



CENTRE FOR QUALITY ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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## EVALUATION REPORT

### STUDY FIELD of PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

at General Jonas Žemaitis Military Academy of Lithuania

#### Expert panel:

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2. Dr. Egert Juuse, *academic*;
3. Assoc. Prof. Dr. Daniel Klimovský, *academic*;
4. Prof. Dr. Benedikt Speer, *academic*;
5. Dr. Ieva Lazarevičiūtė, *representative of social partners*;
6. Mr. Rimvydas Burba, *students' representative*.

Evaluation coordinator – *Dr. Domantas Markevičius*

Report language – English

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## Study Field Data

Title of the study programme	<b><i>Defence and Public Management</i></b>
State code	6121LX001
Type of studies	University studies
Cycle of studies	First cycle
Mode of study and duration (in years)	Part-time (4,5 years)
Credit volume	210
Qualification degree and (or) professional qualification	Bachelor of Business and Public Administration
Language of instruction	Lithuanian
Minimum education required	Secondary education
Registration date of the study programme	10 May 2016

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## I. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. BACKGROUND OF THE EVALUATION PROCESS

The evaluation of study fields is based on the Methodology of External Evaluation of Study Fields approved by the Director of the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (hereafter – SKVC) 31 December 2019 Order [No.V-149](#).

The evaluation is intended to help higher education institutions to constantly improve their study process and to inform the public about the quality of studies.

The evaluation process consists of the main following stages: 1) *self-evaluation and self-evaluation report (SER) prepared by Higher Education Institution (HEI)*; 2) *site visit of the expert panel to the HEI*; 3) *production of the external evaluation report (EER) by the expert panel and its publication*; 4) *follow-up activities*.

On the basis of this external evaluation report of the study field SKVC takes a decision to accredit the study field either for 7 years or for 3 years. If the field evaluation is negative then the study field is not accredited.

The study field and cycle are **accredited for 7 years** if all evaluation areas are evaluated as exceptional (5 points), very good (4 points) or good (3 points).

The study field and cycle are **accredited for 3 years** if one of the evaluation areas is evaluated as satisfactory (2 points).

The study field and cycle are **not accredited** if at least one of evaluation areas is evaluated as unsatisfactory (1 point).

### 1.2. EXPERT PANEL

The expert panel was assigned according to the Experts Selection Procedure as approved by the Director of Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education on 31 December 2019 [Order No. V-149](#). The site visit to the HEI was conducted by the panel on 31 May, 2022.

*Dr. Christine Leitner (panel chairperson), Senior Advisor, Centre for Economics and Public Administration (London, UK), and Senior Policy Advisor, Federal Ministry for Digital and Economic Affairs, Austria;*

*Dr. Egert Juuse, Research Fellow, Ragnar Nurkse Department of Innovation and Governance, School of Business and Governance, Tallinn University of Technology, Estonia;*

*Assoc. Prof. Dr. Daniel Klimovský, Department of Political Science, Faculty of Philosophy, Comenius University in Bratislava, Slovakia;*

*Prof. Dr. Benedikt Speer, Berlin School of Economics and Law, Germany;*

*Dr. Ieva Lazarevičiūtė (social partner), independent expert, Lithuania;*

*Mr. Rimvydas Burba (student representative), graduate of Master's programme "Diplomacy and International Relations" at Vytautas Magnus University, Lithuania.*

### 1.3. GENERAL INFORMATION

The documentation submitted by the HEI follows the outline recommended by SKVC. Along with the self-evaluation report and annexes, the following additional documents have been provided by the HEI before, during and/or after the site visit:

No.	Name of the document
1.	The Code of Academic Ethics of the General Jonas Žemaitis Military Academy of Lithuania (approved in 2021)
2.	Data of “Defence and Public Management” programme students’ involvement in scientific activities in 2018-2021
3.	The list of Erasmus activities of the teaching staff of “Defence and Public Management” programme in 2019-2022
4.	The list of activities of international mobility aimed at improvement of skills or competencies of the teaching staff of the “Defence and Public Management” programme
5.	The Equality Plan of the General Jonas Žemaitis Military Academy of Lithuania (approved in 2022)
6.	The Policy of Equity of the General Jonas Žemaitis Military Academy of Lithuania (approved in 2022)
7.	The percentage of women in the General Jonas Žemaitis Military Academy of Lithuania (among students and among all staff), and percentage of women in the “Defence and Public Management” programme
8.	The description of the process of internship arrangements for part-time students at the General Jonas Žemaitis Military Academy of Lithuania (approved in 2022)
9.	The process and the forms for appeals regarding all assignments (excl. the final thesis) at the General Jonas Žemaitis Military Academy of Lithuania
10.	The process and the forms for the final thesis preparation and defence (incl. the appeals) at the General Jonas Žemaitis Military Academy of Lithuania
11.	The list of all partnership agreements with foreign educational institutions
12.	An example of Erasmus bilateral agreement
13.	An example of other type of bilateral agreement
14.	The list of all partnership agreements with social partners
15.	An example of a partnership agreement with a social partner

### 1.4. BACKGROUND OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION FIELD STUDIES AT GENERAL JONAS ŽEMAITIS MILITARY ACADEMY OF LITHUANIA

General Jonas Žemaitis Military Academy of Lithuania (hereinafter referred to as the Academy) is a state owned military educational establishment. Decisions on reorganisation and liquidation are made by the Parliament on the proposal of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania. Other rights and obligations are exercised by the Ministry of National Defence. The Academy is a public legal entity operating as a budgetary institution, and its territory is military territory. The Statutes of the Academy are adopted by the Lithuanian Government on the proposal of the Minister of National Defence. Exemptions are granted under Lithuanian law regarding its Statutes, the legal regulation of its management,

organisational structure, and organisation of work, the legal status of cadets and students, and the development and implementation of joint university-college study programmes.

The Academy offers three-cycle university study programmes relevant to the national defence system, carries out military training, develops leadership and the competences of the officers, conducts research relevant to the national security and defence as well as experimental development in order to pass on the latest scientific knowledge and innovation for the sustainable development of the national defence system (cf. SER, p. 5).

Studies are offered in the following study fields:

- first-cycle, second-cycle and third-cycle studies in Political Science;
- first-cycle and second-cycle studies in Management and first-cycle studies in Public Administration;
- first-cycle and second-cycle studies in Defense studies.

Since 2002 the Academy has been organising programmes in the Public Administration study field. The *Defence and Public Management* study programme (launched in 2016) is the only study programme which is organised by the Academy in the field of Public Administration.

Its part-time format ensures that military personnel as well as their civilian colleagues in the national defence system can pursue academic degree programmes combining work experience and formal learning. Graduates may also continue their studies in the second-cycle.

The Academy is integrated into the international military and reference research network attracting foreign lecturers with relevant expertise. Similar study programmes are offered, for example, at the University of Ljubljana, Slovenia and the Military Academy of the Netherlands.

This is the first time that the *Defence and Public Management* study programme has been evaluated by external experts.

## II. GENERAL ASSESSMENT

*Public Administration* study field and *first cycle* at General Jonas Žemaitis Military Academy of Lithuania is given **positive** evaluation.

*Study field and cycle assessment in points by evaluation areas*

No.	Evaluation Area	Evaluation of an Area in points*
1.	Intended and achieved learning outcomes and curriculum	4
2.	Links between science (art) and studies	4
3.	Student admission and support	3
4.	Teaching and learning, student performance and graduate employment	3
5.	Teaching staff	3
6.	Learning facilities and resources	3
7.	Study quality management and public information	3
	<b>Total:</b>	<b>23</b>

\*1 (unsatisfactory) - the area does not meet the minimum requirements, there are fundamental shortcomings that prevent the implementation of the field studies.

2 (satisfactory) - the area meets the minimum requirements, and there are fundamental shortcomings that need to be eliminated.

3 (good) - the area is being developed systematically, without any fundamental shortcomings.

