



# **AGJENCIA E SIGURIMIT TË CILËSISË NË ARSIMIN E LARTË**

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## **Report of the Periodic Institutional Accreditation of “The Academy of Armed forces”**

**December 2024**

## REVIEW TEAM

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A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'Elvin Gjevori', is written over the 'Reviewer' label.

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## About this review

The overall aim of Institutional Review is to assess the extent to which each HEI meets the Albanian State Quality Standards (Quality Code) which came into force in 2021. Institutional Review is a peer review process with each review team composed of a mix of international reviewers and Albanian reviewers appointed by ASCAL.

The resulting reports will serve not only for institutional accreditation based on the extent to which the HEI meets the standards, but will also to inform the HEIs, Albanian government, the public and students of how each HEI meets the standards. This report also helps the HEI to identify priorities for enhancement (the process by which higher education providers systematically improve the quality of provision and ways in which students' learning is supported).

The Albanian State Quality Standards have been grouped under five headings, the Evaluation Areas: the Management, Autonomy, and Quality Assurance; Resourcing and Partnership; the Study Programs, Teaching, and Evaluation; Scientific/Artistic Activity and Innovation; Students and their Support. This report identifies features of good practice, recommendations, affirmations of actions in progress and weaknesses for each Evaluation Area, together with a judgement as to how well the HEI meets the standards. The judgements that the reviewers may assign are: standards are fully met; standards are substantially met; standards are partly met; or standards are not met.

Finally, the reviewers conclude by recommending a summary judgement to ASCAL's Accreditation Board. This overall judgement is one of four levels:

- **State Quality Standards are fully met**
- **State Quality Standards are substantially met**
- **State Quality Standards are partly met**
- **State Quality Standards are not met.**



## The context of this review

The Academy of Armed Forces (AAF) was established in 1958 with the Decision of Council of Ministers no 136 qualified as a "semi-higher military education" [Evidence 7]. In 1972, AFA developed into Military High School, which with its 4-year academic programmes constituted the basis for the education model that AAF still carries on today. The education aspect was enriched by research activities and publications on the military art. Such developments were overarched with the final re-organization of the academy in 1982 aiming a further step in increasing the quality of education and research of this institution.

AFA is currently a public Higher Education Institution the with the status of an "Academy" according to the Higher Education Law 80/2015, carried out its first accreditation in 2017 for a period of three years with the decision of the Accreditation Board No 91. In February 2020, to AFA was granted the special status as the only higher education institution in the country specialized in security and defence with the DCM No. 156, date 19/02/2020 [Evidence 1].

In the period 2020-2022, AAF adapted its regulatory framework and by-rules in order to align with the legal acts in force, such as the approval of the statute in 2023 [Evidence 3]. This process was further enhanced by implementing a new restructuring process in the framework or the reorganization of the Armed Forces at the National level [Evidence 4]. In this framework was also the approval of the legal framework in order to legally align the former Commander of AFA with a military rank to that of a Rector for purposes related to the institutional and program accreditation for a transitory period of four years [Evidence 6]. This process allowed AAF to start the institutional accreditation process like all the other Higher Education Institutions in Albania.

With the objective of "Education and qualification of military and civilian personnel for all leadership levels within the Armed Forces and other security institutions in the country in the field of security and defence" [SER, Pg.11], AAF is organized around two academic pillars: the faculty of Defence and Security, the Scientific and Research Military Institute, which is primarily focused on preparing the military doctrines and necessary materials for the education activities implemented in the Faculty programmes as well as in the centres of education, which are not subject of the higher education law:

- a) Professional Education for subordinate officers with dedicated courses to prepare the support ranks of the graduated officers;
- b) Professional Education for soldiers aiming at offering to the soldiers the necessary military preparation organized into introductory and advanced.

The institution offers study programs in all three cycles, Bachelor, Master but not yet on doctoral studies [SER Pg. 14]. The variety of fields covered by the offered study programs define the profile of the institution as the only higher education institute in the area of security and defence. As explained more in detail in the point two of recommendation fulfilments in the next section of this report, "AAF" offers at the moment 9 study programmes out of which: a) six are at the bachelor level (both three and 4 years of study); three are at the master level [Evidence 18]. However, one programme of the second and one of the third level are at the moment inactive [Evidence 18]. In the meeting with the academic and management staff was highlighted the planning process of opening the doctoral studies in AAF.

AAF has drafted and implements a development strategy – 2024-2032 - which aims to consolidate a distinct profile in the context, system and academic offer, which distinguishes it from the other HEI-s in the country, thanks to the combination of the academic and professional experience of institution leaders, commitment and dedication of academic staff, to meeting and respecting



academic standards and legal requirements, providing quality education, training and contemporary services for students and establishing external partnerships, aimed at improving the quality and facilitating the employability of its graduates **[Evidence 29, SER, Pg.9]**.



## Fulfilment of the recommendations from the previews institutional Accreditation

Considering the recommendations accompanying the Decision of the Accreditation Board, No.91, date 20.10.2017 "On the first accreditation of the Institution of Higher Education, the Academy of the Armed Forces", the Academic Senate of AAF discussed and approved – in the period from November 2017 to April 2018 – a detailed Action Plan encompassing the necessary steps to be undertaken in order to fulfil the three recommendations [Evidence 6].

The findings of the EER (referring to the EE Report) were the following:

### Recommendations:

1. The institution must take immediate measures to enable students enrolled in the third cycle of the doctorate to complete their studies in this cycle.
2. The institution must establish units and develop capacities to provide authentic higher education study programmes and focused research activities in support of these programmes, while maintaining an emphasis on practical activities as the professional level or higher.
3. The institution must design and develop an action plan aimed at enhancing the research capacities of the staff. This plan should be based on the evaluation of research products and the management and assessment of research performance based on measurable results.

In response to the review team report and the recommendations of the Accreditation Board, AAF has followed a proper procedure, correctly demonstrated through clear and well addressed evidence.

In the following, there is an overview of the actions undertaken to address the recommendations and the degree to which they were met.

1. To address this recommendation AAF decided with the Decision 38 of the Academic Senate to continue the Study Program of the III Cycle at AFA in accordance with legal acts and bylaws in force. The point II of this decision approved the establishment of the Council of Professors, which included academic personnel with the title of "Professor" from Out and UAMD due to the lack of AFA academic staff in the category of professor [Evidence 10]. In January 2018 the Rectorate of AFA notified all students whose doctoral school has been temporarily suspended to restart the process. On April 2018, the Council of Professors approved the defence procedures in the departments for doctoral students from the academic years 2010-2013 and 2011-2014 [Evidence 11]. The process was concluded on November 2018, when 25 candidates completed their doctoral studies [Evidence 11]. However, at the moment there is not a doctoral programme, although there is an affirmative action and a clear planning in recruiting the academic staff and drafting the programmes to start the third cycle programmes. **We consider that the recommendation is partly addressed.**
2. Following the approval of the DCM No. 156, date 19/02/2020, AFA was granted a special status as the only higher education institute in the field of defence and security. The new organization structure of AFA are approved by the Prime minister based on the proposal of the Minister of Defence and it includes two main/basic units: a) Faculty of Defence and



Security; b) Military Scientific Research Institute. In 2020, such structural reorganization was followed by the opening of the first higher education programme for officers in the first cycle of bachelor on: "Studies in Military Sciences" [Evidence 13]. In 2021, three more study programmes were launched: "Information Technology in the field of Defence" and Marine Navigation and Command [Evidence 14]. Both programmes are structured with 180 ECTS and have a duration of three academic years and six semesters corresponding to the level 6 of the Albanian Qualifications Framework. Additionally a second cycle programme of the "Professional Master in Cyber Security in the Field of Defence" was launched containing 60 ECTS for a duration of one academic year in the full-time study format. Following the graduation of the first bachelor cohort in 2023, AFA re-organized its basic units following the education model of West Point by adopting a 4-year system of the first bachelor cycle and opened three new bachelor programmes: 1) Communication Sciences in the field of Defence; 2) Information and Communication Technology in the field of Defence; 3) International Relations in the field of Defence [Evidence 17]. The reason for that is to make sure that students get the necessary 180 ECTS in the specific area of expertise counting for 3-years of study and 1-year dedicated to the military education. In this way, students will have employment opportunities even in case they don't continue their military career in the armed forces. AFA has opened for the first in September 2024, two new master programmes in "Computer Science and Artificial Intelligence" and "International Security and Politics", which bring the overall number of education programmes at nine, although two programmes of the second Cycle and one programme in the third cycle of studies are at the moment inactive [Evidence 18]. **We consider that the recommendation is fully addressed.**

3. The new programmes starting in 2020 demanded the implementation of concrete steps in terms of enhancing the research capacities of the staff and providing them with the necessary support. For that is drafted and approved the Academic Senate in 2018 a plan of measures to support the academic staff [Evidence 9]. However, there is not a clear the establishment of a set of activities, milestones, KPIs and other quantitative indicators for evaluating the research quality of the academic products of the staff and how that is integrated in the research and the overall performance. An affirmation action is that starting from September of this academic year, a new template dedicated to assess the research progress of each member of the academic staff. We consider that the recommendation is substantially addressed.

In addition to the statements from the institution regarding the recommendations and the degree of their fulfilment, the on-site verification of the above has been carried out and respectively explained for each recommendation.

All of the above were verified both in documentary terms as during the visit to the institution.

**In summary and as a conclusion of all this process we can declare that the institution has addressed the weaknesses and has taken measures and actions to resolve and fulfil all the recommendations identified by the accreditation process of 2020.**





## Summary Report

At the time of this review AFA has 223 students and offers nine study programs. More in detail: 6 study programmes at the first level; 3 study programmes in the second level out of which 2 are "Master of Sciences"; and as mentioned above, the third cycle programme is in the pipeline. However, as mentioned above three of these programmes are inactive (two programmes at the second cycle and one programme at the third cycle).

Over the years, AFA has trained and graduated many students in the various study programmes it offers starting from its establishment in 1958 [SER, pg.5, M1]. According to the official statements of AFA, the legal framework and verification during this evaluation process, all the graduated students are employed since the number of accepted students depends on the demands of the Ministry of Defence for the military staff [M10]. Hence, students of AFA have a guaranteed job position after competing their studies.

AFA developed a self-evaluation report through an Internal Self-Evaluation Working Group, which included 5 (five) academics representing each of the basic units and specialized centres as well as 4 military ranking officers, one expert from institution support units and 1 (one) student representative. It circulated drafts to a wider audience within the institution before it was finalized. The process of drafting and approving the final internal evaluation report for the Agency was devolved by the Internal Self-Evaluation Working Group.

The report and supporting evidence (over 360) were found to be helpful in providing the review team with relevant information on institutional policies and procedures, the facts and data proving the grade of fulfilment of the required standards. In this respect AFA shows an increased level of knowledge and awareness of internal quality processes in terms of procedures and content, an aspect that showed some weakness in the previous report. What needed to be approached to an exhaustive level in this report is a more appropriate demonstration and description of the efficacy and effectiveness of policies, procedures and measures in terms of long-term sustainability of the study programmes, as well as how to assess and grant support to the scientific research of the academic staff especially in the conditions of limited financial resources to enhance this process.

The review visit took place over two days on the 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> of October 2024. The review team comprised one senior higher education reviewers, one international and one experienced higher education staff member of an Albanian institution. The review team was supported by the Review Manager and a note-taker provided by ASCAL. The review team received the self-evaluation report and the portfolio of supporting evidence eight weeks in advance of the review visit, later supplemented by additional requested documentation before and during the visit. The wide range of supporting information provided by AFA enabled the reviewer team to familiarize itself with the structure, policies, management procedures, and nature of teaching and research activity undertaken.

Evidence included the Statute and Regulations, internal reports, the annual report to the Ministry of Education, admission, and orientation procedures, lists of external agreements and memoranda, examples of programme information, and evidence of deliberative meetings. The review team met senior managers, students, lecturers, administrative and support staff, as well as external partners and alumni during the review visit. Discussion supported the clarification of procedures, responsibilities, and findings. Notes were taken in all meetings. In a learning resources tour, the review team viewed the library, teaching areas, laboratories, social amenities, and offices.



Thanks to this work integrating documents and the field visit the reviewers' team arrived at the following conclusions:

**The Standards for Higher Education Institution - Management, Autonomy, and Quality Assurance are fully met.** In reaching this judgment, the review team did record the allocation of an annual budget for research for each member of the academic staff. The institutional structures work in accordance with the Statute and its formally constituted sub-structures ensure efficient management, while respecting the Autonomy of structures as well as of the academic and administrative staff. The Development Strategy heading to 2032 is already approved and it will provide a clear path for the further development of this institution. AFA has affirmed the involvement of other stakeholders of the innovation ecosystem in crafting such strategy, and how such objectives are monitored and commensurate with the budget and changes in the strategy in the reviewed medium-term budgets. The HEI showed evidence to demonstrate effective internal monitoring and evaluation of all activities.

In terms of quality assurance, the review team evidenced that the structure is functional, and the operational mechanisms are in place. To further enhance the process of quality self-assessment of the institutional structures AFA has engaged also external member to share a different complementary perspective and best practises from elsewhere. In a broader perspective, although external stakeholders are involved in quality assurance activities, it would be helpful to establish an institutional procedure on how to collect the feedback of external stakeholders in the process of curricula improvement.

