional experience in the field.

4. There are links with international universities for ERASMUS mobilities from Lithuania, Hungary, Spain, Bulgaria, Slovakia.

5. Staff published 18 articles nationally and internationally.

6. There were 6 courses published by 4 lecturers and used on the Moodle system.

7. Lecturers are specialized in a module or maximum 3 modules which are related.

#### Weaknesses:

1. Only one staff member was in outgoing ERASMUS mobility during the evaluated period. The duration of mobilities was short.

2. Only a very limited number of staff published articles on the evaluated period.

3. Use of the English language is a major challenge for most of the staff.

4. Only one lecturer of the field is involved as a member of the scientific committees of international scientific conferences and collections of articles and/or as a reviewer.

## 5. Assessment of the Compliance of the Study Programme "Agricultural Entrepreneurship"

### Requirements

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Partially compliant

The diploma sample provided in SAR partially complies with the procedure and regulations by which Latvia's state-recognized documents of higher education are issued (Cabinet Regulations No 202). The additional information about the educational system in Latvia (the internet links) is different in the currently valid Cabinet Regulations, as well as the 1st page with Latvia's Coat of Arms is missing from the diploma sample.

2. Documents confirming that the higher education institution/ college will provide the students with the options to continue the acquisition of education in another study programme or at another higher education institution/ college (a contract with another accredited higher education institution/ college), in case the implementation of the study programme is discontinued.

**Assessment of compliance:** Partially compliant

There is a signed agreement with the Latvia University of Life Sciences and Technologies provided in SAR, Annex "Continue studies, contract", hence this criterion is technically met. However, it is written in a way that offers a continuation of studies only for graduates of the program in question as well as the agreement is signed with a program which is in a different

level of studies - professional bachelor. The situation is understandable because this study program is unique in Latvia, however, the experts would urge the college to try to find other collaboration options or expand the terms in the current one to fully comply with this criteria.

- 3 3. Document confirming that the higher education institution/ college guarantees to the students a compensation for losses if the study programme is not accredited or the licence of the study programme is revoked due to the actions of the higher education institution/ college (actions or failure to act) and the student does not wish to continue the studies in another study programme.

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

Full compliance can be found in the document Nr. 1.11/53 signed by the director of the college. (SAR, Annex "Apliecinājums par zaudējumu kompensāciju.pdf")

- 4 4. 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's official language knowledge fully complies with the Cabinet of Ministers Regulation No. 733 of 7 July 2009 "Regulations Regarding the Extent of the Knowledge of the Official Language, the Procedures for Examining the Proficiency in the Official Language and the State Fee for Examining the Proficiency in the Official Language" (document Nr. 1.11/52 signed by the director of the college). (SAR, Annex "Apliecinājums par valodas zināšanām.pdf")

- 5 5. 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.

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

- 6 6. 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.

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

- 7 7. 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 Institutions of Higher Education.

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

Full compliance with Cabinet regulations No 70 "Mandatory Provisions to be Included in the Study Agreement" can be found in the SAR, Annex "Studiju līgumi".

- 9 9. 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 56.1, Paragraph two and Section 56.2, Paragraph two of the Law on Institutions of Higher Education.

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

Study course descriptions are technically fully compliant with the Law on Institutions of Higher Education Section 561, Paragraph two. They have been prepared in Latvian. The study course descriptions include the necessary information for both implementation possibilities: full time and part time extramural studies. There are some improvements to be seen in regards to the study course order, literature sources etc., which do not influence the evaluation of this particular criteria. Please see recommendations for the study programme for more information.

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

The study program operates according to the professional standard "Agricultural business specialist", approved by the Ministry of Education and Science June 3, 2003, Order No. 262. The program is compliant with this standard, hence the criteria are technically compliant. However, it is pointed out by the college and the experts that this professional standard is very old and needs to be renewed. Some steps have been taken in the direction of forming a new professional standard and currently, the plan is to finish development in the year 2023. Council of Sector Experts has given their approval to continue to accept students in the program until the year 2023.