4 (very good) - the area is evaluated very well in the national context and internationally, without any shortcomings;

5 (excellent) - the area is evaluated exceptionally well in the national context and internationally.

### III. STUDY FIELD ANALYSIS

#### 3.1. INTENDED AND ACHIEVED LEARNING OUTCOMES AND CURRICULUM

*Study aims, outcomes and content shall be assessed in accordance with the following indicators:*

##### *3.1.1. Evaluation of the conformity of the aims and outcomes of the field and cycle study programmes to the needs of the society and/or the labour market*

The SER (p. 8) states that the aim of the part-time *Defence and Public Management* study programme is to “provide education and skills acquisition for professionals in security and defence with particular emphasis on skilful and evidence-based public management in serving at the Lithuanian Armed Forces or continuing career in public sector institutions.” The programme is the only such programme in Lithuania and addresses diverse needs of modern national security forces by providing opportunities for the professionalisation of the military, offering in-depth knowledge on the emerging threats (e.g. digital, hybrid threats, etc.), and an opportunity for non-commissioned officers (hereafter - NCOs) to advance their careers. Furthermore, during the site-visit, another objective has been repeatedly indicated as relevant, namely - the opportunity for those serving in the Lithuanian Armed Forces to obtain a degree in public administration thus preparing for civilian careers after retiring from the military.

The expert panel considers the aims and outcomes of the study programme as highly relevant considering the specificities of its focus and direct linkages to the demands of the Lithuanian Armed Forces. However, the panel also was informed that the programme is only accessible to active members of the Lithuanian military. The panel recommends extending the eligibility requirements to include military members who retired after injury as a way of supporting their integration in the civilian labour force. Furthermore, considering the increasing complexity of security threats and multiple actors relevant to their solution, in the future the programme could be expanded to include other relevant actors of the defence and security sector, in addition to the Lithuanian Armed Forces.

##### *3.1.2. Evaluation of the conformity of the field and cycle study programme aims and outcomes with the mission, objectives of activities and strategy of the HEI*

The study programme provides opportunities for NCOs serving in the military to pursue a career and acquire a civilian education, i.e., it aims to provide education and skills for professionals in the area of security and defence forming part of the reintegration programme for early retired soldiers (cf. SER, pp. 7-8). The expected objectives and outcomes of the study programme are in line with the Lithuanian National Security Strategy and the National Defence System. It is the only programme (in Lithuania) which corresponds to the qualification ‘Soldier, LTKS VI’ specified in the professional standard of the Public Administration sector (cf. SER, p.7). The programme is based on the operational plan for



2021-2023 of the Ministry of National Defence (thereafter - MoD). 20 students are admitted to the first-cycle part-time *Defence and Public Management* bachelor studies each year.

Considering the above and having reviewed the curriculum contents in detail, the expert panel concludes that the programme is fully in line with the mission and strategic objectives of the Academy and supports the national defence strategy.

### 3.1.3. Evaluation of the compliance of the field and cycle study programme with legal requirements

**Table No. 1.** Study Programme's *Defence and Public Management* compliance to general requirements for *first cycle study programmes*

Criteria	Legal requirements	In the Programme
Scope of the programme in ECTS	180, 210 or 240 ECTS	210
ECTS for the study field	No less than 120 ECTS	160
ECTS for studies specified by University or optional studies	No more than 120 ECTS	35 (General University Studies) and 10 (optional courses)
ECTS for internship	No less than 15 ECTS	15
ECTS for final thesis (project)	No less than 15 ECTS	15
Contact hours	No less than 20 % of learning	22%
Individual learning	No less than 30 % of learning	78%

The first-cycle study programme *Defence and Public Management* meets the legal requirements and provisions stipulated in various legal acts of Lithuania. Learning outcomes meet the requirements set out in the Descriptor of the Study Field of Public Administration (hereafter - the Descriptor) for first-cycle study programmes. The volume of all study subjects (except for the Bachelor's thesis and internship) is the same (5 ECTS), which ensures that a student's workload is evenly distributed throughout the programme and between single courses. As per Descriptor, there is also a consistent use of social partners and representatives of other HEIs in thesis defence committees.

### 3.1.4. Evaluation of compatibility of aims, learning outcomes, teaching/learning and assessment methods of the field and cycle study programmes

The learning outcomes of the *Defence and Public Management* study programme are specified in Table 3 of the SER. Furthermore, a matrix showing the allocation of learning outcomes for each study course of the programme is presented in Annex 2. This shows that the formal mechanisms for the connection between learning outcomes and course structure are clearly in place. Given the high number of learning outcomes allocated to many courses – often seven

out of nine – it might, however, be discussed how their concrete achievement is actually assessed in detail and if a possible reduction might be more reasonable in the future. At the course level, the learning outcomes are linked with specific teaching, learning and assessment methods by the descriptions of the study subjects. These are discussed and revised twice a year/ each semester by the Study Programme Committee. During the online-site visit it was learned that this formal process is prepared as well as accompanied by a constant exchange among teachers and between teachers and the Study Programme Committee in order to adapt the courses and the course matrix to new findings. The expert panel concludes therefore that the compatibility of aims, learning outcomes and corresponding methods is ensured by the existing mechanisms.

### *3.1.5. Evaluation of the totality of the field and cycle study programme subjects/modules, which ensures consistent development of competences of students*

Study subjects are basically grouped into four categories („Management“, „Political Sciences“, „Economics and Finances“, and „Law“) in accordance with the special aims of the programme (see 1.1 of the SER, p. 7). These are complemented by the so-called „not specified“ subjects and common university subjects (the latter being mandatory and predominantly closely related to the military sphere, e.g. „Warfare History“ or „General and Military Psychology“). Special attention is given to the course projects, which subsequently build upon one another and convey, inter alia, knowledge about Social Research Methodology and Social Statistics in preparation of the bachelor thesis. The mostly mandatory course structure is complemented by four optional courses in the seventh semester and another three in the eighth semester, which allow for a certain specialisation of interests. While the offered subjects and their sequence in the course structure seem all in all reasonably balanced, it might be discussed if an increasingly important subject like “Cyber Attacks: Methods, Examples, Defense Measures” should really be an elective and not a mandatory course in a security oriented programme like this. Another point might be a more prominent role of international aspects for an institution which operates in a multinational and multidimensional NATO and EU context. Apart from these suggestions, it is concluded that the existing structures ensure the consistent development of competences of students in compliance with the aims and learning outcomes of the programme.

### *3.1.6. Evaluation of opportunities for students to personalise the structure of field study programmes according to their personal learning objectives and intended learning outcomes*

There are two main avenues for the personalisation of studies: the possibility to study according to an individual study schedule and to choose electives. In addition, there are possibilities for students to select topics and adjust them for assignments in various modules and for the final thesis. Likewise, tasks in modules have been adapted, depending on students' professional experience, and when needed, deadline extensions have been provided. That said, the volume of electives in the programme is rather limited, since only two courses / modules are offered for the entire programme (i.e. 5% of the total programme volume). Other than that, the Military Academy offers opportunities for students to personalise the structure

of their Public Administration field study programme according to students' personal learning objectives and intended learning outcomes.

### *3.1.7. Evaluation of compliance of final theses with the field and cycle requirements*

The principles of preparation, evaluation and defence of final theses are clearly determined, structured and available (see Table 5 of the SER). Subjects are regularly provided by the units of the Lithuanian Armed Forces, but it was also understood that teachers and students can propose their own topics, while it was the task of the Study Programme Committee to ensure the overall conformity with the existing requirements. The process itself is well defined and provides for a continuous guidance of the students. During the online site-visit it was explained that – due to the part-time character of the studies and the non-academic background of the active NCOs who participate – the theses are actually elaborated in a “double stage process”. This means that before the final submission all students receive intensive feedback in order to “reach the necessary quality”. This might explain the comparatively good grades of the few completed bachelor theses available until now (2 x 10 points; 3 x 9 points; 2 x 8 points; 2 x 7 points). However, the topics are compliant with the orientation and aims of the study programme and a random examination has shown that English summaries were coherent and understandable and that at least some international sources were included. On this basis the expert panel concludes that the necessary regulations and mechanisms are in place to ensure the compliance of final theses with the field and cycle requirements.