**The Standards for Resources and Partnership are substantially met.** To reach this judgment, the review team identified features of good practice such as collaboration with international academic institutions in military and security education from the USA and other NATO member countries. This new cooperations and exchange programmes are definitely a step forward compared to the previous assessment and clear evidence of addressing the recommendation left from the accreditation board.

AFA is in possession of a complete structure, organization chart and decision-making bodies, executive and administrative, and that operates and functions in accordance with the legal acts and academic standards in force and the special status of this institution as mentioned above. Their decision-making and efficiency guarantee at the same time the academic Autonomy and the inclusion in the academic, research and administrative processes. In this Evaluation Area, the EET provides additional suggestions to further focus on: improving coordination and harmonization of the research agenda and activities at all institutional education and research structures; and a more comprehensive research evaluation scheme and criteria for permanent staff performance evaluation.

Regarding the international partnership, although there are current developments concrete projects, exchange study programmes and a series of international partner institutions, they are still in the early stages of implementation and of receiving concrete and tangible benefits from them in terms of academic research. In this framework, the institutional strategy concerning the internationalization and strategy implementation actions need to be further elaborated and detailed down to the level of departments and academic staff, in terms of responsibilities and tasks accompanied by the corresponding timeline and deadlines.

**The Standards for the Study Programs, Teaching, and Evaluation are fully met.** In reaching this judgement, the review team noted one feature of good practice, made three recommendations, identified no weakness, and one affirmation of actions already being implemented. Throughout the review process AAF provided strong evidence to demonstrate its commitment to providing a coherent and resource based educational experience with strong connections to the labour market. In addition, the fact that in the upcoming academic year the institution will have a brand new building for the Faculty of Defence is further evidence of the intention to improve every year. Nevertheless, the library was a clear weak point with very little if any digitalization, and that must be addressed promptly. As noted in the recommendations, AAF should also become more proactive in introducing itself and enviable academic offer to the outside 'civilian' community, which more often than not is not aware of the academy.

**The Standards for Scientific/Artistic Activity and Innovation are substantially met.** In reaching this judgement, the review team did not note any features of good practice, identified one weakness, made one recommendation, and did not find any specific new actions already being implemented. Generally speaking, throughout the review process AAF provided some evidence to demonstrate its commitment to high quality teaching and research commensurable to its legal status. Nevertheless, as noted in the analysis, the academy lacks a structured system for supporting institutionally and financially research by its staff in a way that can be considered commensurable with the status of an 'academy.' While a lot of progress has been done and the review team have noted it, this institution must put in place a coherent, structured and easy to follow system for supporting and promoting research particularly in light of the resources available to it and the international network that it can use particularly through the NATO alliance.

**The Standards for Students and their Support are fully met.** In reaching this judgement the review team noted one feature of good practice, did not identify any weaknesses, did not make any recommendations, and identified one action already being implemented. Throughout the review process AAF provided strong evidence to demonstrate its commitment to providing 360-degree support to its students in teaching, applied research, and sustainable employment. In fact, we can say that, as far as we are aware, there are not other institutions of higher education in Albania that offer the same kind of support and guaranteed employment to their students. In that regard, AAF is unique, avant-garde and an example to be followed by other institutions.

AFA undertook the review in accordance with ASCAL guidelines. The review team acknowledges the serious and correct engagement of AFA the process and the cooperation provided to the review team throughout the whole process, including the site visit phase.

## Summary of findings

### Good practice

The review team identified the following features of good practice:

- AAF considers the cooperation with the USMA "West Point" as a priority for exchanging the best practices in the field of education and trainings **[Annex I, Standard I.3]**
- Good sport and physical related activities **[Annex I, Standard II.11]**
- AAF's combination of theoretical and practical skills, the connection of students with the labour market, and overall support for [guaranteed] employment is a good practice. **[Annex No. 1, Standard III.16]**
- The extraordinary support provided to students through dedicated payment and free housing and food is identified by the review team as good practice. **[Annex No. 1, Standard V.1]**

### Weaknesses

The review team identified the following weaknesses:

- There is no access for physically impaired people in the buildings **[Annex I, Standard II.9]**
- Despite some efforts, the institution does not have a consolidated system in place - backed up by a dedicated budget - to ensure that research is supported institutionally to take place regularly and at a high quality. **[Annex No. 1, Standard IV.3]**

### Recommendations

The review team identified the following recommendations:

- More can be done to clarify the set of mechanisms within the implementation strategy plan on how to qualitatively monitor the strategy implementation success by setting the mechanisms crafting and updating such strategy, and how such objectives are monitored and commensurate with the budget and changes in the strategy in the reviewed medium-term budgets **[Annex I, Standard I.3]**
- There is a clear effort from the only Faculty to support the establishment and implementation of the education programmes, there is not a clear evidence on how the Military Research and Scientific Institute, the other basic unit of AFA is supporting this process, although this institute covers also the centres of high military education, whose activities are not object of the Law of the Higher Education **[Annex I, Standard I.4]**
- However, more can be done to include in the evaluation mechanisms focused on ongoing program improvement, stakeholders, partner institutions and other parties involved in the delivery or in the assessment of knowledge / competences benefited from such programs **[Annex I, Standard I.9]**
- At the moment, the contribution of the external non-academic partners on the programme improvements is limited to the feedback, which needs further attention to improvement, insights on open lectures or workshops on specific topics, but there is not at the moment an institutional procedure to carry out this process **[Annex I, Standard I.10]**
- The Review Team recommends that support for staff qualification and scientific promotion needs to be included within research plans and institutionalized agendas at the department, faculty, and research centre level **[Annex I, Standard II.3]**

- The evaluation team further encourages the institution to institutionalize and harmonize at the department and faculty level the scientific promotion and research in general since at the moment there is not a mechanism in place on how the selection process is carried out when the demand for participation in scientific activities exceeds the available budget. **[Annex I, Standard II.3]**
- More efforts can be dedicated to enhance a well-balanced presentation between the highly academically qualified permanent and part-time staff **[Annex I, Standard II.5]**
- The institution doesn't seem have a solid analysis on the impact of the cooperation agreements with national HEIs and specific partner NATO countries in the education and research activities of AFA **[Annex I, Standard II.19]**
- AFA doesn't have a fully functional mechanism in place to institutionally involve representatives of partner institutions to provide their insightful perspective and participate in the conduct of the job market study. **[Annex I, Standard II.21]**
- Accurate labour market analysis so to see how to adapt to the market needs those study programmes which face difficulties on attracting a higher number of students **[Annex I, Standard II.22]**
- To address low student registration numbers in both bachelor and master study programs and to increase the recognition of the institution outside of the military world, the review team recommend to the AAF to identify and implement a communication strategy to boost its visibility and consequently its student numbers. **[Annex No. 1, Standard III.4]**
- The Academy must take proactive measures to implement a meaningful digitalization of its library by making sure that students have dedicated online sources for learning and teaching. **[Annex No. 1, Standard III.21]**
- Now that AAF has finalized the internal restructuring, and in keeping with its status as an academy, the review team recommend that there needs to be a more structured and focused approach to research **[Annex No. 1, Standard III.9]**
- The review team recommend that the institution, overall, view research as a much more integral part of all its activities and integrate it in its actions and thinking. In that regard, the institution is encouraged to leverage its enviable international network to undertake cooperative research that heightens its status and capacitates further its staff. **[Annex No. 1, Standard IV.12; Standard IV.15]**

### **Affirmation of action being taken**

The review team identified the following affirmations:

- The opening of the new doctoral programmes is in the pipeline and it will be approved before the end of the year. **[Annex I, Standard I.2]**
- Since September of this year, the Academic Performance Card is in place to assess the quality and scientific progress made by the academic staff **[Annex I, Standard II.4]**.
- In the academic year 2024-25 the Faculty of Defence and Security will move into a new and modern building that will further enhance the dedicated space to teaching and learning. **[Annex No. 1, Standard III.19]**
- The ongoing implementation of the Pitagora system in cooperation with RASH for enabling students to receive all the necessary academic information online is recognized by the review team as an ongoing affirmation. **[Annex No. 1, Standard V.3]**




### Summary of judgements for each Evaluation Area

- 1 Standards for the Evaluation Area: Higher Education Institution Management, Autonomy and Quality Assurance are **fully met**.
- 2 Standards for Resources and Partnership are **substantially met**.
- 3 Standards for Study Programs, Teaching, and Evaluation **fully met**.
- 4 Standards for Scientific/Artistic Activity and Innovation are **substantially met**.
- 5 Standards for Students and their Support are **fully met**.

### Summary judgement

The reviewers recommend to the Accreditation Board that at Albanian University, the Quality Code Standards are **Substantially Met**.





## Detailed Report

### Evaluation Area 1: Higher Education Institution Management, Autonomy and Quality Assurance

- 1.1 Armed Forces Academy (AFA) has set up and put into full operation all governing and decision-making bodies academic and administrative, which exercise its activity and activity in accordance with law 80/15 on "Higher Education and Scientific Research in Higher Education Institutions in the Republic of Albania" and the Law No. 64/2014 dated 26.06.2014, "On the Powers and Authority of the Direction and Command of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Albania" **[Evidence 12]** as well as by-laws in line with all its normative acts, the most important of which is the DCM of 2020 granting a special status to this institution. AFA has approved the Statute as the funding document of the institution outlining the norms, mission aligned to objectives and academic freedom guaranteed by the Joint Order No. 833 issued by the Minister of Defence and the Minister of Education and Sports on 31/05/2022 **[Evidence 3]**. The General Regulation approved by the Senate **[Evidence 1.1]**, and other normative acts are drafted and regulate its activity in all aspects and activities of these Authorities/bodies such as: regulation of the main units **[Evidence 1.3]**, Regulations of the Study programmes **[Evidence 1.4]** as well as other regulations in the study programmes, administrative and scientific/education activities. There are normative acts of the institution drawing upon the Regulations of the Main Units, Regulation of the Basic Units, Regulations of the Study programs etc. Decision-making structures operate in accordance to the provisions in force and internal regulatory, acts and are subject to continuous improvements. Governing and decision-making bodies discuss and approve the relevant changes at the beginning of each academic year, such as: curricula / syllabi, academic structure, changes in the composition of the main/basic units and implement improvement steps **[Evidence 1.5]**. These changes are proposed by the interested units - and after undergoing a process of discussions if the proposed focus is in line with the annual research objectives of the main unit - are approved by the senate **[Evidence 1.5, SER, pg. 14]**. This was confirmed, supported and illustrated during triangular meetings in the institution (management, staff, and administration) **[M5, M7]**. In this context, concrete examples were the special regulations drafted, approved and implemented such as Curriculum Development Regulation, or the establishment of the Military Scientific Research Institute in the respect to changes in the regulatory framework to allow the structural institutional restructuring happening in 2023 **[Evidence 1.6]**. The mission of AFA is fully aligned with the general mission of higher education in the Republic of Albania and it aims to offer highly qualitative full education support for civilian and qualified students in the area of defence and security **[Evidence 16]**. The institution encourages the professional development of the academic staff by promoting participation in international conferences, courses and publish in international journals **[Evidence 1.35]** **[Annex I, Standard I.1]**
- 1.2 AFA is organized and operates in support of applicable law and its internal acts. From the documentary verification and during the site visit the External Evaluation Team (EET) found that the decision-making and governing bodies are functional abide with rules and regulations of non-public IALs and have a continuous activity supported by evidence **[Evidence 124, M4, M5, M7]**. There is an appropriate division of functions and tasks among structures, in accordance with legislation, ensuring efficiency in governance and institutional management **[Evidence 1.7]**, based on the strategic development plan proposed by the basic and main units as well as the Administrators of the Units, which are



approved by the Academic Senate and are part of the budget of the Ministry of Defence, whose general staff finalized the budget approval process **[Evidence 1.9]**. The Directorate of Support Services drafts, based on the development plans, the annual budget and the AFA mid-term 3-year budget, which are presented by the Senate to the Board of Administration for final approval **[Evidence 1.8]**. The latter establishes the rules for allocating financial resources to the IAL academic governing bodies. The Administration Board is the highest collegial administrative body in charge of financial and administrative management - although the budget is finally approved by the Ministry of Defence and the institution has to align in this respect - while Academic Senate is the highest management academic body, operating as a decision making collegial body in charge of the AFA's accomplishment of its mission **[Evidence 1.29]**. The Dean's Office is a decision-making collegial body responsible for drafting the main unit strategic development plan, building on the proposals of the main units based on their set of priorities being the managing authority of the faculty and its legal representative. The Dean is in charge of proposing the new programmes and is the decision-making body at the main unit **[Evidence 1.27]**, while the heads of basics units and departments are the academic governing authority and propose changes and priorities on which to determine research, education and human resources in collaboration with the Scientific Council at the MSRI **[Evidence 1.28]**. While the usual issues foreseen are managed by permanent structures, for specific issues or procedures such as the recruitment of academic staff and periodic evaluations, ad-hock commissions are set up in the functions of a certain process, whose activity is regulated in the relevant regulation and with the act of setting up these groups and commissions **[Evidence 1.30]**. The Council of Ethics is established with the task of reviewing university ethical issues and it makes proposals to the Rector on how to address such issues **[Evidence 16, Article 13]**. **[Annex I, Standard I.2]**