(SAR, Annex "Compliance with a professional standard"). In 2023, it is planned to develop new occupational standards at the state level for the professions corresponding to the 4th vocational qualification level or the 5th level of the Latvian qualification framework marked in the structure map of the agricultural sector (SAR, page 68)

- 11 11. 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 Institutions of Higher Education.

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

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

**Assessment of compliance:** Fully compliant

Fully complies with the State Professional Higher Education Standard (Cabinet Regulations No 141) (SAR, Annex "Atbilstība izgl.satandartam", Annex "Studiju kursu kartējums")

- 13 13. The joint study programmes comply with the requirements prescribed in Section 551, Paragraphs one, two, and seven of the Law on Institutions of Higher Education (if applicable).

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

- 14 14. Each member of the academic staff has either publications published in reviewed editions within the last six years, including international editions (if they have worked for a shorter period of time, the number of publications shall be in proportion to the work period), or artistic creation achievements (for instance, exhibitions, films, theatre performances, and concert activity), or a five-year practical work experience (except for the experience in the implementation of the study programme) in accordance with the Law on Institutions of Higher Education.

**Assessment of compliance:** Partially compliant

Partial compliance can be seen in the documents provided to the experts in the SAR Annex "Lecturers". Almost half (8) of the academic staff members do not have any publications and/or practical work experience listed in the aforementioned document and their CV's provided as an Annex to the SAR. The qualification of the teaching staff members involved in the implementation of the study program generally complies with the requirements for the implementation of the study program (Annex "CV.docx" and Annex "Course descriptions J.docx"). For example, the lecturer who teaches "Business in agriculture" holds 5th level of the Latvian qualification (LQF) in "Business specialist in agriculture", the lecturer who teaches "Economics, financial mathematics, statistics" holds Master's degree of Social Sciences in Management Science. There are some other cases where the correlation between the qualification of the staff and the course they are teaching is not so clear: for instance, the lecturer that is teaching "Agrarian policy", is an agronomist (graduated in 1980), who specialized, after that, in pedagogy, not proving of having published articles and/or research activity in the field of agricultural policy

## 15 R5 - Overall rating

**Assessment of compliance:** Partially compliant

The study program mostly, but in a few aspects partially complies with the legal requirements outlined in the Law on Institutions of Higher Education and other regulatory enactments. See more recommendations regarding this study program.

**Requirements (R6-R8)**

- 1 R6 - The compliance of the study provision, scientific support (if applicable), informative provision (including libraries), material and technical provision, and financial provision with the conditions for the implementation of the study programme and ensuring the achievement of the learning outcomes.

**Assessment of compliance:** Partially compliant

Sufficient material and technical base are provided for the implementation of the study program, but in some aspects modernization and improvements are required. (See Analysis in 3. Resources and Provision of the Study Direction and SAR p.3 ) There is no scientific support. (SAR p.4) Cooperation with industry and other scientific institutions can be improved (Interviews with former and current students as well as company representatives).

- 2 R7 - The compliance of the qualification of the academic staff members, visiting professors, visiting associate professors, visiting docents, visiting lecturers, and visiting assistants with the conditions for the implementation of the study programme and the provisions set out in the respective regulatory enactments.

**Assessment of compliance:** Partially compliant

Almost half (8) of the academic staff members do not have any publications and/or practical work experience listed in the aforementioned document and their CV's provided as an Annex of the SAR.

The qualification of the teaching staff members involved in the implementation of the study program generally complies with the requirements for the implementation of the study program (Annex "CV.docx" and Annex "Course descriptions J.docx"). For example, the lecturer who teaches "Business in agriculture" holds 5th level of the Latvian qualification (LQF) in "Business specialist in agriculture", the lecturer who teaches "Economics, financial mathematics, statistics" holds Master's degree of Social Sciences in Management Science. There are some

other cases where the correlation between the qualification of the staff and the course they are teaching is not so clear: for instance, the lecturer that is teaching "Agrarian policy", is an agronomist (graduated in 1980), who specialized, after that, in pedagogy, not proving of having published articles and/or research activity in the field of agricultural policy

- 3 R8 - The study programme leading to the master or doctoral degree is based on the advances and findings in the relevant field of science or artistic creation.