### *Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:*

#### *(1) Strengths:*

1. The Academy offers various ways and possibilities to personalise studies, even though the offering of optional courses is not very comprehensive (see Weaknesses below).
2. Highly relevant aims and outcomes of the study programme. The *Defence and Public Management* is the only study programme in the country that focuses on defence sector management and provides active military members with opportunities of transition to civilian careers.

#### *(2) Weaknesses:*

1. The high number of learning outcomes for some courses might be difficult to assess in detail.
2. International aspects (EU, NATO) could be more visible in the course structure.
3. The share/ volume of elective courses is too limited, and there is a risk that the offer does not correspond to personal preferences of students.

## **3.2. LINKS BETWEEN SCIENCE (ART) AND STUDIES**

*Links between science (art) and study activities shall be assessed in accordance with the following indicators:*

### *3.2.1. Evaluation of the sufficiency of the science (applied science, art) activities implemented by the HEI for the field of research (art) related to the field of study*

The *Defence and Public Management* study programme is linked to two fields of science, namely Management and Political Sciences, and according to the information in the SER, this is in line with the strategy of the Academy, whose research is oriented towards the national security and defence from the perspective of social sciences (SER, p. 17). A strategy-based approach is important because it helps all stakeholders involved a lot to see desired objectives. Speaking about the sufficiency of research activities for the field of study offered by the Academy, it is easier for teaching staff to define their own ways to successfully accomplish all tasks, deliver planned outputs, and achieve predefined outcomes thanks to this approach.

Formal indicators highlighted in the SER (e.g. Figures 1 and 2, Tables 7 and 8) confirm that teaching as well as research performance has been significantly improved since 2018. If one looks at the overall numbers of research publications in the field of relevant social sciences, the Academy has achieved a higher-than-average research level in comparison with other Lithuanian HEIs (cf. SER, p. 17).

The Academy introduced a structural reorganisation in 2021, and, inter alia, five research groups were created. These groups should develop and implement research projects supporting the studies at the Academy. The SER states that the research groups receive funding each year (SER, p. 23), but since the funds were only established in 2021 this continual support can only be assessed as a potentially meaningful plan.

From the perspective of applied research, it is clear that the MoD is not only the main partner of the Academy but also its main donor and beneficiary of delivered outputs. This gives the Academy a specific position among other Lithuanian HEIs which offer study programmes in the field of Public Administration. The Academy has focused on the effectiveness of various measures which have improved high-level research outputs of its teaching staff. The Academy and its teaching staff have been actively involved in international research, including higher participation in international research collaboration, and institutional as well as personal (teaching staff) integration in relevant international research associations, networks or communities, etc. The Academy has gained a significant volume of international funding for its own research. These measures have also led to a higher number of high-quality research publications of the Academy's teachers.

The Academy co-organises a few national or international practice- and research-oriented conferences, including the Baltic Military Conference, and the International scientific-practical Conference on Public Administration Changes. The Academy declares in the SER that its collaboration with various external partners is ensured especially thanks to organisation of research promotional events (p. 26). Although these events are presented as annually or biannually organised events, they were first held in 2020 or 2021, i.e. at the end of the evaluated period.

As already mentioned, the Academy enjoys a specific position among the Lithuanian HEIs which offer study programmes in the field of Public Administration. It influences not only its management and the contents of various strategic documents, but also its focus and the

funding of research activities, as well as the preferences for the development of international collaboration in both education and research. Taking all the available information into account, it can be concluded that, in recent years, the Academy has paid increased attention to the improvement of its research activities, which sufficiently support/inform the content of the offered study programme.

### *3.2.2. Evaluation of the link between the content of studies and the latest developments in science, art and technology*

The content of study subjects is developed and updated according to the latest global and Lithuanian scientific and practical trends. This is ensured in various ways, e.g. lecturers of the programme carry out relevant research in the area of security and defence and are actively practising researchers. Thereby, they have access to case analyses, databases and current practices as practical examples for the use in studies. The research topics of projects supporting the study programme reflect the public administration trends and are related to public management, risk, crisis, change and defence innovation management, security, humanitarian and international conflict, etc. One of the most relevant topics in defence and security – cybersecurity – runs through various modules as a horizontal topic. Thus, implemented research projects and the expert activity of lecturers ensure that the content of the programme is linked with international trends such as the NATO programme 'Science for Peace and Security' (NATO Strategic Concept) and the topics of the EU programme 'Horizon Europe 2021-2027' (increasing the demand for innovation in the public sector, building an innovation ecosystem, strengthening inter-sectoral and inter-institutional cooperation in managing current challenges, building a disaster-resilient society, and ensuring public safety and security). The content of the study subjects is updated on a regular basis (twice per academic year). Lecturers are encouraged to recommend the latest and most relevant scientific sources to students and to use scientific databases subscribed to by the Academy. Overall, the link of studies with both practice and theory in the Public Administration field can be noted. In addition, the content of the studies is linked with the latest developments in the Public Administration discipline and practice, in particular, with the niche topics of security and defence.

### *3.2.3. Evaluation of conditions for students to get involved in scientific (applied science, art) activities consistent with their study cycle*

There are several ways for students to get involved (directly or indirectly) in research consistent with their study programme, namely: 1) studying compulsory as well as supplementary literature; 2) completing tasks within individual subjects/courses of their study programme; 3) participation in various conferences; 4) independent engagement in certain research activities (with support from their teachers). Moreover, all final theses are somehow related to ongoing applied research, and students appreciate this approach a lot. Students are encouraged and motivated to go beyond the first and the second options. More precisely, taking the information provided in the SER into account, if students engage in certain research activities (e.g., in the preparation of research publication/s) or if they actively

participate in academic events (e.g., if they present papers at research conference/s), they may be awarded a letter of commendation from their supervisor or a nominal gift for their research activities (cf. SER, p. 28). One can consider these instruments as interesting incentive mechanisms, but students who participated in the site-visit did not have any experience with them, and they could not confirm whether these mechanisms can motivate students and positively determine their interest in active personal involvement in ongoing research. As a general feedback received from students, the final theses and the mandatory internships could be more integrated with research activities of the Military Academy. Teachers who also participated in the site-visit stressed that most of the students are not interested to be involved in research because, first of all, they primarily prepare themselves for the service in the Armed Forces. On the other hand, teachers pointed out a few cases of the desired involvement of students in some research activities, for instance, the participation of students in scientific conferences where they presented papers, as well as the transformation of some final theses into research or practice-oriented publications. In addition, an annex to the SER presents details about the involvement of students in conferences co-organised by the Academy. Taking this information into account, it seems that participation in these conferences is compulsory for undergraduates in the final year of their study. At the same time, attendance of younger undergraduates in these events is rather rare.

#### ***Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:***

##### ***(1) Strengths:***

1. The Academy has a specific position among other Lithuanian HEIs which offer study programmes in the field of Public Administration. It enjoys long-lasting support from the Lithuanian Ministry of Defence which is not only a main donor of its research but also a main beneficiary of research outputs. This can be considered a unique competitive advantage.
2. Studies are linked with global and national developments, in particular, to security and defence aspects of Public Administration, and hence, there is a reliance on up-to-date literature and practical use cases in the study process.
3. Recently, the Academy enhanced the internationalisation of research at both institutional and personal level.

##### ***(2) Weaknesses:***

1. Despite some interesting measures aiming for higher students' motivation to engage in research activities, students prefer to focus on the practical preparation for the service in the armed forces.