- 1.3 The current strategy of AFA 2024-2032 constitutes the basis for the development of the strategic plans of the IAL and it integrates the "Strategic Plan" to draft the AFA academic offer, collaboration with other academic institutes and research activities is based on previous experience, appreciation of the higher education system, achievements of other similar institutions at home and abroad, higher education developments in the IAL and economic, social, legal reforms undertaken in Albania as well as in the security level reforms **[Evidence 1.5]**. The Strategic Development Plan aims at the institutional consolidation of AFA as the only institution of higher military education committed to maintaining a high level of academic and scientific excellence in the field of military and security education and research **[Evidence 1.5/Annex 1.5b]**. The current Strategy mirrors AFA's goals and strategic objectives to achieve high quality on management and research development thanks to boosting sustainable development and cooperating with national and international High Education Institutes (HEI) **[Evidence 1.5/ Annex 1.5a]**. AFA considers the cooperation with the USMA "West Point" as a priority for exchanging the best practices in the field of education and trainings, which together with cooperation activities with HEIs in the country and abroad help to achieve the strategic goals of AFA **[Evidence 1.40]** However, more can be done to clarify the set of mechanisms within the implementation strategy plan on how to qualitatively monitor the strategy implementation success by setting the mechanisms crafting and updating such strategy, and how such objectives are monitored and commensurate with the budget and changes in the strategy in the reviewed medium-term budgets **[M12]**. **[Annex I, Standard I.3]**

- 1.4 Constituting units of all levels exercise their responsibilities and freedoms of action autonomously and have the right to argue their proposals and demands in the above






decision-making bodies [Evidence 1.10]. This fact, in addition to being supported by evidence, was also verified and confirmed during meetings with senior executives, heads of departments and AFA academic staff [M5, M7]. AFA has sanctioned academic autonomy and interdependence with the Ministry of Defence in the administrative activities as a principle in the functioning of all organs and structures, as well as in the operability of each individual that is part of its structure; academic, auxiliary-academic, administrative staff, including students. To enhance this process a quality structure is set up consisting of the Directory of Quality and Curricula (dedicated to assess the quality of the military-related subjects), Institutional Evaluation Commission and the Internal Permanent Quality Assurance Unit [Evidence 1.32 SER, pg. 15, M6]. This is present in the Statute and Regulations as well as other acts – such as the Academic Decision of the Senate [Evidence 1.13] that provide for the duties, responsibilities, rights and degrees of freedom of all figures at AFA. Self-governance is evident in organizational academic and administrative units, teaching, scientific activities, financial and administrative issues. matters [M6, M9] The Internal Quality Assurance Unit – starting at the Basic Unit with the dedicated ad-hoc groups - has a key role in monitoring and analysing the effectiveness of internal evaluation activities [Evidence 1.30]. Each Unit submits an annual action plan to Senate setting out matters to be addressed, as resulting from its analysis and it monitors the implementation of the action plan to ensure that matters are successfully concluded [Evidence 1.35]. AFA invites external experts to assist in the supervision and evaluation of institutional activities as well as curricular improvements [Evidence 1.30]. All of the above are also confirmed in the findings and conclusions from the academic staff conducted with AFA staff and students [M3, M5, M7]. AFA is organized to benefit from the combination of the education activities with the scientific Research Office with that of Academic Publications, which rely on the activities carried out by Basic units [Evidence 1.5/Annex 1.5.c]. There is a clear effort from the only Faculty to support the establishment and implementation of the education programmes, there is not a clear evidence on how the Military Research and Scientific Institute, the other basic unit of AFA is supporting this process, although this institute covers also the centres of high military education, whose activities are not object of the Law of the Higher Education. There is also a dedicated office at the IAL level dealing with international projects and cooperation with countries abroad, and support to the staff in the calls' application process [M4]. The list of current projects shows that international projects receive attention [Evidence 1.40]. [Annex I, Standard 1.4]

- 1.5 Internal debate is enhanced in the decision-making process thanks to periodical discussions of challenges and decisions in the collegial bodies. The Academic Senate is the highest collegial decision-making body at the University level and is composed by nine members from the academic staff of the Faculty of Defence and the Military Scientific Research Institute and one student. In accordance with the regulations on force, the Senate meets on regular sessions (three times during a semester) and takes all the decisions by a simple majority of votes [Evidence 1.1]. The decisions of the Senate are forwarded to the relevant units within 5 days from the signature of its chairperson [Evidence 1.6]. The Board of Administration is the Highest Collegial administrative body at the AFA. As in the case of the Senate and other collegial bodies, the decisions are taken following a process of proposals and discussion among members based on the priorities and proposals send by the main units [Evidence 1.48]. It consists in 7 members 3 of whom are employed part-time and the other 4 are staff of AFA and its meetings are not public and it meets three times in a quarter, but it may also held extraordinary meetings [Evidence 1.18, Article 15]. As in the other collegial meetings, the decisions are reflected in the minutes of the meeting.

The Rectorate is an executive collegial body chaired by the Rector and takes decisions with 50% of majority in its monthly meetings **[Evidence 1.18, Article 14]**. As mentioned above, the academic and administrative activity of AFA is carried out in accordance with national legislation, statute and relevant regulations. The internal acts also define the manner and procedure of how the proposals are forwarded from the bottom up, the discussion and the decision-making. Each collegial decision-making body, structure or unit, has clearly defined how different processes are organized which are initiated and then finalized **[Evidence 1.19]**. Boards and councils meet regularly, while information on agenda items is available to all staff in advance electronically. Arrangements for the operation of councils and boards, and to support collegial discussion and debate, are understood by staff and students **[M4, M5, M7]**. Deans and heads of departments are responsible for monitoring locally the implementation of decisions made by formally constituted boards and councils **[Evidence 1.29]**. In this context, the constituent units of all levels exercise their responsibilities and freedoms of action autonomously and have the right to argue their proposals and demands in the above decision-making bodies **[Evidence 1.48]**. This fact, in addition to being supported by evidence, was also verified and confirmed during meetings with senior executives, heads of departments and AFA academic staff **[M5, M7]**. **[Annex I, Standard 1.5]**

- 1.6 The annual report to the Ministry provides accounts of teaching and study programmes, scientific research, staffing, project activity, and economic and financial matters including also the general data on the institution performance **[Evidence 1.50]** The drafting process is led by Dean of the Faculty and the Rectorate drawing upon documentation of internal evaluation and self-assessment reports on departments and study programs and approved by the Academic Senate and the Board of Administration **[Evidence 1.50]**. AFA makes the final report available to relevant institutional structures, to staff and students through its website including also detailed data on revenues and expenditures as well as mid-term budget **[Evidence 1.52, M7]**. This is a key element in expanding the knowledge concerning the results but also on improving capacities on data collection, reporting and drafting of reports, as important skills in these processes and the spread of quality culture in AFA **[Evidence 1.52]**. Even during the visit to the institution we found that the academic and administrative managers, administrative units and academic staff were aware and were specifically involved in such processes **[M4, M5, M7]**. **[Annex I, Standard 1.6]**
- 1.7 Quality assurance activity is organized at three levels: a) institutional; b) programme; c) individual. At the institutional level the focus is placed on enhancing capacity building and service offered for basic units to achieve the study programmes and research objectives **[Evidence 1.54]**. At the programme level, the focus is on aligning study programmes with the labour market needs and monitoring their quality of implementation, while at the individual level, the focus is on quality assurance, so to motivate and support the professional growth of the academic staff and participation in projects and activities helping their further professionalization **[Evidence 1.53]**. The Institution's Quality Assurance strategy states that at the end of each semester and academic year, the basic units compile the respective reports, which include quantitative data on issues related to the study programmes, the validity of accreditation, the recruited academic staff the scientific and research activity and the presentation of the SWOT analysis for steps to be taken in the future **[Evidence 1.57]**. The quality assurance purpose is to further enhance the development of study programmes and there are dedicated structures carrying out the quality assurance for the academic programmes and the military ones offered at the high

military centres **[Evidence 1.58]**. AFA has established and it is functional the Internal Quality Assurance System and implements an institutional strategy for continuous quality improvement, wherein students and experts are involved, while for external partners drafting a specific strategy of involvement would be helpful **[Evidence 1.56]** *[Annex I, Standard I.7]*

- 1.8 The Internal Quality Assurance Unit for the academic programmes plans and organizes the internal evaluation of study programmes to achieve the formative objectives and the learning outcomes. AFA has approved criteria for improving programmes based on the insights provided by students, teachers or other stakeholders, and market labour needs, while this is done drawing upon the best European experience and the legal framework at the institutional and national level **[Evidence 1.60]**. The curricula revision considers also the constant updating of syllabuses mirroring – thanks to exchange programmes with prestigious academic institutions worldwide - the latest achievements in the field of research and literature perspective **[SER, pg. 28, M5]**. In addition to the above-mentioned bodies, specific structures are established in the AFA, such as the Curriculum Development Sector, where ad-hoc groups consisting of full time academic staff, who work on the revision of a curricula and syllabi in cooperation with lectures from other disciplines **[Evidence 1.61]**. The strategy for quality assurance has allowed the establishment of various operational mechanisms such as: the assessment report based on the students' questionnaire; the outcomes of the focus groups and the Academic Performance Card; self-assessment feedback from lectures; the assessment of head of department for each lecturer; self-assessment report of the study programme drafted by an ad-hoc unit established at the department level and composed of academic staff **[Evidence 1.60]**. Such variety of input is integrated in the Internal Quality Assurance Unit (IQAU) annual report to enhance the quality of the study programmes. The results of the IQAU report are then forwarded at the department level, where are proposed the action-steps to make the necessary improvements in the study programme. The proposed improvements, initially approved by the Dean of Faculty and the Office of Curricula, are finally approved by the Senate. In accordance to the law, the Ministry of Education and Science is informed in case the changes are within the 20% improvement rate or is asked for approval of the new programme for a higher improvement rate **[Evidence 1.64]**. The activity of the IQAU is supervised by academic senate in which do take part the key academic figures of the institution and one member from the Students Council. This commission has an external member to share a different complementary perspective and best practises from elsewhere. *[Annex I, Standard I.8]*
- 1.9 Ensuring a constant improvement of teaching quality remains an AFA objective. To work on that, the HEI monitors and evaluates programmes constantly thanks to: questionnaires of students; institutional and self-assessment of teachers; through staff mobility frequency and lessons learned; academic staff progress based this year also on the Academic Performance Card; staff promotion, and engagement of the academic staff in scientific projects **[Evidence 1.67]**. As explained above, the quality assurance activities at the departmental level helps to prepare the annual self-evaluation report of the study programme in collaboration with the IQAU. This report is drafted for each study programme and is integrated in the reports that main units draft for the collegial structures of the AFA, while it is also published on the official pages of the HEI **[Evidence 1.65]**. The report draws on and includes the following information: the curriculum quality implementation of the study programmes throughout the academic year and the academic staff engaged; statistics of the teaching secretariat on student registration and progress rate; analysis of

the students feedback questionnaires; and input from focus groups **[Evidence 1.66]**. This process is harmonized with the annual staff self-assessment procedure, semester and annual reports of the Department, Internal and External Evaluation report as well as on recommendation provided by the previous programme accreditation report (if the latter has undergone this process) **[Evidence 1.68]**. However, more can be done to include in the evaluation mechanisms focused on ongoing program improvement, stakeholders, partner institutions and other parties involved in the delivery or in the assessment of knowledge / competences benefited from such programs. **[Annex I, Standard I.9]**

- 1.10 As explained above, the Internal quality assurance of the study programmes at the AFA is carried out by the IQAU in cooperation with the internal evaluations groups set up at the faculty level, with the participation of the specialized academic staff and lead by the Dean **[Evidence 1.56]**. The assessment of the study programmes is conducted based on the students (two times per year) questionnaire, self-assessments of the academic and administrative staff questionnaires (once per year), programme assessment, the results of which are discussed in various reports as mentioned above and provide the platform upon which are realized by IQAU the quality assessment conducted also with the support of the internal evaluation group **[Evidence 1.66]**. The results of these evaluations are documented by IQAU in a written form and sent to each basic unit, to the Rectorate and the Academic Senate, in order to be included in their meetings' agenda, in case some improvements steps are considered as necessary **[Evidence 1.56]**. Once the collected information is analysed, it is shared with all the relevant institutional instances, which discuss it in dedicated meetings and communicate it confidentially to the interested groups. The IQAU publishes both the evaluation results and the planned objectives/goals of the respective study programme and follows the implementation of all the corrective steps to improve the quality aspects **[Evidence 1.69]**. At the moment, the contribution of the external non-academic partners on the programme improvements is limited to the feedback, which needs further attention to improvement, insights on open lectures or workshops on specific topics, but there is not at the moment an institutional procedure to carry out this process **[M3]**. **[Annex I, Standard I.10]**
- 1.11 The IQAU has a supporting, advisory, coordinating, monitoring and administrative role in conducting the internal quality activities in order to also enhance the process of creating for the institution an internal quality culture **[Evidence 1.69]**. As mentioned above, in this activity it is supported by the other academic and administrative structures to which it provides constant expertise in the process of developing the quality assurance mechanisms **[SER, pg.32]**. The key objective here is to identify the best practices in the academic activities in order to share and disseminate them, while being able to identify the right strategies and take the necessary decisions to address the evidenced criticalities **[Evidence 1.70]**. For that the IQAU drafts an annual report which includes information and evaluation of the academic and administrative services offered to students as well as the recommending steps to address them **[Evidence 1.71]**. The report is initially presented to the main units and in the following to the Academic Senate, for finally being available for all interested stakeholders **[SER, pg.32, M7]**. AFA organizes periodic activities with the academic staff and students for their information and awareness-raising on the long-term quality assurance and study program improvement, such as the inclusion of such topics in the orientation week for students' information, while specific trainings on the topics related to the quality assurance are offered to the academic staff **[Evidence 1.69]**. **Annex I, Standard I.11]**



## Findings

### Good practice

The review team identified the following feature of good practice:

- AFA has established an academic cooperation with the USMA "West Point" as a priority for exchanging the best practices in the field of education and trainings and also in setting up new education programmes [*Annex I, Standard I.3*]

### Weaknesses

The review team did not identify any weakness.