**Assessment of compliance:** Not relevant

## Conclusions by specifying the strengths and weaknesses

### Conclusions

1. The study program operates in accordance with the professional standard "Agricultural Business Specialist", which was approved by the Ministry of Education and Science Order No. 262 of June 3, 2003. The program complies with this standard, so the criteria are technically appropriate. However, the college and experts point out that this professional standard is very outdated and needs to be renewed. The College has analyzed the existing professional standard and developed a new standard with the help of involved internal and external experts. However, in the current two working groups (at the end of 2021) with the involvement of Agriculture Expert Council sector experts and a representative of the Business Sector Expert Council, it has been concluded that the standard should be completely revised. The field of study and this unique program should be maintained until the development of the new standard to be completed as planned at the end of 2023. Based on the new standard, it is planned to develop a new program taking over the best of the existing program, thus ensuring the continuity of college-level study opportunities in the region. As the Council of Sector Experts has previously included the profession in the Sector Professions Map and has agreed to continue enrolling students in the program until 2023, no special action is required at present. Given the uniqueness of the program, it is imperative for school professionals to be involved in the development of the new standard and to facilitate the development process as soon as possible.

2. The procedures of creating, updating, disseminating and applying the study courses content are created by Malnava College and are complex and involve a large number of significant internal and external stakeholders. The content of study courses provides both theoretical knowledge and competencies and professional (practical) skills required to work and run an agribusiness, but there are some issues to be reconsidered for the content of the modules (as are: old references, duplication of some content, too general skills assumed, limited elected modules, lack of coherence of acquiring the knowledge and abilities). During the various meetings the expert groups had with staff, students, graduates and representatives of potential employers, it was observed a relatively high level of satisfaction on the skills, competencies and knowledge (both theoretical and practical) that the study program offers.

3. The study program is implemented with sufficient material and technical support, although some areas of the curriculum will require modernization and enhancement. Experts believe that the college's development of an e-environment to improve the teaching process is reasonable. Cooperation with industry and other scientific organizations, on the other hand, can be improved.

4. The teaching staff has an appropriate academic background and practical experience. There is a good connection between staff and local stakeholders in terms of curricula development, traineeship and visits, but research and international experiences (institutional development, research, mobilities, etc.) of the staff are limited.

Strengths:

1. The aim, objectives, and learning outcomes are interrelated and well defined.
2. High demand for state-funded places - two applicants for one place in full-time studies.
3. The study program is created according to the expectation of the local stakeholders, focusing on farm activity and farm efficiency.
4. The content of each study course is included in the study course description, offering the possibility to easily evaluate its content, its aim, its requirements, evaluation, and required work.
5. The modules dedicated to practical training are challenging, complex and detailed and are assumed by different lecturers of studies.
6. The College uses the e-learning environment and is constantly improving it
7. The College has strong agricultural material and technical base
8. With the help of funding from the Ministry of Agriculture, it is planned to significantly renew the college's teaching and technical base.
9. The qualification of the teaching staff involved in the study program has improved compared with the previous accreditation period: the average age is 48 years and the teachers for 10 study courses have been changed.
10. All lecturers hold at least a master's degree.
11. From CVs and expert group meetings with the teaching staff, it is obvious that they are not only academically educated in the fields corresponding to the study courses, but also have professional experience in the field.
12. There are links with international universities for ERASMUS mobilities from Lithuania, Hungary, Spain, Bulgaria, Slovakia.
13. Staff published 18 articles nationally and internationally.
14. There were 6 courses published by 4 lecturers and used on the Moodle system.
15. Lecturers are specialized in a module or maximum 3 modules which are related.