### **3.3. STUDENT ADMISSION AND SUPPORT**

***Student admission and support shall be evaluated according to the following indicators:***

#### ***3.3.1. Evaluation of the suitability and publicity of student selection and admission criteria and process***



The conditions for admission and procedures relevant to applicants to the *Defense and Public Management* study programme are publicly available on the Academy's website (<https://www.lka.lt/istestines-bakalauro-studijos/>) (LT). Entrants are admitted based on the Rules of Admission for Part-Time Studies (approved by the Academy) as well as the Conditions of Admission validated by the MoD. Only persons with a certain status can be admitted to studies on the basis of the competition procedure: soldiers and employees within the national defence system, volunteer military personnel, NCOs, other officials (as per agreements with MoD). They must also meet particular conditions: to have a secondary education, a competitive score of at least 4.0, the permission of the commander of the Lithuanian army to join LMA (more details are provided on the website). The admission to the programme happens on an institutional level, and potential students are ranked in downward order based on their scores. In 2021, the competitive score consisted of 4 components: 1) History (0,4); 2) Lithuanian Language and Literature (0,2); 3) Weighted score of a subject that does not overlap with other subjects; 4) Math, IT, Geography or Foreign Language.

During the analysed period, the number of applications to the *Defense and Public Management* programme has decreased noticeably (46 in 2019, 34 in 2020, 27 in 2021). Nevertheless, the number of admitted students remained stable (from 18 to 20). It has to be highlighted here that up to 20 students can be admitted to this programme every year, which is decided by the MoD.

Admission scores during the reviewed years were as follows: the average in 2019 was 6.51 (10.25 highest, 5.02 lowest); 2020 average - 4.83 (8.66 highest, 4.06 lowest); 2021 average - 5.13 (7.01 highest, 4.20 lowest).

The admission procedure is organised and executed well. Since the procedure is coordinated with national security and defence structures (primarily the MoD), it is stable and durable. However, the expert panel noted that the number of applicants has decreased recently; therefore, the expert panel advises to discuss this matter as a potential challenge for the programme's longer-term sustainability.

### *3.3.2. Evaluation of the procedure of recognition of foreign qualifications, partial studies and prior non-formal and informal learning and its application*

In the SER (p. 33), the Academy states that "as only citizens of the Republic of Lithuania may study at the Academy, the Academy has no need and has not acquired the right to perform academic recognition of qualifications acquired abroad. This is done by the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education on demand." Therefore, this aspect of the evaluation criteria is not applicable and was not assessed by the panel.

The procedure for the recognition of results of partial study periods has been detailed and is carried out in accordance with the existing guidelines (cf. Academy's process group *21 PROC Management and crediting of recognition of periods of study*). The evaluation of the partial study credits and their inclusion in the student's academic record depends on the content of such studies. If the content is assessed as aligned with the Academy requirements, such study credits are included without any limitations (e.g. when the students are studying at another

HEI on the basis of contract between two HEIs). If the content of the programmes is deemed as not aligned, they are assessed in greater detail so as to ascertain their conformity with the requirements of the study programme. Final decisions on the conformity of the credited results vis-a-vis formal requirements established for the study programme are made by the head of the Study Programme Committee.

The Academy has also established a procedure for the assessment, recognition and crediting of competences acquired through prior non-formal and informal learning, which is regulated by the Academy's process group 42 *PROC Management of the system of recognition of competences*. According to the SER, there were no cases of recognition of non-formal learning in the programme during the evaluated period.

Considering the above, the expert panel concluded that the Academy has developed adequate procedures for the assessment and recognition of prior non-formal and informal learning and partial studies. However, due to the short period of their implementation and a limited number of cases their implementation in practice was not evaluated at this time.

### *3.3.3. Evaluation of conditions for ensuring academic mobility of students*

The Academy participates in the Erasmus programme and the European Initiative for the Exchange of Military Young Officers (EMILYO). Additionally, the Academy currently has 24 partnership agreements with foreign educational institutions. For example, an Erasmus+ bilateral agreement was recently concluded with the Hellenic Army Academy (Greece), valid from 2021 to 2029. Compared to other defence universities, the Academy claims to be a leader in providing the largest number of study subjects that are intended for Erasmus exchange students (cf. SER, p. 32). Both full-time and part-time students can be selected to participate in mobility abroad and can receive Erasmus scholarships. Information related to study and internship possibilities abroad can be found on the Academy's official website (<https://www.lka.lt/erasmus/> (LT)).

Within the evaluation period, there were no students from the *Defense and Public Management* study programme that participated in any academic exchange programme (no incoming students to the programme either). According to the SER (p. 32), they were not able to do this due to specifics of their professional activity.

International study exchanges and internships are taking place at the Academy level, and students from a number of programmes apparently participate in them. Students that have enrolled to the programme in question seem to be in an uncommon situation, and, as stated, cannot engage in academic mobility (especially long-term) in foreign countries due to their profession. During the site-visit, it was clarified that limiting factors include military deployments, training and other duties. Although such circumstances are expected, various methods could be reviewed and implemented by the developers of the programme in order to potentially increase its internationality and quality. For example, the Academy's already existing international mobility initiatives and study subjects could be offered and adapted (if possible) to students of the *Defense and Public Management* programme. Students'



participation in virtual mobility (either study exchange, internship or separate courses) could be considered as it potentially could be compatible with their profession.

#### *3.3.4. Assessment of the suitability, adequacy and effectiveness of the academic, financial, social, psychological and personal support provided to the students of the field*

The Academy provides students with support (both individually and for groups) in the following spheres: 1) academic; 2) administrative and orientation; 3) psychological; 4) financial; 5) accommodation (SER, p. 33).

Academic advice is given by the lecturers during contact hours or remotely, for every student that is in need. One of the focal points of the study programme is the individual approach, which is possible due to the fact that the number of students in the programme is usually relatively small. Furthermore, students have all means of entry to the study related systems: Moodle (virtual learning environment); Edina (information about studies); manoLKA (online information system). Additionally, library resources are accessible both physically and via the website (<https://kmilc.lka.lt/>). If the students have any questions related to the study process (e.g. inability to attend lectures), the Study Department organises consultations in which its staff provides students with information and solutions to their issues. Orientation support, which is continuous during the whole study period, includes introductory meetings at the beginning of each semester. Through orientation support, students receive all the basic and necessary information about the Academy (e.g. student support, library resources, criteria of assessment, etc). In addition, students can also receive psychological support from two full-time psychologists. On top of that, there is well-functioning tutoring offered by older students (sergeants) to keep students on track.

Furthermore, financial student support is organised by the MoD (not the Academy). More precisely, first-cycle part-time studies at the Academy are fully state funded by the Lithuanian MoD. All other financial support instances are as well regulated by the MoD. It is important to add here that one of the ways of financial support is free student accommodation during the programme sessions.

Overall, students of the Academy have good conditions to receive the necessary support. The panel noted that the academic staff demonstrates flexibility and responsiveness to accommodate students' specific situations, taking into account the needs of active military personnel. This fact results in apparent contentment of students. However, there are aspects that should be discussed by the programme organisers in order to potentially improve the study quality and experience. Apparently, tension between needs of active duty and needs of studies is observed. As a response, additional support/incentives (apart from what is offered already in terms of e.g. academic, psychological and financial support) might be required. For instance, due to a possible recent increase of duty related responsibilities for students, aspects such as study workload, assignment types and deadlines, teacher consultation hours, and/or remote lectures need to be reassessed and adjusted accordingly.