### Recommendations

The review team identified the following recommendations:

- More can be done to clarify the set of mechanisms within the implementation strategy plan on how to qualitatively monitor the strategy implementation success by setting the mechanisms crafting and updating such strategy, and how the settled objectives are monitored and commensurate with the budget and changes in the strategy in the reviewed medium-term budgets [*Annex I, Standard I.3*].
- There is a clear effort from the only Faculty to support the establishment and implementation of the education programmes, there is not a clear evidence on how the Military Research and Scientific Institute, the other basic unit of AFA is supporting this process, although this institute covers also the centres of high military education, whose activities are not object of the Law of the Higher Education. [*Annex I, Standard I.4*]
- However, more can be done to include in the evaluation mechanisms focused on ongoing program improvement, stakeholders, partner institutions and other parties involved in the delivery or in the assessment of knowledge / competences benefited from such programs. [*Annex I, Standard I.9*].
- More can be done to include in the evaluation mechanisms focused on ongoing program improvement, stakeholders, partner institutions and other parties involved in the delivery or in the assessment of knowledge and competences benefited from the study programs. [*Annex I, Standard I.9*].
- It can be helpful to establish an institutional procedure on how to collect the feedback of external stakeholders involved in the curricula improvement process. [*Annex I, Standard I.10*]

### Affirmation of action being taken

The review team identified the following affirmation:

- Opening of the new doctoral programmes is in the pipeline [*Annex I, Standard I.2*]

### Judgement

The standards for the Higher Education Institution – Management, Autonomy and Quality Assurance are **Fully Met**.



## Evaluation Area 2: Resources and Partnerships

- 2.1 AFA applies a clear recruitment procedure which is followed and detailed in accordance with the needs for academic, support or administrative staff to facilitate the procedures during this process, the Personnel Organization Table and in compliance with the Law No. 64/2014, the law on Career in the Armed Forces as well as the Decisions of the Council of Ministers No. 156 date 19.02.2022 "On granting the special statute to the Armed Forces Academy as the sole public higher education institution in the field of Defence and National security, outlining its organization and operation **[Evidence 2]**. This procedure is set out in the AFA Regulation, and in the Regulation on the Regulation of Labour Relations with Personnel (AFA Regulation Article 89-90) and Albanian Labour Code **[Evidence 1.1]**. Relevant announcements are published on the official website and social networks of AFA and contain the requirements, criteria for candidates and the specific vacancy. Vacancies are published by the Human Resources office of the Ministry of Defence ([www://afa.mil.al](http://www://afa.mil.al) and [www.mod.gov.al/](http://www.mod.gov.al/)), as well as in the official website of AFA <https://www.mod.gov.al/newsroom-2/njofitimet/6378-shpallje-vendi-i-lire-pune-pedagog-per-informatiken-rep-usht-5002-fakulteti-i-mbrojtjes-dhe-sigurise-ne-afa>. The procedural provisions followed are clearly defined and guarantee fairness and correctness of the process thanks to a transparent procedure for all applicants in line with the needs of the specific study programmes **[Evidence 2.3]**. There are specific employment policies for academic staff, assistant academic staff **[Evidence 2.8]** and administrative staff **[Evidence 2.10]**. For the military personnel, the criteria are not published on the official websites of the Ministry of Defence and AFA as they are part of a classified network **[Evidence 2.10]**. Requests for recruitment of full-time or part-time academic staff are submitted by the basic unit, which defines the criteria and requirements for the candidate – approved by the Dean of Faculty and the Rector - while the selection is made by an ad-hoc Commission set up specifically for each recruitment procedure set up by the Ministry of Defence following these procedural steps of approval: 1) basic unit; 2) chief of staff; 3) Minister of Defence **[Evidence 2.8]**. Each step approval is completed within 7 days. The request for part-time staff of researchers or foreign scholars are conducted based on the respective institutional and national regulations, and the specific need of the departments **[Evidence 2.3]**. For administrative staff, vacancy and criteria are determined by the AFA administrator **[Evidence 2.10]**. After the selection, the successful candidate signs an employment contract, defined in the relevant model according to the function and time of engagement **[Evidence 2.9, M10]**. AFA provides comprehensive information for both staff and students on its policies, procedures and activities. The website is a useful source of public information, supplemented by additional info provided through a password-protected portal [<https://academia.edu.al/sq/kreu/>]. AFA also produces a variety of information leaflets, brochures and books in hard copy and the regular periodical journal: Military Magazine, where is published the academic and scientific work of national and international experts in the field of security. **[SER p.22-23; 25]**. These were verified and confirmed by the assessment team during the meetings held especially with staff, students and admin staff responsible for the information system and IT at AFA **[Evidence 2.7, M4, M5, M7, M10]** **[Annex I, Standard II.1]**.
- 2.2 AFA implements clear policies on constant promotion and qualifications of the full-academic staff in line with the Law on Higher Education 80/2015 and other relevant legal acts based also on the needs evidenced during the periodical evaluation by the respective departments (drawing upon self-evaluation, students' evaluation) **[Evidence 2.11]**. Lectures and scientific researchers are entitled to autonomy and academic freedom as long as it's not

hindering the achievement of curricular objectives and programmes successful implementation and rules of security considering the specific status of the institution **[Evidence 1.41]**. AFA supports the engagement of staff in external activities such as conferences and support to participate in scientific symposiums to present the proper papers or research products **[Evidence 2.12]** and allows to them the right to recover the working position (sabbatical period) **[Evidence 1.1, Article 39]**. Beyond specific and area of competence research specializations, HEI organizes various qualification activities such as trainings seminars and workshops and capacity building projects in order to support further professional development of the academic and support staff **[Evidence 1.42]**. Academic and admin staff organize info activities such as the for students starting their Bachelor and Master programmes so to inform them on their rights and obligations, curricular/extra-curricular activities, and other international projects opportunities **[Evidence 5.6]**. AFA supports and encourages its staff to become member of sports, informative, literary or social activities organized by AFA or other partner institutions and has organized with students specific activities to promote the exchange of ideas such as the Student Council including the permanent collegial bodies where students participate such as the Academic Senate and IQAU **[Evidence 2.14]**. HEI implements policies aiming at the integration of its own staff in the institutional activities, such as ad-hoc commissions or the quality assurance groups, but that is done considering the workload of teaching and research activities of the academic staff **[M5, M7]**. **[Annex I, Standard II.2]**

- 2.3 The performance of the academic staff is periodically evaluated through a special standard form on annual basis by the heads of main units who perform performance appraisal, for all staff and this appraisal is included in the personal file of the staff and it consists of assessing the lecturer's teaching performance, quality of scientific research and the contribution in administrative activities of AFA **[Evidence 2.11]**. As explained in Chapter 1, students are also part of the staff evaluation by completing questionnaires that are drafted, administered and processed by the IQAU, whose results are reviewed by management and kept in mind to take appropriate action, if appropriate, and improve performance in the future **[Evidence 1.50]**. The Assessment Team verified that this process was adequately implemented thanks to the submitted documentation and meetings held with the students of both cycles, it results that this process was performed online, without compromising the process and the reliability of the results **[M3, M5]**. Meanwhile, the evaluation of the research performance of the academic staff is performed by the basic units with criteria related to scientific publications, participation in conferences and important scientific events, direction and participation in projects are key part of the lecturers' assessment **[Evidence 2.15]**. From this year, a special assessment tool the Academic performance Card will be employed to assess the research performance of the academic staff **[M5, M7]**. AFA envisages several activities and processes aimed at qualifying the staff of the departments in the teaching and research plan. In the annual plans of the departments and faculties are foreseen in-depth and profiled qualifications for the staff on the areas and subjects, in which they are lecturers / researchers as well as through the participation in international projects **[Evidence 2.16]**. The group verified through documentation and meetings with the academic staff the realization of separate meetings / trainings or in the framework of national projects / programs **[M5, M7]**. In support of the scientific qualification, it was ascertained with clear evidences the organization of several national and international scientific conferences, in cooperation with universities in Europe, to focused on experience exchange including visiting of national and foreign professors and experts from Italy, Greece, Bulgaria, the USA, in order to train and enhance the capacity of its own staff, thanks also to the regular exchanges with USMA West Point **[Evidence 1.43]**. AFA

enhances the promotion of academic staff, through financial support in various scientific activities such as: participation in conferences, symposia, organized at AFA in cooperation with its institutional partners or others; by financing publications in international scientific journals; drafting of various course-materials, in the form of books or lectures addressing a relevant aspect of the basic unit research activity **[Evidence 1.67]**. Moreover, as mentioned above to each lecturer is offered the opportunity to conduct financed research and/or related activities or publications but this sum can be even higher if the research is within the basic-unit priorities **[M5]**. However, the Evaluation Team finds that support for staff qualification and scientific promotion needs to be included within research plans, institutionalized agendas at the department, faculty, and research centre level. The AFA has to organize, coordinate and harmonize this process at the individual level and harmonize the research strategy, with research plans and projects at the unit level so to enhance individual professionalization. This would increase at the same time the efficiency of research investments and the continuous qualification of the academic staff in a harmonious way and in the service of the research component of the institution at the same time. The evaluation team further encourages the institution to institutionalize and harmonize at the department and faculty level the scientific promotion and research in general since at the moment there is not a mechanism in place on how the selection process is carried out when the demand for participation in scientific activities exceeds the available budget. **[Annex I, Standard II.3]**

- 2.4 AFA cooperates with students to arrange a variety of social events and initiatives, as well as to offer their contribution to societal and community activities, such as book promotion and specific talks for community on the domestic violence, juvenile delinquency etc **[Evidence 2.18, M5]**. The institution has organized several social / educational activities, such as public talks on the right to privacy in conditions of cyber security **[Evidence 2.18]**. Facilities are available to enable staff and students to meet informally, and AFA encourages and supports staff in participating in sporting and social activities. This fact was confirmed by both students and staff **[M3, M5, M7]**. AFA pursues a policy of life and health insurance. Based on this, each employment contract is declared to the relevant state bodies, and each person employed in AFA is entitled to benefits as provided by Law No. 7703/1993, "On social security in the Republic of Albania". The rights deriving from this law are expressly provided for in the individual employment contract **[Evidence 2.19]**. **[Annex I, Standard II.4]**
- 2.5 AFA policies foresee within the framework of continuous improvement of quality parameters as a key to enhance the sustainability of academic staff. The latter is provided with employment contracts as full-time academic staff (FTAS) as well as with part-time Contracts (CAS) in accordance with the Law on Higher Education 80/2015 as well as the Labour Code of the Republic of Albania for both military and civilian personnel. Full-time staff are entitled to request funding from AFA for a scientific activity inside or outside the country or a scientific publication in the field that constitutes a priority for the respective basic unit, while the recruitment policy is increasingly focused on employing personnel at a higher level of the academic progress **[Evidence 2.20]**. To further enhance the academic progress, full-time staff members are entitled to reduce their teaching and institutional workload as well as to take a sabbatical year, with the approval of the basic unit for periods of time up to one year **[Evidence 2.22]**. Such supporting policies are the results of analysis from the staff questionnaires, self-assessment, student surveys, all which have contributed to have an accurate towards the academic staff further specialisation and personnel development **[Evidence 22]**. AFA ensures that the categories of academic staff are in line



with the age, experience and other requirements necessary to guarantee exchanges between generations, to ensure the progress of basic units **[Evidence 1.53]**. However, more efforts can be dedicated to enhance a well-balanced presentation between the highly academically qualified permanent and part-time staff and the presence of academic staff with the qualification of Associate or full professor **[Evidence 2.22]**. **[Annex I, Standard II.5]**