Weaknesses:

1. Almost half of the academic staff members do not have any publications and/or practical work experience listed in the documents provided as Annexes to the SAR.
2. The signed agreement with the Latvia University of Life Sciences and Technologies provided in SAR, Annex "Continue studies, contract" does not meet the criteria about ensuring students a place for the studies if accreditation is not granted.
3. The diploma sample provided in SAR does not fully comply with the procedure and regulations by which Latvia's state-recognized documents of higher education are issued (Cabinet Regulations No 202).
4. The professional standard is outdated and doesn't correspond to current trends of the agricultural sector.
5. Decreasing number of part-time students.
6. The share of the managerial and entrepreneurial courses in the study program aims is low and the trend seems them to be even more reduced in practice.
7. The number of full-time matriculated students in the reporting period from 2014 to 2020 has been varying, while the number of part-time students is facing a decreasing trend.
8. The number of elective courses is very limited.
9. Some of the economic, management and business-related courses are concentrated in the last semester of studies. That does not allow the logical coherence of the acquired knowledge, for instance, students may need the knowledge from Management and/or Investments and finances for the course of Agricultural project management.
10. Practice (traineeship) in the enterprise starts in the 2nd semester of the 1st year, while both the Enterprise course and Marketing course (these 2 courses being the theoretical courses that focus on the practical enterprises' activity) start only in the 1st semester of the 2nd year, so it is not a logical order of courses.

11. The literature used for some study courses is rather old and not updated.
12. There is no full correspondence between the plan of the study program and the descriptions of the study courses - possibly because of the translation.
13. The skills for the course "Processing of electronics data" are too general, not adequate for this level of studies.
14. Sociology course is not focused on the rural community specificities, but only on general sociology.
15. In the "Agricultural machinery" course and "Stock farming production of its output" course there is content that is duplicated "mechanization of animal husbandry processes" and "Livestock mechanization".
16. Specialist guest lectures are organized too rarely.
17. The college does not have a sufficient base of research equipment.
18. Insufficient resources available for material and technical base renewal from state funding.
19. Livestock laboratory - its equipment is morally and physically outdated.
20. The literature available in the library on several professional subjects is outdated and little is available in foreign languages.
21. The internship company database does not contain information on the assessment of the internship company by students and the College comments about the most important material and technical resources available in the company, which students can get acquainted with during the face-to-face visit.
22. Only one staff member was in outgoing ERASMUS mobility during the evaluated period. The duration of mobilities was short (just a few days).
23. Only a very limited number of staff published articles on the evaluated period.
34. Use of the English language is a major challenge for most of the staff.
35. Only one lecturer of the field is involved as a member of the scientific committees of international scientific conferences and collections of articles and/or as a reviewer.

### **Evaluation of the study programme "Agricultural Entrepreneurship"**

Evaluation of the study programme:

Average

### **6. Recommendations for the Study Programme "Agricultural Entrepreneurship"**

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

- |  |
|--|
| 1. Within two years, the College should be actively involved in the development of the new professional standard so that it could be updated according to the trends of the agricultural sector.   |
| 2. Until the hearing of the Study Quality Committee, add publications and/or practical work experience to the CVs of academic staff members if some were missing at the moment of SAR preparation. If there is nothing to add, disregard this recommendation and see a long-term recommendation regarding the increase of academic staff's publications.               |
| 3. Until the hearing of the Study Quality Committee, review the diploma sample with the procedure and regulations by which Latvia's state-recognized documents of higher education are issued (Cabinet Regulations No 202) and make necessary amendments.  |
| 4. Until the next admission, either review the agreement with the Latvia University of Life Sciences and Technologies by adding more specific criteria on which credits are going to be transferred or sign a completely new agreement with a different program (and/or university/college) that suits to the one Malnava College is implementing in this study field. |

5. Until the hearing of the Study Quality Committee, review the study program so that it would focus on the requirements that are described in the profession standard and if necessary adapt the study program.

6. Until the hearing of the Study Quality Committee, update the literature used for study courses to reflect the new trends in the field.

7. Until the beginning of the next academic year, the promotion process should be improved, to assure that the number of part-time matriculated students does not continue the trend to decrease.