#### *3.3.5 Evaluation of the sufficiency of study information and student counselling*

The most important study-related information shared with students consists of the following components: 1) Introduction to the organisation of the study process (e.g. study regulation documents, Academy's structure); 2) Presentation of the study programme (e.g. courses, objectives and outcomes); 3) Presentation of the study subjects, e.g. their content, assignments, evaluation (SER, p. 33). To ensure the dissemination of such information, different communication channels are used: introductory lectures with teachers, messages, meetings with Academy staff, the mano.lka.lt study environment (in order to check schedules, documents, contact details, etc.), emails to students, etc. Additionally, relevant study information is shared on the Academy's and MoD's websites, and Facebook pages. Student feedback is collected on the adequacy of the information provision about student counselling and studies. Student counselling and dissemination of study information at the Academy is considered sufficient. As noted by the expert panel, students are generally satisfied with the information distribution mechanism. Nevertheless, some problematic aspects were observed during the site visit discussions which should be reviewed and discussed by the programme's management. For instance, the students attending the site-visit apparently lacked awareness about internship possibilities as well as opportunities to be actively involved in ongoing research activities. Moreover, it was clarified that a possible reason for a rather high drop-out rate during/after the first study semester is due to insufficient student preparation for the upcoming workload, suggesting that there is information inadequacy during the presentation of the study programme at the beginning of the studies. Another issue noted is that students seemingly do not receive enough information about what changes were made as a result of their feedback.

### ***Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:***

#### ***(1) Strengths:***

1. The Academy offers good study quality and has created favourable study conditions for people who are in service in the national defence system.
2. Student counselling and financial support in general is very good.

#### ***(2) Weaknesses:***

1. Insufficient student awareness about opportunities for internships and involvement in research activities.
2. High drop-out rate in the first semester.
3. Students do not have enough knowledge about what changes are implemented in response to their feedback.

## **3.4. TEACHING AND LEARNING, STUDENT PERFORMANCE AND GRADUATE EMPLOYMENT**

***Studying, student performance and graduate employment shall be evaluated according to the following indicators:***

***3.4.1. Evaluation of the teaching and learning process that enables to take into account the needs of the students and enable them to achieve the intended learning outcomes***

The *Defense and Public Management* study programme emphasises the importance of active learning methods with a focus on military administration competences. Especially simulation-based and problem-based learning is applied extensively in various courses and also in other contexts a large variety of teaching and learning methods is used to respond to the needs of students who have to combine their studies with their professional duties (besides classical seminars study methods include e.g. practical assignments, individual and group tasks and the development of interactive competences). These are complemented by study visits and the invitation of external lecturers/ experts. Due to the special character of the study programme, contact course lectures are limited and the students must be enabled to follow their studies independently. Therefore, remote study elements are increasingly important and all key study materials are available online. The ongoing process of transferring course materials to a distance/ virtual learning environment is guided by a special regulation (SUBPROC 34-01 "Compilation and Certification of E-learning Materials"). Also, during the online site-visit, the students highlighted the variety of study methods and material as well as the flexibility and interactivity of the studies. Therefore, the expert panel concludes that diversified teaching and learning processes are in place, which take into account the special needs of the students as active members of the military and enable them to potentially achieve the defined learning outcomes.

#### *3.4.2. Evaluation of conditions ensuring access to study for socially vulnerable groups and students with special needs*

The SER states that due to the active military status of the students, the "special and high physical and emotional requirements" and the prescribed periodical medical examinations there are currently no students with special needs or from socially vulnerable groups in the programme. This led to the following conclusion: „[...], in the meantime, the issue of adapting the Academy's infrastructure for students with special needs is not relevant to the Academy.“ (SER, p. 37). Apart from the fact that this might exclude lecturers and experts with special physical needs (note that this was discussed during the online site-visit), the programme management team seems to have a somewhat limited understanding of potentially concerned groups/ persons, mainly including "physically disabled" and "sexually diverse" persons (with the latter allegedly not being present - neither in the programme nor in the Lithuanian Armed Forces). This implies that widely acknowledged potential problems arising in strictly hierarchical military and highly male-dominated structures as well as typical psychological challenges for military personnel are not sufficiently considered. The expert panel therefore advises the programme authorities to discuss and refine their understanding of "socially vulnerable groups" and "students with special needs" and to activate or - if already in existence - to better communicate institutional mechanisms providing information, counselling, and help for potentially concerned groups/ persons.

#### *3.4.3. Evaluation of the systematic nature of the monitoring of student study progress and feedback to students to promote self-assessment and subsequent planning of study progress*

The study progress of students is monitored according to the regulations „PROC 34: Study Planning, Programme Execution, Quality Assessment and Feedback Analysis” and „PROC 33: Planning and Coordinating the Content of Study Programmes”. As the students are assessed cumulatively, they receive consecutive feedback on their accomplishments and corresponding grades during as well as at the end of the respective courses. Various forms of feedback – (interim)assessments, written and/ or oral – are provided by the individual or – in the case of course projects – by groups of teachers/ instructors. In some courses these are complemented by additional peer-evaluation methods with students giving feedback to their fellows. Especially for course projects and final theses, a three-stage feedback system is used („feed-forward“, „feed-up“ and „feedback“). Assessment data is available in the „EDINA-Studies management and study information system“ and is used for monitoring purposes at the level of the Study Programme Committee, the Study Department and – in an aggregated form – the top management of the Academy. During the online-site visit the students also confirmed that they receive regular feedback but saw sometimes delays in getting assessment results or comments as a point of criticism. This might be a point for internal discussion, but at any rate the necessary regulations and mechanisms for a systematic monitoring of the study progress are in place at the level of students, teaching staff and programme management and allow for the self-assessment and subsequent planning of study progress.

#### *3.4.4. Evaluation of employability of graduates and graduate career tracking in the study field*

Considering the specific nature of the *Defence and Public Management* study programme, this criterion cannot be assessed in the same manner as in the case of study programmes offered by other HEIs in the country. The programme is only open to active Armed Forces members. As such, the graduates of the programme have an employment rate of 100% immediately after their graduation and the majority of them continue their military service after the graduation. Furthermore, the degree is a precondition for advancing their military career, therefore obtaining this degree has direct links with career advancement. The MoD personnel system is the main career tracking tool used by the Academy.

Considering the above, the expert panel assessed the criteria of employability of graduates and graduate career tracking positively, however, it would be useful to monitor the integration of retired military personnel in the civilian labour force as well as the linkages between their competitiveness in the labour market and the study programme.

#### *3.4.5. Evaluation of the implementation of policies to ensure academic integrity, tolerance and non-discrimination*

The principles of academic integrity are set out in the Statute of the Academy and the Code of Academic Ethics. The Code of Academic Ethics lays out the basic principles of ethical academic behaviour, such as academic honesty, academic fairness, trust, respect, responsibility and equality. The principles are embedded in the Academy’s culture, and “the Academy’s community has a common understanding of the academic ethics, as it to some level is relevant to the military ethics” (SER, p.39). The Academy has implemented sound policies and well

functioning procedures to ensure academic integrity (designed and described and in accordance with the Academy's process group, *PROC 41 "Ensuring Academic Integrity"*). The Academic Ethics Committee is responsible for the promotion and supervision (monitoring, relevance, implementation, etc.) of the provisions of the Code. According to the SER, "The Committee investigates potential breaches of academic ethics by members of the academic community on the basis of a complaint, report, request or on its own initiative. Students also have the opportunity to "report perceived misconduct or discrimination by placing their report in the specially designed Report Box" (SER, p. 40). The site-visit revealed that students are well informed about the requirements for academic integrity and the consequences of breaches of policies and procedures. This reflects a preventive approach taken at the Military Academy, where students are provided with methodological materials and given consultations on the matter of academic ethics during their studies. To avoid plagiarism, the Turnitin Plagiarism Prevention tool is used for the final thesis and other written assignments.

Overall, as described in the SER (p. 40) and confirmed by respondents at the site-visit, no violations of the principles of academic honesty, tolerance and non-discrimination were recorded during the period covered by the SER. Appropriate information on rules and requirements, dedicated activities, the very nature of the community and the collaborative approach between teachers and students have contributed to a culture of mutual trust. Regarding written exams/assignments as well as bachelor theses, cases of plagiarism are very rare and potential problems are detected and mitigated early on. The expert panel noted that policies related to diversity and non-discrimination do not play a significant role given the specific framework conditions mentioned above. This might, however, be an issue for further attention in view of future developments in the study field as well as in light of the comments made in section 3.4.2.