- 2.6 The personnel assessment policies for the academic and non-academic staff and the procedures related to their implementation are specifically defined in the legislation in force and in the internal acts of AFA as the statute and institutional regulation aiming at conducting this process at all levels: departmental, faculty and institutional level **[Evidence 1.52]**. There are several evaluation of staff performance: a) Evaluation at the departmental level carried out at the end of each semester based on the following criteria: the average evaluation obtained in the students' questionnaire; the evaluation of the correctness of the implementation of the lessons through the semester; a self-completed report **[Evidence 1.57]**; the evaluation of the head of the department on the performance of institutional tasks at the department, and on their scientific activity and trainings as stated on the lecturers' self-declarations in the scientific activity form **[Evidence 1.66]**. b) Evaluation by students' questionnaires conducted two times a year: one at the end of the first semester and one at the end of the second semester **[Evidence 2.29]**. The questionnaire is always conducted before the exam season and the focus groups are organized by IQAU according to their agenda **[Evidence 1.57]**. AFA supports the fulfilment of annual academic obligations by promoting staff's participation in national or international conferences organized by AFA or by partner HEIs, publication of scientific research work, especially for the academic staff, who aim to increase their academic level have the opportunity to publish in this journal after going through a review process to guarantee the quality of the scientific work **[Evidence 2.16]**. Publication efforts are harmonized with organization of national and international scientific conferences, which AFA organizes in the field of military art and security, areas for which the institutions is professionally accredited. That is also facilitated by a ample space available of 19.175 square meters dedicated to economic activities **[Evidence 2.23]**. Another approach to motivate the academic staff members through promotion of various incentives based on the academic titles and scientific degrees they possess, as well as on the contribution they make to the Institution **[Evidence 1.66]**. **[Annex I, Standard II.6]**
- 2.7 AFA has an conducted its economic activities main two buildings during the academic years 2021-2024: a two story main building (FDS) and a three-story building housing academic, assistant academic and administrative staff **[Evidence 2.24]**. The respective AFA structures are responsible thanks to detailed plan for the security, rehabilitation, expansion, and/or restructuring of its real estate and the financial resources for that **[Evidence 2.26]**. AFA prioritizes the proper financial resources to support an effective management and maintenance in the financial budget of the institution **[Evidence 2.26]**. In function of increasing the quality of teaching and improve the infrastructure of the scientific facilities the university operates currently in five different buildings and it is included in the annual budget of the academy and allocated resources to the maintenance of this infrastructure. **[Evidence 2.26, Learning Resource Tour]** **[Annex I, Standard II.7]**
- 2.8 AFA has appropriate resources for staff and students and the delivery of the programs that it offers. These include lecture rooms, seminar rooms, computer rooms, offices and an internet space **[Evidence 2.23, Learning Resource Tour]**. A library with the contemporary literature enriched with the adequate infrastructure for students, while the access of books

online is also available for students, although at a limited level due to the security of the online network posed by the institution [M.4]. Teaching facilities are appropriate for the delivery of the programs offered and are constructed to meet the required standards such as equipment of classrooms with projectors, computer rooms, [Evidence 2.23]. Teaching halls rooms offer a satisfactory teaching, learning and working environment with suitable space, lighting and heating [Learning Resource Tour]. There are on-site sports facilities, while students stated their satisfaction about the current situation [M3, M45]. AFA provides a technical report on the facilities and infrastructure and has confirmed that they comply with all necessary technical requirements. [Learning Resource Tour]. AFA ensures also the fulfilment of the norms related to the usable area per student - with a surface of 30,3 square meters - in accordance with the quotas approved by MES [Evidence 2.24]. Specific attention is paid to ensure the necessary surface and laboratory space for students studying in the programmes of computer science and in the facilitation areas related to military preparation techniques [Evidence 1.53] [Annex I, Standard II.8]

- 2.9 AFA has taken all the necessary steps to guarantee lecture rooms, halls, administration offices and infrastructure, which respects the ISO standards and ensure a 30% of natural lightening in the buildings [SER Pg. 43, Learning Resource Tour] AFA follows a policy to support students with special needs and students differently able. In these respects, it awards scholarships for excellent students those in economic difficulties or foreseen by the specific law provisions and students in need [M3]. Special support is offered to academic and administrative staff in cases of health problems, family problems, etc [M5, M7]. Infrastructure for people with disabilities is adequate in one of the buildings, while there is available the infrastructure for the sanitary and hygienic services, and for assuring the implementation of the safety rules [Evidence 2.23]. Access is confined to the ground floor of the buildings for people with special needs in the central AFA building, and in the non-reconstructed buildings, it is entirely and conveniently accessible to access classrooms, facilities and other services including sanitation [Learning Resource Tour]. [Annex I, Standard II.9]
- 2.10 AFA provides the necessary teaching laboratories for the study programs it offers especially in the field of ICT and cybersecurity, the institution provides adequate infrastructure for the development of laboratories, teaching/professional practices and seminars/exercises [Evidence 1.57]. Support staff assists students to carry out the work in the AFA laboratories [SER Pg.28]. The Cybercrime and ICT laboratories constitute a good practise in creating for students the appropriate conditions to apply the acquainted knowledge. [Learning Resource Tour]. These laboratories are equipped with the necessary infrastructure for the safety and security of the students and is distributed on regulations of the relevant study programmes and displayed in the governing operational framework of laboratories [Learning Resource Tour, SER Pg.45]. [Annex I, Standard II.10]
- 2.11 AFA provides all the necessary infrastructure places for students and academic staff to be able to spend time and conduct leisure activities with a cafeteria, a coffee bar, an indoor cinema and a cultural centre [Evidence 1.53]. AFA has also made available for its staff a designated sports areas such as a futsal pitch, that of a normal soccer pitch, and two indoor gyms where students can exercise on regular basis, so to address the problem of limited physical activities during the lecture hours [Learning Resource Tour]. A first aid room is situated in the premises of AFA, and is equipped with all

the necessary infrastructure in case of emergency use **[Learning Resource Tour, Evidence 2.24]. [Annex I, Standard II.11]**

- 2.12 AFA has established the Support Services Directorate (SSD) as a permanent structure responsible for building, maintenance and assessment of the infrastructural conditions of the AFA buildings, tasked also in issuing and directing specific working groups are created for the ordinary maintenance of each of the HEI's buildings including coordination and implementation of the necessary maintenance activities in five reconstructed and re-evaluated buildings **[Evidence 1.1, Article 27, paragraph c]**. Periodical surveys of students and academic staff include also insights on the building qualities and provide useful inside in further improving the quality of the infrastructure **[Evidence 2.27, Learning Resource Tour]**. The buildings completely meet the hygiene and sanitary standards while avoiding elements of danger, although old ones are not thermally insulated; most of the institution's windows are double-glazed not only to ensure stable internal temperatures but also to avoid noise from the outside. The institution continuously maintains and reconstructs the premises which present problems related to insulation to avoid moisture and not only **[Evidence 2.27, Learning Resource Tour]. [Annex I, Standard II.12]**
- 2.13 AFA possesses full documentation of academic activity in hard copy and electronic form **[M4, Learning Resource Tour]**. AFA archives hard copy material in accordance with legal requirements and collects and stores data on programmes, students and institutional activities both digitally and in hard copy formats. The Archives-Protocol Office is in charge of collecting official information and storing the official documentation of the institution dating from the establishment and commencement of its activity, both in written and electronic form **[Evidence 2.28, Learning Resource Tour]**. In the archive are stored all documents of an academic nature (curricula, syllabi, relevant changes and their official acts) as well as that of an administrative nature of all sectors (human resources, finance, inventories, etc.) **[M4, Learning Resource Tour]**. To document the activity and scientific activity of the academic staff and students, AFA maintains and administers all publications of the academic staff, which are used as teaching or study materials, enriching from year to year the library fund and publishes its scientific journal and the publications of national and international scientific conferences **[Evidence 2.27, SER pg.47]**. Part of this archive were also the student diplomas, syllabi, programs, other publications of cultural, historical character, etc, stored in the Faculties Secretariats, Library, Archive and Chief Secretary. According to the regulation, AFA stores this property in both hardcopy and electronic formats **[Evidence 2.27, Learning Resource Tour]**. All processes of storage and processing of personal data of students follow the principle of confidentiality and in accordance with the requirements of legislation on personal data protection **[Evidence 2.28]**. The main teaching secretary collects and manages databases related to student enrolment, registration number, personal data, etc. in accordance with bylaws in force. The process of information and registration of new students is realized by the Office of Teacher Secretariat, as well as the secretaries and Chief Secretaries **[Evidence 2.28, M4]**. Information on the criteria and application procedure can also be obtained online on the official website as well as in the information brochures that contain all the study programs **[A2.46]**. The detailed transfer criteria and procedures are defined in the AFA General Regulations, the Registration and Transfer Regulations and the Study Program Regulations. Faculties' Chief Secretaries compile, administer and are responsible for the maintenance of the basic register, the results and the minutes of the final exams, in physical and electronic form **[Evidence 1.61, M4]**. Information on the academic activity of students will also become available in the electronic form at the online secretariat

(<https://AFA.pitagora.rash.al/>) Diplomas and supplements are distributed in written form only. The diploma supplement is also provided in English languages [SER Pg. 47]. The administration of the University is instead the structure responsible for processing and issuing statistics, whether these are occasional or on annual basis, following the requirements of the HEI and MAS. The initial information for the collection of statistics derives from the teaching secretariat. The general administrator: a) keeps detailed data on registered students, transferred students, students remaining in internship, students who have left and students who have graduated for each study program over the years; b) draws and keeps up the records of the issuance of diplomas and certificates, as well as the incoming and outgoing protocol; c) issues diplomas accompanied by a supplement and list of grades [Evidence 2.29, M4]. [Annex I, Standard II.13]

2.14 One of the important means of information and communication, especially in times of pandemic is the "Share AFA", which also serves as a source of information and communication for students and academic staff [Evidence 2.29, M3]. Students can access the portal and use, exchange information, get information about exams, results, curricula, teaching schedule, lectures and other teaching materials related to the academic process. AFA has an integrated information management system using both the public website and the password-protected portal through which students and staff can access confidential information [www.afa.edu.al](http://www.afa.edu.al) [M3, M5]. The information system is managed and administered by the IT offices and all units that store or exchange information, documentation and others. While academic units communicate and exchange info and data related to the academic process, leadership and intercommunication between staff as well as issues related to students, study programs, decision making organs and admin structures administer information related to student data, teaching documentation, contract, matriculation, other documents related to financial aspects, academic obligations, etc [Evidence 2.29, M3]. AFA provides comprehensive information for both staff and students on its policies, procedures and activities. The website is a useful source of public information, which is supplemented by additional information provided through a password-protected portal. (<https://www.afa.mil.al>). AFA also produces a variety of information leaflets, brochures and books in hard copy. The latter were confirmed by the assessment team during the meetings held especially with staff, students and persons responsible for the information system and IT at AFA [M3, M4, M10]. [Annex I, Standard II.14]

2.15 AFA has developed or adapted the IT systems and services to help students and teachers in the process of developing a coherent system for the online learning activities and the exchange of information between students and the institution for a range of services [Evidence 2.30, M3]. Students and academic staff use this access independently, both for the teaching process and for research thanks to the full access to the Lan internet network and Wi-Fi, the quality of which is very high (SHARE AREA) a dedicated internal online space in order to respect the security provision rules of the institution. The latter is also adopted and used for the internal institutional needs in terms of managing the documentation and store sharable information among the collegial structures such as the rectorate, department as well as admin offices [Evidence 2.30]. The degree of using these systems was verified during the visit to the institution and confirmed in meetings with staff and students [M5, Learning Resource Tour]. AFA webpage is a dynamic platform, constantly updated, which provides detailed information about the study programs, the organizational structure of the institution, the composition of the academic staff, other scientific and social activities, etc. and at the same time enables the distribution of quick information on activities developed (<https://ualbania.al/pages/fakultete.html?id=39> ). Other





social platforms such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram are other platforms used by the institution for the purpose of communication, interaction, information dissemination and promotion are: the official website [**Learning Resource Tour, M3**]. From the visit of the website it results that in it are published the public data and information, the statute, regulation, development strategy, study programs, tuition fees, financial support, academic and scientific activities, academic staff, full-time and part-time, list of national and international partners, annual report, etc, while the scientific "Military Journal" is published for security reasons in the website of the Ministry of Defence. (<https://afa.edu.al/sq/kreu/>). During the site visit, we found that all buildings have a dedicated internet line, which covers with Internet and Wi-Fi all the facilities of both buildings at the disposal of AFA. All auditoriums were equipped with a computer, video projector and internet, a computer room where students could get information or use for internet navigation as well as online access and consultation of the electronic library [**Evidence 2.31, Learning resource tour**]. In each of the AFA buildings there were electronic laboratory rooms complete with computers and laptops with about 25 PCs for each room. Their effective use was also confirmed by the students during the meetings (although the teaching was done mainly online and without physical presence) and is one of the findings of the students' feedback [**Learning Resource Tour, M3, M5**]. [**Annex I, Standard II.15**]

- 2.16 As public higher education institution AFA is granted an annual state budget in accordance with the needs based on the financial resources organized on a medium and long-term financial program in accordance with national standards and financial drafting and reporting rules designed in accordance with the National Standards of financial drafting and reporting and other rules provided by Law No. 80/2015, Law No. 9901, of 14 April 2008, "On Traders and Trading Companies", Law No. 9228, of 29 April 2004 "On Accounting and Financial Statements", as well as other regulations. The drafting process is initiated by the basic units on a two stage approval progress (April and August) by the Service Support Directorate for then being discussed in the rectorate and finally approved by the Ministry of Defence [**Evidence 1.7**]. Financial management is regulated by special regulations and is administered by the Service Support Directorate and administered by the Office of Finance [**Evidence 2.33**]. In drafting and allocating the budget – after the approval from the Ministry of defence - AFA implements the financial legislation in force and the structuring according to the public sector; according to the latter, the revenues are generated from the annual tuition fees for students attending the master programme while for bachelor students, the institution offers full scholarship, food and accommodation [**Evidence 1.7, M4, M7**]. On the basis of this Reporting, by September, the Board of Administration and the Academic Senate make decisions regarding the budget for the following year by structuring and detailing each item and structure drawing upon the suggestion of the SSD and approval from the Ministry of Defence. The following draft budget considers the resources and needs of the basic and main units and is submitted for discussion first to the Senate for aspects and effects in the academic activity - detailed at the faculty and department level - and is shared with the basic units to manage its use and implementation [**Evidence 2.33**]. AFA drafts an annual and three-year budgetary plan and allocates finance in accordance with legal requirements and the Statute. Heads of department prepare draft budgets that are compiled into faculty budgets by the respective deans. Faculty budgets are then compiled into an institutional budget, which is approved by the SSD in cooperation with the governing bodies of AFA. [**Evidence 1.7**]. The institution defined the salaries for supplementary load burdened by the academic staff, be them contract-based or invited. [**Annex I, Standard II.16**]