8. Within two years, a clear strategy for attracting part-time students should be developed. For example, by establishing closer collaboration with employers, developing study courses for professionals that are in need of life-learning opportunities, etc.

9. Within two years, after evaluating the most promising research directions, as well as attracting European funds or other sources of funding by the college or in cooperation with industry, industry organizations, purchase research equipment that will help the college specialists to carry out research activities as required for higher education institutions.

10. Until the hearing of the Study Quality Committee, there should be assured a full correspondence between the plan of the study program and the Description of the study course.

### Long-term recommendations

1. Until the next accreditation, the number of publications by the academic staff members should be increased so that all of the members involved in teaching activities would have at least 1 publication (local and/or international).

2. Until the next accreditation, at least 1 in 5 staff from the evaluated study field should be included into international scientific committees of international scientific conferences and collections of articles and/or reviewers

3. Until the next accreditation, reconsider the logical coherence of the acquired knowledge (for instance students may need the knowledge from Management and/or Investments and finances for the course of Agricultural project management) and for the practical training (traineeship).

4. Until the next accreditation, the content of the study courses must be systematically checked to avoid the observed problems: the skills for "Processing of electronics data modules" are too general, not adequate to this level of studies; "Sociology" study course is not focused on the rural community specifics, but only on general sociology; in the "Agricultural machinery" study course and "Stock farming production of its output" study course there is content that is duplicated "mechanization of animal husbandry processes" and "Livestock mechanization".

5. Until the next accreditation, create/supplement the database of internship companies and, in addition to standard contact information, include in it information about the students' evaluation of the internship company, and the College comments about the most important material and technical resources available in the company, which students can get acquainted with during the face-to-face visit. Such information will make it easier for internship supervisors and teachers to organize internships and assess the company's interest in admitting students.

6. Until the next accreditation, organize regular guest lectures to acquaint students with potential jobs, to inform them about the technologies and the most modern production solutions used in companies.

7. Until the next accreditation, the number of elective courses should be increased.

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

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

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

Requirements	Requirement Evaluation	Comment
R1 - Pursuant to Section 5, Paragraph 21 of the Law on Institutions of Higher Education, the higher education institution/ college shall ensure continuous improvement, development, and efficient performance of the study direction whilst implementing their internal quality assurance systems:	Partially compliant	The recently approved Quality Management System in Malnava College includes the structure of the quality management system and sets guidelines for the establishment, maintenance, improvement, and evaluation of the quality management system within the study field. However, based on the analysis in the previous 6 chapters, specifically, the implementation of the guidelines set in the quality system needs some improvements (see recommendations for the study field).
R2 - The cooperation with different organisations from Latvia and abroad implemented within the study direction ensures the achievement of the aims of the study direction.	Partially compliant	The cooperation mechanisms and collaboration agreements in place are good on a national level, however, the cooperation with the organizations abroad should be developed and improved. (SAR, p.5, chapter 5 analysis of this report - study field)
R3 - Compliance of scientific research and artistic creation with the development level thereof (if applicable).	Partially compliant	The Regulations of Malnava College stipulate that one of the tasks of the College is to conduct research following the study profile and to promote students' scientific research work. The priority research directions are grouped into three main units of science branches. (SAR, p.4) However, currently research practices are almost non-existing in College and research directions have been defined only on paper.

<b>Requirements</b>	<b>Requirement Evaluation</b>		<b>Comment</b>
R4 - Elimination of the shortcomings and deficiencies identified during the previous assessment of the study direction, if it has been conducted, or the implementation of the provided recommendations.		Partially compliant	Of the 3 recommendations given by the previous experts group, 1 is fully implemented and 2 are partially implemented. Serious improvement is needed in terms of foreign language skill improvement for academic staff and student mobility as well as academic staff members mobility.

### **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	Agricultural Entrepreneurship (41621)	Partially compliant	Partially compliant	Partially compliant	Not relevant	Average

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

There are no dissenting opinions among the experts