#### *3.4.6. Evaluation of the effectiveness of the application of procedures for the submission and examination of appeals and complaints regarding the study process within the field studies*

The Academy has implemented effective policies and procedures for complaints and appeals. As mentioned in the SER, the process is organised in accordance with the Academy's process group, *PROC 34 "Study Planning, Programme Execution, Quality Assessment and Feedback Analysis"*.

Students who are dissatisfied with the final evaluation of their knowledge in the study course may submit an appeal to the Commandant of the Academy within three working days of the announcement of the final result. According to the SER, before submitting an appeal, students have to discuss the issue with the lecturer of the course. The appeal must contain the following information: 1) a reasoned explanation of the objection to the evaluation of the results; 2) a detailed description of the related facts; 3) the precise statement of the appeal. The Appeal Commission analyses the appeal on recommendation of the Vice Rector for Studies and Science and by the order of the Commandant of the Academy. The decision of the Appeal Commission is announced in the minutes of the Commission meeting. Students can also appeal the final thesis defence process.

According to the SER and the discussions at the site-visit, the policies and procedures are well established and students are familiar with them. There were no cases of appeals, complaints and/or expulsions from the Academy for dishonesty during the period under analysis. According to discussions at the site-visit, potential issues are usually discussed with teachers and solved in a cooperative manner.

### ***Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:***

#### ***(1) Strengths:***

1. The Academy has implemented sound procedures and a culture of mutual trust to ensure academic integrity, potential problems are detected/mitigated early on.
2. Regulations and structures for the systematic assessment and monitoring of students' study progress are in place and well designed.

#### ***(2) Weaknesses:***

1. Policies related to diversity, non-discrimination and inclusion of socially vulnerable groups do not play a significant role yet given the specific framework conditions mentioned above. This might, however, be an issue that deserves further attention in view of future developments in the study field.
2. Sometimes delayed assessment and feedback notifications as a point of criticism for students.

## **3.5. TEACHING STAFF**

### ***Study field teaching staff shall be evaluated in accordance with the following indicators:***

#### ***3.5.1. Evaluation of the adequacy of the number, qualification and competence (scientific, didactic, professional) of teaching staff within a field study programme(s) at the HEI in order to achieve the learning outcomes***

In total, 23 teachers are involved in the study programme, and almost 80% of them have a doctoral degree. The ratio of teaching staff to students is about 1:4. The Academy considers this ratio a very good indicator for a favourable interaction between teaching staff and students (cf. SER, p. 45). Teaching staff is highly experienced in general, and although there are several teachers with part-time contracts, all of them have worked at the Academy for more than three years. From this perspective, one can consider the teaching staff of the Academy to be stable, well-qualified and adequately competent as well as experienced in order to achieve the desired learning outcomes.

Persons with rich practical experience are also invited to deliver lectures at the Academy. In addition, many teachers of the Academy have relevant experience with either policy making or public management.

All teachers are involved in research. During the evaluation period, some of them have either published articles in high-quality international journals (i.e. journals with a high impact factor) or chapters in volumes published by well-known academic publishing houses. However, a concern in this regard is that the publication records of individual teachers



contain, inter alia, articles in journals of the MDPI (e.g., on Sustainability). This publisher has a controversial reputation among scholars in some countries as well as other high-quality publishing houses. Therefore, teachers might consider publishing in other international research journals (if possible).

### *3.5.2. Evaluation of conditions for ensuring teaching staffs' academic mobility*

The specific character of the Academy is clearly visible in this field. First of all, the Academy has a proper budget for those who are interested in various mobilities, and international resources (e.g., Erasmus+ mobility programme) are considered additional but not as the primary resource for this purpose. Second, teachers prefer to use internal resources for mobility. This may be connected, inter alia, to the fact that teaching staff prefers participation in research events or competence development rather than teaching visits (cf. SER, p. 45). In addition, due to the Academy's specific focus in research and education - which is strongly determined by the Lithuanian MoD - the Academy is involved in the so-called "small Erasmus", which facilitates a network among similarly oriented HEIs across Europe.

Resources from the Erasmus+ mobility programmes seem to be almost unexploited (SER, Figure 3). This issue should be considered and teachers could be motivated to share their knowledge and experience also with colleagues abroad through the Erasmus+ mobility programme.

### *3.5.3. Evaluation of the conditions to improve the competences of the teaching staff*

The Academy declares that it has an effective system for the competence development of teaching staff (SER, p. 46). The approach focuses on the improvement of teaching staff's competences in three fields: 1) teaching/learning competences; 2) research competences; 3) general competences. Regarding the latter, the courses and training activities are often focused on digital literacy or leadership. The "Deep Leadership" programme has been "transferred" from the Finnish National Defense University and the Finnish Armed Forces (SER, p. 47). In this context, it is necessary to highlight the Academy's collaboration with national (e.g., Kaunas University of Technology) and international partners (e.g., the Danish Military Training Centre, the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst) which significantly contributes to offering high-quality and continually updated teacher training and competence development. Moreover, the Academy has its own Leadership and Methodological Training Centre. In addition, the annual publication entitled "Factors of Education in Contemporary Society" is another interesting instrument which helps to improve the competences of teachers in the field of education. Teachers at the site-visit confirmed their appreciation for the Academy's support in terms of funding available for qualification raising and training provided on various aspects, including on hybrid teaching.

One can positively assess that improvements of competences are integral parts of the annual development plan of the Academy, and that all teachers include these activities in their individual development plans. As pointed out in the SER (p. 50), all achievements including

improvements of relevant competences are assessed annually in interviews with the responsible department leaders.

### ***Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:***

#### ***(1) Strengths:***

1. The Academy's teaching staff is stable, well-experienced and competent and all teachers are actively involved in research.
2. The Academy employs a systematic approach ensuring continual improvement of teaching staff's competences.
3. The Academy provides support for international mobility of teachers through dedicated resources from its budget.

#### ***(2) Weaknesses:***

1. The Erasmus+ teaching mobility programme is only used to a very limited extent, because teachers are less interested in teaching mobilities in general.
2. Publications (i.e. articles) in the MDPI journals are controversial among scholars in some countries as well as other high-quality publishing houses. Teachers might consider publishing in other international research journals (if possible).

## **3.6. LEARNING FACILITIES AND RESOURCES**

### ***Study field learning facilities and resources should be evaluated according to the following criteria:***

#### ***3.6.1. Evaluation of the suitability and adequacy of the physical, informational and financial resources of the field studies to ensure an effective learning process***

There is a sufficient number of classrooms equipped with up-to-date technologies for both face-to-face and online studies. Based on the number of students in a group, three categories of lecture rooms can be used, fitted for various didactical needs. To add value to studies and research, the Academy has also established a design thinking lab, which is adapted to the use of innovative teaching/learning methods. The Academy uses manoLKA portal as an electronic study platform for studies that integrates Moodle, a document exchange site (cloud.vu.lt), and Edina (the Lithuanian information system for the management of science, studies, activities and processes). Various software licences have been obtained for studies and research. Existing equipment and IT tools are fully sufficient for the *Defence and Public Management* programme's needs. However, facilities and study processes have not been adapted to the special needs of students. Thus, disabled people are disadvantaged in accessing study buildings or partaking in the study process, i.e. there are no special applications and devices for people – students, lecturers or guests – with reduced mobility or visual impairment.

Library services are of very good quality and accessible to students physically or electronically. Visitors of the Library also have an opportunity to access individual and group work rooms, and discussion spaces. Study materials – literature, databases etc. – are updated



in cooperation between lecturers and the library. Every year, the information resource fund is supplemented with about 500 new titles of documents required for studies and research.

Arrangements for internships have been recently re-designed and in that light, there seem to be some problems in the communication of expectations and tasks to students. Currently, students' internships are envisaged as research-oriented internships, where students are expected to collect and analyse data in their serving unit and depending on their interests, while applying theory in a military work context for administrative tasks.