- 2.17 AFA provides the necessary tools for the implementation of financial policies provided in the financial program such as the special structure, which has been set up and operates in the organizational structure of AFA, that also exercises the task of drafting and implementing the Financial Program **[Evidence 1.7]**. The institution performs periodic analyses and reports on the realization of financial indicators for the previous year and forecasts for the following year. In the Financial Reporting, the budget and expenses are detailed according to the academic structure, covering all the academic and administrative activity of AFA, as well as investments in infrastructure, expenses for other activities such as social, sports, etc **[Evidence 2.33]**. The respective accompanying report is submitted for discussion and approval to SA and BA. The most important indicators become part of the Annual Report of AFA, which after approval by SA and BA are sent to Ministry and published on the official website of the Institution **[Evidence 1.7]**. The allocation of budgets at the faculty and department level is monitored monthly by the Administration Board and managed by the Office of Financial Reporting and Supervision **[Evidence 2.33, M4 M10]**. Based on the information of the last 3 years that the Finance Office and the Administrator prepare - as part of the Report on the realization of the financial indicators of the year - a special Table with detailed data regarding all elements of expenditures of the last 3 years and the financial plan for the following year is provided. **[Annex I, Standard II.17]**
- 2.18 The financial activity of AFA is subject to Legal Auditors of the Financial Statements, in accordance with the law on accounting and the international requirements of the Audit of Financial reporting. Since the approval of the restructured Statute according to Law 80/2015 on Higher Education and Scientific Research in the Republic of Albania, while the Internal Audit office of the Ministry of Defence also operates in conducting the financial operations at AFA making the results public **[Evidence 2.33]**. The institution's Financial Statements is annually published, accompanied by the Legal Audit report, in accordance with the Law on Accounting and the Law on ICS **[Evidence 2.34]**. After analysis and discussions in the relevant structures of AFA, the financial activity report, after being drafted by the Rectorate, is discussed in the meetings of the Academic Senate and the Board of Administration and is made available to the National Registering Centre **[Evidence 2.34]** **[Annex I, Standard II.18]**
- 2.19 AFA enhances an open strategy for cooperation and partnership at regional, national and international level. This is also expressed in the institutional strategy for development focusing on the following priorities: 1) building partnership; 2) supporting innovation and entrepreneurship; 3) enabling practical experience; 4) promoting cultural exchange; supporting ongoing education **[Evidence 1.4]**. To further enhance such cooperation the AFA has drafted the key institutional objectives which defines the concrete action plans of of the cooperation policy, where cooperation with external partners is specified as one of the key issues in the strategy and integrates it in the institution's Strategic Plan. The latter defines high quality management, research and development objectives aiming to creating a national, regional community based on sustainable development. This can be realized thanks to a continuous cooperation and exchange of experiences with National and International HEIs. In this framework, AFA has established partnerships with educational and scientific research institutions with the aim of cooperation in the direction of developing the necessary capacities by promoting scientific and cultural exchange initiatives. With regard to this, AFA has signed a series of cooperation agreements with local and foreign HEIs, among the most significant can be mentioned: Polytechnic University of Tirana, Aleksander Moisiu in Durres, Luarasi University, Fan Noli University, Defence Innovation Centre, etc **[Evidence 1.40]**. Thanks to such attention to the cooperation and partnership at



the national and international level, and implementation of scientific research projects, in which it participates, the AFA aims to further enhance its teaching and scientific research capacities in the fields of study it offers, and contribute in this way to the social - economic, health and technological development of the country **[SER Pg. 53]**. However, more can be done to clarify the impact of such cooperation agreements in the specific education and research activities of AFA **[Annex I, Standard II.19]**

- 2.20 An increasing cooperation with local and foreign HEIs within the framework of scientific research is facilitated by the cooperation agreements signed by the Ministry of Defence with the respective institutions in the partner countries, which include also education and professionalisation components offering to AFA the possibility to participate/apply and extend the network of international partners **[M5, M7]**. This has enhanced collaborations with foreign institutions in NATO members sanctioned by the cooperation agreement with countries such as: Italy; Greece; Turkey; Hungary; Latvia etc. Specific cooperation agreements are signed with specialized international institutions such as the Centre of Excellence of the NATO security force, and the George C. Marshall Centre, which enable the mobility of academic and administrative staff in order to improve teaching, scientific research, as well as internships other extracurricular activities **[SER Pg.53]**. **[Annex I, Standard II.20]**
- 2.21 AFA makes institutional efforts to support its academic staff participation in international activities, conferences, symposiums, workshops, while it is also themselves involved in organizing international activities, such as scientific conferences, symposia, professionalisation mobility of its staff, etc. supported financially by the institution **[Evidence 2.35]**. The principal focus of such efforts is to further develop the curriculum in order to meet the European standards of higher education and increase the exchanging possibility with partner institutions in partner countries and abroad, as much as equip students with the adequate knowledge for being an asset in the labour market even when ending their military career. Based on Institutional development policies and within the framework of the continuous improvement of quality parameters, AFA has given special importance to the mobility process of the academic staff and students and exchange programmes such for instance the exchange programmes with USMA West Point focusing on further consolidating strategic partnership with this institution and improving the quality of education in AFA **[Evidence 1.43]**. **[Annex I, Standard II.21]**
- 2.22 The mission of AFA and the national labour market are the key drivers on development of education priorities considering its unique profile in the country. Addressing the needs of security and military institutions for bachelor graduates and the overall labour market needs in specific areas at master level such as cyber-security is another objective to be achieved thanks to the establishment of the dedicated study programs remains one of the key goals AFA, in accordance also with the mission, goals and its development strategy. The Basic Units responsible for each offered study program perform a detailed analysis of the job market and have contributed to identify and address the need with 6 new bachelor programmes (first level) and one master programme second level **[SER Pg.54]**. The institution follows the employment rate of its graduates at the bachelor level thanks to the special registration of the military institutions at the Ministry of Defence **[M5]**. More efforts can be done to involve representatives in the non-military master programmes the key stakeholders to provide their insightful perspective and participate in the conduct of the job market study. Within the framework of the market study, it is important for the AFA to create an accurate panorama of the labour market needs situation for those programmes. Such



data analyses would serve to AFA to decide on the opening of new programs after conducting the necessary job market research and estimating the possibilities of employment of students at a regional, national and international level. **[Annex I, Standard II.22]**





## Findings

### Good practice

The review team identified the following feature of good practice:

- Good sport and physical related activities **[Annex I, Standard II.11]**

### Weaknesses

The review team identified the following weakness:

- There is no access for physically impaired people in the buildings **[Annex I, Standard II.9]**

### Recommendations

The review team identified the following recommendations:

- The Review Team recommends that support for staff qualification and scientific promotion needs to be included within research plans and institutionalized agendas at the department, faculty, and research centre level **[Annex I, Standard II.3]**
- The evaluation team further encourages the institution to institutionalize and harmonize at the department and faculty level the scientific promotion and research in general since at the moment there is not a mechanism in place on how the selection process is carried out when the demand for participation in scientific activities exceeds the available budget. **[Annex I, Standard II.3]**
- More efforts can be dedicated to enhance a well-balanced presentation between the highly academically qualified permanent and part-time staff **[Annex I, Standard II.5]**
- The institution doesn't seem have a solid analysis on the impact of the cooperation agreements with national HEIs and specific partner NATO countries in the education and research activities of AFA **[Annex I, Standard II.19]**
- AFA doesn't have a fully functional mechanism in place to institutionally involve representatives of partner institutions to provide their insightful perspective and participate in the conduct of the job market study. **[Annex I, Standard II.21]**
- Accurate labour market analysis so to see how to adapt to the market needs those study programmes which face difficulties on attracting a higher number of students **[Annex I, Standard II.22]**

### Affirmation of action being taken

The review team identified the following affirmation:

- Since September of this year, the Academic Performance Card is in place to assess the quality and scientific progress made by the academic staff.

### Judgement

The standards for the Resources and Partnerships are **Substantially Met**.



### **Evaluation Area 3: Study programs, Teaching, and Evaluation**

- 3.1 AFA is a public institution of higher education, consisting of two main units: the Faculty of Defence and Security and the Military Research Institute. The units are comprised of three departments within the Military Research Institute and four within the Faculty of Defence and Security. Currently, AFA offers eight active study programs: 6 Bachelor programs and 3 second-cycle programs [Evidences 13; 14; 15; 17; 3.11; 3.12]. All these programs aim to create future leaders who can mostly fill the ranks of the military and security services, but who can also leap over into the 'civilian world' potentially. The overall number of students registered in those programs is 223 students. The B.A. programs offer a practice-oriented curriculum that emphasizes implementation of theoretical knowledge in real environments with an expectedly strong focus on security and military studies. Meanwhile, the master programs provide foundational knowledge in managing people and organizations and using advanced technology within a military and security context. AAF's study programs are designed to be closely related to the needs of the AF and MoD, NATO, and the development of the security prospects of Albania and NATO's allies. This approach is reflected in the learning outcomes of study programs, which emphasize empowering students with leadership skills, discipline, content matter expertise and military combat readiness. The bachelor programs' objectives include providing a solid foundation in military science, leadership skills, and developing skills in communication, technology, and teamwork. Similarly the master programs are designed to empower future leaders and help them lead their teams towards in complex and dynamic environments [Evidences 3.5; 3.6]. **[Annex No. 1, Standard III.1]**
- 3.2 The review team notes that study programs are in line with both national objectives and quality assurance standards. Specifically, the review team note that AAF's overall academic activity is shaped by a number of strategic documents such as: the Long-Term Development Plan of the AAF, the strategic development plan of the AAF, the curriculum and teaching regulation, and the Annual Plan of work for academic and scientific research activities [Evidences 3.13; 1.5; 1.61; 3.18]. Additionally, AAF's commitment to offering interdisciplinary study programs in close cooperation with other international partner institutions, particularly NATO partners, reflects alignment with global academic trends and inter-institutional collaboration. This approach enables students to work and learn from various participating institutions, which broadens their academic and career prospects both nationally and internationally [Evidences 3.8; 3.9; 3.11; 4.3]. **[Annex No. 1, Standard III.2]**
- 3.3 The review team notes that AAF has well-defined objectives, which are reflected and incorporated in the study degree programs provided by the institution's two main units [Evidences 3.23; 3.27]. These objectives align with AAF's mission of empowering students to shape their lives and become leaders in the defence and security sector of Albania and potentially NATO. As importantly, the institution has established processes to ensure the relevance and quality of their programs through internal quality assurance mechanisms. Specifically, there is an assessment plan in place for systematic evaluation of the teaching and learning services, which includes the periodic review of study programs [Evidences 1.58; 1.64]. Overall, the assessment reviews the quality of teaching, the connections between the institution's mission/objectives and the programs' learning outcomes, and so on [Evidences 3.32; 3.33; 3.34; 3.35]. Such structured approach aims to ensure that the programs' learning outcomes are in line with the qualification profile they provide, aligning with the standard III.3. From an institutional perspective, the responsible heads of

departments and quality management oversee these efforts, ensuring that the standards are maintained and continuously improved. **[Annex No. 1, Standard III.3]**

- 3.4 The review team notes that AAF, adheres to a specific and highly regulated process when introducing new programs. Based on the analysis of documents provided by the institution, it was clear that departments are tasked with creating these programs [based on several sequential steps], which must then gain approval from both the Academic Senate and the Administration Board **[Evidence 1.1; 1.49]**. This ensures an extensive internal review process, in which there are ample opportunities for parties to voice their ideas and create a curriculum that fits the objectives of the institution, the needs of the armed forces, and complies with the strategic security objectives of the country. Crucially, any new programs or significant changes to existing ones, including openings, reorganizations, or closures, require approval from the relevant authority, as guided by the law and internal regulations of the institution. An essential role in this aspect is played by the Directorate of Curricula and Quality Assurance and the Permanent Commission of Curriculum and Equivalence, which have the responsibility of organizing, managing and leading the process of new programs and the review of existing ones **[Evidences 3.25. 3.41]**. **However, the institution faces challenges with low student registration numbers in both bachelor and master study programs as there is low recognition, outside of the military world, of the programs and benefits offered by AAF, which is why the review team recommends to the AAF to identify and implement ways to boost its visibility and consequently its student numbers. [Annex No. 1, Standard III.4]**
- 3.5 The Academy of Armed Forces is more than capable of providing all its study degree programs based on their vast institutional capacity. This is evident by the fact that they have all the sufficient academic staff to cover both academic and administrative responsibilities. The AAF has sufficient and qualified civilian and military human resources for each study degree program, including guest international lecturers as well **[Evidences 3.42, 3.43, 1.53]**. Importantly, based on the analysis of the documents provided by the institution, the review team noted that the academic staff engaged in the implementation of teaching activities covers more than 70% of the teaching workload **[Evidence 3.47]**. Similarly, for the academic year 2023-2024, full-time academic staff covers at least 70% of teaching activities of the study degree programs, except for the Cyber Security in the field of defence professional master program. During the field visit, we were also informed that considering the specificity of this program and the institution's goal of including the best specialists in the field, who are employed in private or public entities, for this program most of the staff is external to the institution **[Evidence 3.47]**. Importantly, positions that require a doctoral or professor title are filled by staff with the respective academic titles. **[Evidence 3.49; 3.51; 3.44; 3.45]. [Annex No. 1, Standard III.5]**
- 3.6 The review team notes that Academy of Armed Forces relies on the structure and logic of the Bologna Agreement, which is evidenced by its organization into study cycles. This is reflected also in their use of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System [ECTS] for course description. There are however, a number of notable differences with this system for the bachelor programs which have 240 ECTS differently from the usual 180 we are accustomed to. We were informed that this was due to the specific nature of their study degree programs and the need for special emphasis on physical/military training. This means that AAF's students need to do one extra year of study for what in Albania remains a three-year degree. From our meetings with the students, we noted that they were informed of this and had registered in the Academy fully aware of it. We were also informed

that this was in line with other military academies in the NATO area and allowed to them by the DCM governing the Academy. Overall, the review team also noted that programs offered at AAF contain all the necessary information required by law such as: general program data, program name, duration, form of study, program objectives, ECTS for each subject, for each semester and in total for each academic year, course syllabi, degree format and degree supplement. Importantly, this information is made available to all students. In addition, and importantly, the objectives of the study programs are clearly defined and the learning objectives of each subject are specified in the respective syllabus, where the description and objectives of the subject are outlined. **[Evidence 3.54; M3; M4]. [Annex No. 1, Standard III.6]**

- 3.7 The review team notes that Academy of Armed Forces has created consolidated structures and mechanisms dedicated to providing comprehensive guidance and knowledge to students through their study programs. Being situated in a highly structured [military] environment with strong support mechanisms, AAF has in place a well-defined process for introducing students to the Academy and guiding them through their studies there. Specifically, the personnel office helps orient students professionally, place them in the armed forces [AF] structures, develop their professional and military skills and, ultimately, fulfill the criteria of any AF structure where they might be assigned. This structured approach is applied across study cycles, ensuring that students receive consistent support during their full academic process. Importantly, AAF's programs, whether Bachelor or Master level, are designed with a strong emphasis on **practical applications** to prepare students for their prospective careers in the military or civilian life later. Specifically, first-cycle study programs provide entry-level knowledge of general scientific methods and the skills needed in various specialties in accordance with the degree. As mentioned above, AAF offers first cycle study programs with 180 or 240 European credits [ECTS] lasting 3 or 4 academic years. Overall, the review team notes that the range and depth of AAF's study programs demonstrate their commitment to providing students with quality guidance and theoretical as well as practical knowledge. **[Evidences 1.40, 3.59; M3; M4]. [Annex No. 1, Standard III.7]**
- 3.8 Based on the documents submitted by the institution and our discussions during the site visit, lifelong learning and trainings/qualifications are not provided by AAF but by other structures within the armed forces, such as the Training Centres in NF, LF, AF and SC, the College of Defence and Security, as well as by the structures of academies, universities, and centres of allied countries in NATO in America, England, Greece, Turkey, Italy, Germany, France, Belgium, Kosovo, etc. **[Annex No. 1, Standard III.8]**
- 3.9 The programs at AAF are backed by research efforts of the academic staff all of whom are conducting or have conducted scientific research. This draws a clear connection between the study programs and the profile of the institution. Additionally, the institution has just introduced a system for performance evaluation and planning, which includes self-evaluation, student feedback, academic, and professional integrity evaluation. This suggests the institution is now keen on ensuring their programs adhere to the professional profile of the unit **[Evidences 2.11, 2.16, 3.64, 3.65; M6; M9]. Nevertheless, now that AAF has finalized the internal restructuring, and in keeping with its status as an academy, the review team recommend that there needs to be a more structured and focused approach to research. [Annex No. 1, Standard III.9]**



- 3.10 The review team noted that AAF regularly reviews and monitors its study programs through a well-structured system. Specifically, the internal structures of the academy, such as CQAD, IQAU, Permanent Quality Assurance, and Curriculum Committee at an institutional level are responsible for periodically evaluating the efficiency and quality of the study programs. Importantly, in this process AAF also includes third [outside] parties and support personnel from the Rectorate. In addition, to ensure up-to-date curriculum, the institution also obtains feedback from different stakeholders, including alumni, and business representatives. Their methodologies of evaluation are systematic and include performance evaluations, surveys, and feedback meetings **[Evidences 3; 1.63; 1.64; 1.66; M4; M5; BM9]. [Annex No. 1, Standard III.10]**
- 3.11 The review team notes that the institution places a great emphasis on the continuous improvement of study programs particularly since it has had to enact a number of internal reforms due to its last institutional accreditation and the need to be fully aligned with the law on higher education. As the AAF embark on the accreditation of their study degree programs for the first time, this process will be deepened and become more structured. In addition, as they graduate more students, they will also create more relations with the outside world and establish their alumni. At this stage of their development, the review team notes that they have the structures in place to undertake serious and periodic review and improvement of their study degree programs. **[M2; M12]. [Annex No. 1, Standard III.11]**
- 3.12 The AAF, pursues a consistent policy to improve teaching quality. The periodic evaluation of all faculty members and the involvement of students and other administration members in this process highlights their commitment to foster educational quality. Faculty members are evaluated on a broad range of categories such as quality and quantity of instruction, adherence to policies, professionalism, and student retention to name a few. The feedback provided by students also contributes to improving teaching methods and overall student satisfaction. The institutional structure itself, with its governing bodies like the Academic Senate, Rectorate, and Faculty Council supports the academic procedures including those related to faculty evaluation. Importantly, AAF has established a dedicated structure in support of continuous improvement of teaching, which assists lecturers in their professional development, the use of innovative teaching methods, and the identification of ways to enhance student learning. This structure is a crucial resource for enhancing the quality of teaching. Lastly, the Armed Forces Academy, as part of its organizational structure, includes the Directorate of Curricula and Quality Assurance and since 2021 it has a collegial body, the Internal Quality Assurance Unit [IQAU]. Through these measures, the institution is proactive in its approach to improving the quality of teaching, further demonstrating its commitment to the standard **[Evidences 1.55; 1.56; 1.30]. [Annex No. 1, Standard III.12]**
- 3.13 The review team notes that the study programs at AAF are implemented according to the structures approved at the institutional and national level. Specifically, AAF offers various study programs in the fields of security studies, military sciences, defense, information technology and innovation, as well as humanities. These programs are offered in accordance with the needs and requirements of the Armed Forces and NATO Alliance. Importantly, AAF ensures sufficient capacity for the practical training of students through laboratory work, field practice, supervised professional internships, and other practical activities that aid in their professional preparation. Overall, AAF offers comprehensive student support, including guiding and advising students throughout their studies through academic advisors and providing access to educational resources, such as high-speed



internet, libraries, and digital resources. AAF ensures a functioning interrelation among its administrative departments, academic staff, and stakeholders to maintain the desired standard in the delivery of its programs [Evidences 3.42; M4; M5; M12]. **[Annex No. 1, Standard III.13]**

- 3.14 The review team noted that the bachelor and master programs fully satisfy this requirement. The programs operate on a 'dual track approach' combining academic and practical work at a high rate. Practical applications are directly tied to the theoretical learning undertaken in class, with internship experiences woven into the syllabus. This hands-on learning is well-structured. Additionally, the institution aims at moving further away from traditional theoretical-oriented education emphasizing an even more practical approach particularly for the military sciences degree. In the case of the master study program, a mandatory internship is included in the curriculum helping students to apply their theoretical knowledge. Importantly, the local study trips for both the bachelor and master students are another significant initiative to provide students with exposure to practical issues, thus reinforcing the practical application of their learning. Overall, the review team note that the combination of academic work with internships, the practical approach emphasized in modules, the requirement of internship for students, and exposure to practical every-day issues is fully aligned with Standard III.14 [A59; A62]. **[Annex No. 1, Standard III.14]**
- 3.15 AAF has developed programs with a strong emphasis on student participation and practical competency acquisition. Their programs integrate student-centered teaching methods, utilizing small class sizes, advanced technology, student engagement in various learning environments, as well as accessibility to faculty. They also ensure that students are challenged to grow their innovative and creative thinking skills. The teaching staff assisted by visiting professors from international partners further supports this endeavour. AAF has a solid faculty-student ratio allowing for individualized attention and active participation. The review team also noted that AAF employs many guest lecturers, who are involved in teaching, lending further expertise to the classes and enhancing student competencies. Lectures are regularly evaluated through standardized surveys by students, assessing the didactic competencies of the lecturers, student effort in preparation and wrap-up of content, and general framework of the lecture, providing feedback for continuous enhancement of the programs [Evidences M4; M5; M12]. **[Annex No. 1, Standard III.15]**
- 3.16 Overall, study programs at AAF are designed with employment in the armed forces in mind as that is the main and most natural entry point into the job market. The review team noted that study programs at AAF focus on providing students with professional skills with the goal of transforming them into valuable assets to the Armed Forces first and to meet any obligations within the framework of NATO. Crucially, these study programs also aim to prepare high-quality professionals for similar relevant fields in the civilian job market, both domestic and international [particularly as it regards security studies]. Specifically, the review team noted that student professional internships are regularly usually in collaboration with the Ministry of Defense and other public entities. Based on the documents provided by the institution and meetings during the site visit, the review team noted that employment for bachelor students is almost guaranteed, as they are commissioned as officers and assigned to positions within the Armed Forces immediately after graduation. Importantly, and differently from other HEIs, character building subjects are included in all study programs offered by AFA. **The review team notes that the combination of theoretical and practical skills, the connection of students with the**



**labour market, and overall support for employment is a good practice. [Evidences 3.30; 3.26; M4; M5; M12]. [Annex No. 1, Standard III.16]**

- 3.17 The AAF uses the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System [ECTS], which is a key component of the Bologna Agreement to promote mobility. The Bachelor's and Master's programs require a specific number of ECTS hours, which facilitates easy credit transfer for both Albanian and foreign students. Because of the specificity of this institution, transfer from the bachelor program is limited, and students are made aware of this prior to enrolment. Importantly, a significant number of students in AAF's bachelor programs have participated in joint training and educational activities with students from military academies of "West Point", Greece, Italy, Kosovo, the New Jersey National Guard, etc. These structured exchanges of experiences and the organization of joint exercises and modules enable AAF to prepare well-trained and interoperable military personnel who are ware of and are capable to implement international standards in their professions and potentially combat **[Evidences 3.71; 3.74; M4; M5; M12]. [Annex No. 1, Standard III.17]**
- 3.18 The review team noted that AAF provides students who have met all requirements of their respective study programs with relevant diplomas. The HEI has explicit regulations published on its website to guide students through their assessment processes. Further, upon successful completion of the study degree program, students are granted their respective diplomas. These diplomas are certified by the Rector and the Dean of Faculty and carry with them the seal of the institution, demonstrating their official nature. Beyond the diploma, the institution also provides a Diploma Supplement and transcript. The diploma and its associated documents are registered in compliance with the regulations stipulated by law, as they are registered with the Educational Services Center according to the Law of Higher Education and the instructions of the Ministry of Education and Sport **[Evidences 3.60; 3.72]. [Annex No. 1, Standard III.18]**
- 3.19 The Academy of Armed Forces does provide two dedicated computer laboratories for its students to support their study programs, with specific ratio of equipment per students. All their classrooms are also equipped with whiteboards and. Furthermore, the academy ensures an internet connection across all buildings, subject to strict security settings, within its compound. **Importantly, and evidence of an affirmation, in the academic year 2024-25 the Faculty of Defence and Security will move into a new and modern building that will further enhance the dedicated space to teaching and learning [Evidences 3.42; 3.43; 1.53A37]. [Annex No. 1, Standard III.19]**
- 3.20 AAF provides appropriate classroom equipment, infrastructure, and services like projectors, classroom technology, and internet access. AAF also provides some laboratory equipment proportional to the needs of its study degree programs as it has 2 IT laboratories, 2 sports halls, 1 sports field, outdoor military land and sea training grounds in all AF military units **[Evidences 1.51; 1.53; 3.79]. [Annex No. 1, Standard III.20]**
- 3.21 AAF does have a structured library in place that provides all the titles necessary to the university. Nevertheless, we also noted that despite efforts made in the past years, more needs to be done as it regards digitalization of the library. While recognizing the difficulties that AAF has - due to extra security measures it has to undertake as part of the defence infrastructure - the review team recommend that, in coordination with its various NATO partner institutions, AAF develop a concrete work plan with specific tangibles and timelines for the modernization and digitalization of the library. **[Annex No. 1, Standard III.21]**



## Findings

### Good practice

The review team identified the following feature of good practice:

- The review team notes that AAF's combination of theoretical and practical skills, the connection of students with the labour market, and overall support for [guaranteed] employment is a good practice. **[Annex No. 1, Standard III.16]**

### Weaknesses

The review team did not identify any weaknesses.