The main finance sources of study programmes are state appropriations for studies, in particular by the MoD. The evident challenges are related to upgrading equipment for hybrid studies, as there is only one lecture room currently dedicated to hybrid teaching, but there are plans for another one in the future for the purpose of the *Defence and Public Management* programme. Also, the adaptation of facilities for disabled people needs to be addressed. That said, training and support is offered by the Academy, including financial support, on hybrid teaching and various aspects of a study process, e.g. to attend courses for teachers on didactics and for upgrading qualifications. Overall, physical, informational and financial resources are sufficient to carry out studies effectively at present, but evidently will need upgrading and improvements in the future.

### *3.6.2. Evaluation of the planning and upgrading of resources needed to carry out the field studies*

The resources needed for the programme are planned and partially renewed each year. At the strategic level, the renewal of material resources is planned three years ahead. The resources needed for the programme are planned and renewed in two manners: 1) the entire study infrastructure of the Academy is renewed under the general procedure (the renewal is initiated and planned by the Study Department, the IT Department and the Library according to their respective field of responsibility); 2) at the initiative of the Study Programme Committee proposals are made to include specific resources needed for the study programme in the general plans (e.g. the most recent proposal was to equip another hybrid teaching / learning room to be used exclusively for the study programme). Overall, resource planning and renewal is an integral part of the state budget planning. Each year, the Academy plans and renews its material and technical base by renewing computers, acquiring projectors, smart boards, furniture, other necessary equipment, and by equipping new spaces for students to study. The Academy recently finished three infrastructural projects related to the study programme: the renovation of the auditoriums (all buildings) (2016-2019); the renovation of the sports complex (2018-2021); and the renovation of the dormitories (2018-2021). Thus, it can be concluded that learning facilities and resources, available at the Academy, are planned, and regularly updated and enable the current number of students to achieve their learning outcomes both in face-to-face studies and distance studies.

### *Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:*

#### *(1) Strengths:*

1. The Academy is strongly committed to investing in and upgrading of their study premises and facilities with the financial and institutional backing of the MoD.

2. Establishment of and access to good quality library services; the design thinking lab adds value to the study processes.

***(2) Weaknesses:***

1. Room for improvement in adapting learning facilities and premises for persons with special needs, in particular, those with mobility disability.
2. Shortcomings in sufficient technical equipment for hybrid studies.
3. Lack of clarity about internship arrangements among students and insufficient communication to students on the arrangements for internships.

### **3.7. STUDY QUALITY MANAGEMENT AND PUBLIC INFORMATION**

***Study quality management and publicity shall be evaluated according to the following indicators:***

#### ***3.7.1. Evaluation of the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance system of the studies***

The Academy, both in the SER and during the site-visit, has described a well structured and documented internal quality assurance system. According to the Academy, internal assessment is performed once a semester at different levels: Student feedback (student surveys) is analysed by the lecturer, the SPC, and, depending on the situation, the lecturer or the SPC proposes and implements solutions for the improvement of the subject of study. All decisions for study subject or programme improvement are approved by the SPC.

The Commandant Adviser (similar to the Quality Manager in other universities) draws up a feedback report with recommendations and submits it to the evaluation analysis meeting of the Management in accordance with the Academy's process group *PROC 29 "Management System Analysis and Monitoring of Organisational Success"*. The reports continuously monitor the dynamics of the reference index which indicates the level of student satisfaction with their studies. Recommendations are discussed and improvement decisions are adopted. The quality of studies is included as a priority in the Strategy of the Academy for 2018-2024. The recently adopted new quality management system provides for internal audits and the application of KPIs, as well as the formalisation of the engagement of external partners and obtaining certificates.

That said, the expert panel observed that the processes and procedures, while adequate, have been formalised relatively recently. Therefore their application in practice will have to be monitored in order to ensure functionality and effectiveness in terms of study quality improvements. Furthermore, the impact of the improvements/adjustments to the programme and the individual courses made in response to the needs of the MoD and the Armed Forces should be measured and feedback on the improvements shared with the key stakeholders (Ministry, Armed Forces, other social partners, lecturers and students).

#### ***3.7.2. Evaluation of the effectiveness of the involvement of stakeholders (students and other stakeholders) in internal quality assurance***

The involvement of representatives of the MoD and the Lithuanian Armed Forces is permanent: the allocation and approval of the budget and staffing list of the Academy, the rules for enrolment and student quotas are established by the MoD. During regular meetings (at least once a month) with representatives of the MoD and Lithuanian Armed Forces the contribution of the Academy to the Lithuanian Armed Forces is discussed. The expectations of the stakeholders are assessed by the administration of the Academy and the costs of the implementation of the expected tasks are estimated. The expectations of the stakeholders are then assessed by the Programme Committee and integrated into the study programme. Representatives of the MoD and the Lithuanian Armed Forces take part in all stages of the study programme formulation and implementation.

Students take part in internal quality assurance through the activities of the Student Council and other mechanisms. Students make up 20% of the Senate of the Academy and one out of five (i.e. also 20%) members of the Study Programme Committee is a student. The part-time mode of study and military service activities of these students have resulted in lower than average student engagement in quality assurance. During the site-visit deployments, military training exercises, emerging conflicts and the resulting increased readiness status were identified as key causes for limited student engagement in continuous quality assurance processes. In addition, feedback information is collected from students on a semi-annual basis, as well as from graduates three years after graduation. The SER notes that students who graduate from the programme are often nominated as representatives of the MoD and the Lithuanian Armed Forces in the Academy's quality management mechanisms. As mentioned in the meeting with alumni and social partners during the site-visit, graduates are present in the thesis defence committee and hence, can provide feedback to the Academy on the relevance of each year's studies and defended thesis topics.

Comprehensive information related to the study process (enrolment results, session results, academic leave, termination of studies, resumption of studies, etc.), students, lecturers and graduates is systematically collected, compiled and analysed by the Study Department in accordance with the Academy's process group *PROC 34 "Study Planning, Programme Execution, Quality Assessment and Feedback Analysis"*.

Lecturers are directly involved in the internal quality assurance of studies: they are responsible for the quality of the subjects they teach, they participate in meetings on the study programme organised by the Academy administration where various issues related to the quality of studies are discussed; lecturers are also represented in the Senate and other collegiate bodies of the Academy.

The study programme lecturers also take part in periodic surveys. In addition, feedback from lecturers and students is collected each semester during a meeting of the lecturers with the programme leader and a meeting of the student group with the programme leader after each session. Feedback from students, lecturers and graduates is provided to the Study Programme Committee and summarised for the management of the Academy and is used to make necessary adjustments to the study subjects and the programme as a whole and to improve materials, equipment and the overall learning environment.

During the site visit the participants recognised that they need to improve the mechanisms for stakeholder engagement. One option is to expand the number and the types of stakeholders which are consulted instead of relying on the MoD and the Armed Forces only. The Academy recognises that modern security threats require the participation of a broader group of institutions and entities, and that their input will be relevant for the improvement of the existing study programmes. Additionally, engaging a more diverse social partner group would broaden the employability options for programme graduates who retire from the military (during site visit it was pointed out that most of them continue in the defence sector, albeit in civilian functions). Furthermore, the results of the studies should be more measurable and more closely linked to the needs of the main stakeholder (the customer), the MoD.

### *3.7.3. Evaluation of the collection, use and publication of information on studies, their evaluation and improvement processes and outcomes*

Information about studies and their assessment processes is publicly available on the main Academy website [www.lka.lt](http://www.lka.lt). Information about the assessment and improvement activities of the Academy can be found on the website: <https://www.lka.lt/akademijos-akreditacija/>, but it takes 3-4 steps to obtain the required information and the website does not include any student/ alumni survey information or information on the quality of studies beyond the statement that the Academy was accredited for six years in 2014. At the same time, the SER indicates that all information about studies, assessments, improvements, planned investments, management processes, etc. is hosted on an internal network accessible to the internal Academy actors.

The Academy explains that the dissemination of such information is restricted due to the specific nature of the activities of the Academy and the fact that students are active duty military personnel and that other stakeholders are from the national defence system as well. Based on this restriction the expert panel concludes that the collection, use and publication of information on studies, their evaluation and improvement processes are adequate, whereby the publication of the quality evaluation contents and outcomes is limited due to objective reasons.

### *3.7.4. Evaluation of the opinion of the field students (collected in the ways and by the means chosen by the SKVC or the HEI) about the quality of the studies at the HEI*

During the site visit students shared their experiences related to the study programme. Overall, students seem to be happy about the quality of studies for various reasons. The content is deemed as interesting, and students feel that they deepen their field related knowledge and they have the possibility to personalise assignments (e.g. research work). Furthermore, they are glad that the Academy has created a flexible system allowing them to combine their studies with the military service (e.g. to have study breaks due to deployments). However, the students also face challenges that could potentially be avoided. For instance, they feel that sometimes there is an overconcentration of studies and assignments in a narrow space of time. Dispersing assignments over a broader period might

reduce stress levels and dropout rates. Moreover, even though feedback related to students' assignments is satisfying, there is an issue with timing, as they want to receive assessments (grades, comments) as soon as possible. Additionally, there were complaints from students about the lack of literature in Lithuanian language. Another issue is that the students sometimes have little time to focus on the study process, and as a result, the quality of studies may suffer. For example, when preparing for a written assignment, they usually choose a topic suggested by the teacher, because individualising the topic requires a lot of attention and time. As a result, they sometimes have to compete for the most interesting, convenient or easy topic from a given list.

Overall, the expert panel is left with a generally good impression when it comes to the students' experience. However, the issues mentioned above should be taken up and further discussed by the programme's management team.

### ***Strengths and weaknesses of this evaluation area:***

#### ***(1) Strengths:***

1. Well designed quality assurance processes.
2. Key stakeholders are deeply involved in the planning of study programmes as well as in the assessment of their quality and suggestions for improvement.

#### ***(2) Weaknesses:***

1. Impacts of adjustments on the quality of studies and their outcomes are not well measured/communicated to stakeholders.
2. Social partner engagement is limited to the MoD and the Lithuanian Armed Forces

## IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

Evaluation Area	Recommendations for the Evaluation Area (study cycle)
Intended and achieved learning outcomes and curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The share of electives in the programme should be higher and a wider basket of elective courses to choose from should be offered. This would provide students with more possibilities to personalise studies according to their interests and preferences.</li> <li>• International aspects could be given a more prominent/ visible role in the course structure, particularly for an institution which operates in a multinational and multidimensional context (NATO, EU).</li> <li>• Given the high number of learning outcomes allocated to many courses (often seven out of nine) it might be discussed how their concrete achievement is actually assessed in detail, and if a reduction might be more reasonable in the future.</li> <li>• The eligibility requirements could be extended to include military members who retired after injury as a way of supporting their integration in the civilian labour force.</li> <li>• Considering the increasing complexity of security threats and multiple actors relevant to their solution, in the future, the programme could be expanded to include other relevant actors of the defence and security sector, rather than the Lithuanian Armed Forces only.</li> </ul>
Links between science (art) and studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Considering that students prefer to focus on the practical preparation for the service in the Armed Forces rather than on engaging in research activities, the Academy might explore further incentives addressing this issue, promoting a positive attitude among students towards research and supporting/rewarding their active engagement.</li> </ul>
Student admission and support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Since students cannot allegedly participate in international mobility programmes due to the specifics of their profession, alternative, more flexible exchange formats might be explored (e.g., virtual mobility offers).</li> <li>• The relatively high drop-out rate (in particular at the beginning of the studies) needs to be addressed. In this context, communication about the workload could be improved and expectations should be managed more effectively from the</li> </ul>

	<p>outset.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students should be better informed about the changes made to the programme in response to their feedback (survey results). In this context, the communication strategy should be reviewed.</li> </ul>
Teaching and learning, student performance and graduate employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The programme authorities should discuss and refine their understanding of “socially vulnerable groups” and “students with special needs” and activate or - if already in existence - at least systematically communicate the institutional mechanisms providing information, counselling, and help for potentially concerned groups/ persons.</li> </ul>
Teaching staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teaching staff should be motivated to take part in the Erasmus+ teaching mobility programmes in a much more proactive way. The Academy may want to introduce measures to increase interest and participation in these programmes (e.g., introduce specific internal incentives).</li> <li>While the publication records of teaching staff are of good quality, the publication in MDPI journals is controversial among scholars in some countries as well as other high-quality publishing houses. Teachers might therefore reconsider publishing in other relevant international research journals.</li> </ul>
Learning facilities and resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Premises and facilities should be adapted to the needs of persons with disabilities, in particular, mobility disabilities.</li> <li>The equipment for hybrid studies should be upgraded.</li> <li>Arrangements on internships should be more clearly communicated to the students.</li> </ul>
Study quality management and public information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Academy should expand the number and types of stakeholders consulted in addition to the MoD and the Armed Forces. This is especially relevant as the Academy recognises that modern security threats need the participation of a broader group of institutions and entities, and thus their input has become relevant for the improvement of the existing study programme.</li> <li>Engaging a more diverse social partner group would also broaden the employability options for programme graduates who retire from the military (during the site visit it was pointed out that most of them continue in the defence sector, albeit in civilian functions).</li> <li>The results of the studies should be more measurable and more</li> </ul>

	closely linked to the needs of the main stakeholder (the customer – the MoD).
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## V. SUMMARY

Overall, the expert panel found that in the evaluation period all seven evaluation areas of the first-cycle study programme in the Public Administration study field were systematically developed in line with the legal requirements, the needs of the labour market and the specific needs of the public sector. No fundamental shortcomings have been identified in the evaluation period. The panel noted that the study programme has been subject to an external evaluation for the first time since its launch in 2016.

Based on its specific legal and governance framework and target group (from the military and defence sector), the Academy enjoys a distinct position among Lithuanian HEIs which offer study programmes in the field of Public Administration. Given the specific framework conditions, one of the key strengths of the first-cycle study programme is its strategic focus on and the research and practice links to security and defence matters. Another noteworthy aspect is that the programme provides opportunities for NCOs to advance their careers and/or to prepare them for careers in the civil service after leaving the Armed Forces.

That said, there is still room for improvement in the majority of the seven evaluation areas, notably related to student-related measures tackling the relatively high drop-out rates (in particular at the beginning of the programme), the personalisation of studies, existing communication gaps (such as, for example, on internships, the handling of student feedback, opportunities to engage in research activities, etc.), alternative modes of student mobility tailored to the needs of the specific target group. At the programme level, while overall the close institutional ties with the MoD and the Armed Forces provide stability and continuity as well as reducing uncertainty (e.g. in terms of the number of students admitted to the programme, thesis topics, internships and the content of the studies), the rather formalised and hierarchical approach might hamper innovation through bottom-up initiatives and responsiveness to a changing environment. As pointed out in the previous sections, complex modern security threats require the cooperation among the broadest possible group of stakeholders, and their input will also become increasingly important for the future development of the study programme. In addition, engaging more diverse social partner groups will widen future job opportunities for graduates who intend to retire from the military. Regarding future development, international aspects should be given a more prominent role in the course structure, given that the Academy operates in a multinational context (NATO, EU). Finally, another issue that will need further attention is the development of a broader understanding of policies on inclusion/non-discrimination of vulnerable groups.

In conclusion, the expert panel would like to express their thanks to the team at the Academy for compiling the self-evaluation report, for organising the site-visit and for providing additional information in response to our requests for clarification. The panel also wishes to thank all site-visit participants for sharing their valuable insights.

Expert panel chairperson signature:

Dr. Christine Leitner