### Recommendations

The review team identified the following recommendations:

- To address low student registration numbers in both bachelor and master study programs and to increase the recognition of the institution outside of the military world, the review team recommend to the AAF to identify and implement a communication strategy to boost its visibility and consequently its student numbers. **[Annex No. 1, Standard III.4]**
- The Academy must take proactive measures to implement a meaningful digitalization of its library by making sure that students have dedicated online sources for learning and teaching. **(Annex No. 1, Standard III.21)**
- Now that AAF has finalized the internal restructuring, and in keeping with its status as an academy, the review team recommend that there needs to be a more structured and focused approach to research **[Annex No. 1, Standard III.9]**

### Affirmation of action being taken

The review team identified the following affirmation:

- In the academic year 2024-25 the Faculty of Defence and Security will move into a new and modern building that will further enhance the dedicated space to teaching and learning. **[Annex No. 1, Standard III.19]**

### Judgement

The standards for Study Programmes, Teaching, and Evaluation are: **Fully Met.**





## Evaluation Area 4: Scientific/Artistic Activity and Innovation

4.1 The review team noted that AAF identified and implements its research priorities based on the proposals of its main units: the Faculty of Defense and Security and the Military Scientific Research Institute. Overall, the review team noted that the Academy's scientific activities are in line with the directives of the General Staff of the AF and the Ministry of Defense based on the special status of AAF as well as the Scientific Research Strategy 2022-2026 of the Academy. The review team also noted that the institution generally carries out basic and applied research in accordance with its goals and objectives. Because of the applied nature of this institution, most of the research activities were heavily related to the military and applied military issues. That notwithstanding, it was noticeable – not positively – that most of the research of their main journal was not available online. In addition, most of the research undertaken by the staff was related to preparing teaching material. While that is important and commendable, it is only a small part of the research that is expected by academics. As we have noted earlier, now that the reorganization of the Academy is finalized and its status is clear, it is imperative that the institution focus heavily on research and harnessing much more effectively its vast international network. **[Evidence 1; 4.1; 4.2; 1.22; 1.67]. [Annex No. 1, Standard IV.1]**

4.2 The review team noted that AAF has a Scientific Research Strategy in place, which is implemented through annual action plans developed by its main units. Overall, the research that is undertaken at AAF is in line with the character of the institution and the applied nature of its main field of activity. Based on the analysis of supporting documents and site visit, the review team noted that the infrastructure of the institution adequately supports the conduct of research. Importantly, the institution has well-equipped spaces, two dedicated computer labs, and sufficient space for the academic staff to conduct research. The institution also manages and protects data and research materials effectively with high security measures in place. AAF publishes research in various avenues, and it has dedicated spaces for various typologies of research that fit the academic constituencies it houses. Specifically, AAF publish research through:

- Military magazine

<https://www.mod.gov.al/publikime/revista-ushtarake>

- Student magazine

[https://www.tradoc.mil.al/images/pdf/revista\\_studenti\\_ushtarak.pdf](https://www.tradoc.mil.al/images/pdf/revista_studenti_ushtarak.pdf)

- Scientific conferences

<https://www.tradoc.mil.al/images/Njoftime23/konferenca.pdf>

During the academic year 2023-23 the staff of AAF had the following research output:

Typologies of Publications	FDS	IKSHU
Publications in domestic Scientific Journals	15	20
Publications in Scientific Journals abroad	6	0
Publications in Scientific Journals with Impact Factor	4	0
References Conferences/Symposia within the country	15	20
References Conferences/Symposiums abroad with proceedings	4	0
Participation in domestic steering magazine boards	3	4
Participation in steering magazine boards abroad	1	0

School publications	5	0
Monographs	1	0

It is important, and in line with legal requirements and the status of academy, for AAF to increase the number of publications with impact factor, and for doing so to introduce a structured system of support for research activities. **[Evidence 1.54; 1.50; 4.4; 4.1]. [Annex No. 1, Standard IV.2]**

- 4.3 The review team noted that AAF encourages the development and dynamism of scientific/artistic activities. The statute of the institution sanctions respect for academic freedom, inclusiveness, research, and creative activities. Additionally, AAF has a Scientific Research Strategy in place, which is implemented through annual action plans developed by its main units. It also involves cooperation agreements with companies, institutions, and other higher education institutions both within and outside the country, particularly NATO partners. These factors are potentially conducive to enabling research addressing contemporary security studies challenges, nurturing professional and intellectual ethics, and cultivating critical thinking among academic staff. Despite these elements, the review team note that the institution does not have a consolidated system in place - backed up by a dedicated budget - to ensure that research takes place regularly and at a high quality. **[Evidences 4.18; 1.40; 4.1; 4.6]. [Annex No. 1, Standard IV.3]**
- 4.4 The review team noted that AAF appraises the performance of its faculty, which includes both full-time and part-time faculty members. Specifically, AAF has approved performance evaluation indicators for teaching and research, as well as academic performance of the staff. This process, crucially, includes self-evaluation by the faculty, as well as student feedback through evaluation forms. The results of all these evaluations are documented and utilized for further action when needed. The use of performance results includes the review and modification of certain documents such as job description and targeted trainings. Results are filed confidentially in the personnel folder of the faculty. Importantly, AAF promotes academic staff to leadership based, in part, on the results of the performance evaluation and provides enhanced financial support for research activities. All of the above, suggest that the institution and the units responsible for scientific/artistic research do appraise their performance at the institutional level **[Evidence 1.50; 1.60; 1.69; 1.66]. [Annex No. 1, Standard IV.4]**
- 4.5 The review team noted that AAF has dedicated research centres – with a heavy military sciences profile - that direct, shape, oversee, evaluate, and mentor the publication of scientific papers. These include articles published in scientific journals, scientific literature, conference proceeding books, etc. Published materials bear the logo of the Academy of Armed Forces and the names of the authors or co-authors. Additionally, these works are registered and become part of the library fund of AAF, thereby preserving intellectual property. As noted earlier, more must be done to make this work freely available on the institution's website. **[Evidence 1.50]. [Annex No. 1, Standard IV.5]**
- 4.6 The review team noted that departments at AAF are the units responsible for undertaking research activities according to their respective fields of expertise. Specifically, 7 departments, 4 of which are in the Faculty of Defense and Security and 3 in the Military Scientific Research Institute undertake and coordinate research and publishing activities in respect of academic freedom. Based on our meeting with academic staff, the Military Research Center is the heart of military based research activities and implements the

academy's research strategy. Overall, the review team noted that the Academy supports research endeavors in accordance with the institution's strategic development plan and promotes a culture of continuous improvement and cooperation regarding research. These activities are funded by the academy's budget and external donations [when available] in accordance with laws, bylaws, and other regulations. The overall sustainability of the institution is maintained by an approved budget plan that also factors in the implementation of the research strategy [Evidence 1.7; 2.26; 1.4]. **[Annex No. 1, Standard IV.6]**

- 4.7 The review team noted that the institution does provide and approve clear objectives for the units, research/artistic groups, and academic staff. This is shown through their development of a research strategy and subsequent work plan, which guide research activities for various programs and projects. While the objectives are generally clear and make sense, from our meeting with the staff, it became clear that this is still [to some degree understandably] a teaching-heavy institution. While teaching is indeed crucial, much more needs to be done so that research is undertaken to both increase the reputation of the institution, but also aid in enabling a modern teaching process fully up to date with developments in the fields covered by the academy. **[Evidence 3I 1.1; 1.4; 4.19; M6; M12]. [Annex No. 1, Standard IV.7]**
- 4.8 The review team noted that AAF's Faculty, Institute, departments and research groups design and approve each academic year their specific objectives regarding research. Specifically, departments set up working groups or *ad-hoc* committees for the design of research projects, specific studies, conferences, and/or scientific round tables. AAF also makes its infrastructure available to organize training on research methods and other research-related topics to promote the capacitation of staff and the creation of an effective research network. The review team also noted that AAF is actively seeking to enhance its research and scientific activities and that in 2024 it gained funding by NASRI to undertake a research project on cyber security. All of the above, besides fulfilling legal obligations and implementing the research strategy, aim to prepare the ground for opening the third cycle of studies at the academy **[Evidence 1.50; 18; 4.11]. [Annex No. 1, Standard IV.8]**
- 4.9 The review team noted that AAF adheres to this standard by making outcomes of scientific research public. This is done by storing Bachelor, Master, and doctoral theses in their library, allowing them to be used as references for future research. As noted earlier, the publications of their research magazines should become all fully available online also. **[Annex No. 1, Standard IV.9]**
- 4.10 The review team noted that AAF has established a structured system to ensure the quality and integrity of scientific activities at an institutional level. Specifically, AFA has put in place standards for the publication of scientific research articles in scientific journals as well as participation in scientific conferences. In addition, it has an editorial board and scientific board for the military journal that evaluates the articles to be published. To ensure that the above fulfill all the accepted and expected ethical criteria, AAF, based on the Ethics Code has established the ethics council, which is functional. Together, these instruments have created a reliable structure for overseeing the quality of scientific work. **Nevertheless, the institution must in the very near future also incorporate an anti-plagiarism software to be used to evaluate the authenticity of all scientific activity of the institution [Evidence 4.11; 2.12; 1.21; 1.25]. [Annex No. 1, Standard IV.10]**



- 4.11 The review team noted that AAF's leadership outlines the requirements for its staff to engage in research, studies, and publications. The institution also actively supports and encourages its staff to take part in international conferences and seminars. Further evidence of this is found in the personnel files that house certificates of participation and other relevant documents **[Evidences 2.17; M2; M6]. [Annex No. 1, Standard IV.11]**
- 4.12 The review team noted that AAF has identified scientific research as an important strategic priority and has made efforts towards its internationalization. In that regard, AAF has partnership and cooperation agreements in the field of research with regional universities and OECD, EU or G20 countries. Nevertheless, as stated often above, while generally OK, it is not enough. For an academy the focus on research must be much more noticeable and measurable. **[Annex No. 1, Standard IV.12]**
- 4.13 Since this is an institution that can rely on the MoD's vast international network, much more can be done in this field. Through NATO partnerships many more international lecturers can participate in both teaching and research activities. So, while there is not a specific 'thing' missing or creating problems, we notice that there might be a lack of proactive initiative in this field. As we have mentioned many times above, there needs to be concrete action in this field and what we noticed was a 'business as usual' approach that does not help to raise the academy to the level that it can. **[Annex No. 1, Standard IV.13]**
- 4.14 Overall, the review team note that AAF has taken measures to facilitate the mobility of its students and staff. The academy has conducted exchanges with several international partners such as:
- Military Academy of West Point, USA
  - New Jersey National Guard, USA
  - Italian Maritime Academy
  - The Academy in North Macedonia
  - The War College, France
  - Annapolis Naval Academy, USA
  - Officer's College, Greece
  - Naval War College, Turkey

Nevertheless, there needs to be a more structured approach to internationalization overall since the opportunities are there and this can be 'an easy win for the academy and a 'selling point' for potential students and staff. **[Annex No. 1, Standard IV.14]**

- 4.15 The review team noted that, as mentioned above also, AAF has a research strategy that helps guide all its research-related activities and action. In addition, AAF has several cooperation agreements with various academies/institutions and universities inside and outside the country with the aim of increasing its institutional reputation and particularly its research capacities. In general, the review team noted that there are structures and policies in place to ensure some modicum of continuity and growth regarding research, however a strucrued support, with a dedicated budget was missing. For the future of the institution, particularly in line with its objective of opening third cycle studies, this is a limitation that must be overcome **[Evidence 1.40; 1.43; 1.16]. [Annex No. 1, Standard IV.15]**
- 4.16 The review team noted that AAF sets out its research priorities in its scientific research strategy which is then further delineated in annual action plans for planning, for example, at



least two scientific conferences as well as periodical publications in scientific journals during the academic year. As mentioned above, in the future, now that the institution is an academy, this is an area that it needs to take a careful look at and think about so that it improves upon the current situation. **[Annex No. 1, Standard IV.16]**

- 4.17 The answer to this standard is very similar to the one above. The review team noted that AAF engaged in research that was qualitative and reasonably proportional to its needs and legal requirements. Now that it has become an academy, in line with the recommendation laid out above, it needs to devise and implement a research strategy that addresses this standard also. **[Annex No. 1, Standard IV.17]**





## Findings

### Good practice

The review team did not identify any feature of good practice.

### Weaknesses

The review team identified the following weakness:

- The review team note that – despite some efforts - the institution does not have a consolidated system in place - backed up by a dedicated budget - to ensure that research is supported institutionally to take place regularly and at a high quality. **[Annex No. 1, Standard IV.3]**

### Recommendations

The review team identified the following recommendation:

- The review team recommend that the institution, overall, view research as a much more integral part of all its activities and integrate it in its actions and thinking. In that regard, the institution is encouraged to leverage its enviable international network to undertake cooperative research that heightens its status and capacitates further its staff. **[Annex No. 1, Standard IV.12; Standard IV.15]**

### Affirmation of action being taken

The review team did not identify any affirmation of action being taken.

### Judgement

The standards for Scientific/Artistic Activity and Innovation are: **Substantially Met.**



## Evaluation Area 5: Students and Their Support

- 5.1 The review team noted that AAF has developed and implemented an admission procedure that aligns fully with legal requirements of Albanian law on higher education and other sublegal acts. This procedure encompasses the application process, registration, and matriculation for all students. Due to AAF's special nature, admitted students are subjected to a physical test and an interview. These procedures are all communicated to students via direct communication from academic staff, through email, or via the institution's website. Information about criteria, quotas and application procedure is published online on the official website. Crucially, AAF offers free education to all students without distinction and supports them financially throughout the school years based on DCM No. 420, dated 26.06.2024. In addition, free housing, free food and free dedicated health services are provided to further support enrolled students. Overall, the review team noted that AAF fulfills the criteria in terms of staff/student ratio, m2 per student, staff with titles and ranks, as well as the coverage of 70% of the teaching load by full-time academic staff. **The extraordinary support provided to students through dedicated payment and free housing and food is identified by the review team as good practice. [Evidence 5.13; 5.9; 5.8; 5.7; M5]. [Annex No. 1, Standard V.1]**
- 5.2 The review team noted that AAF provides ample and well-structured support to students through its dedicated university services thus enabling successful student progression, overall comfort, and – particularly for this institution – character building. The institution has an orientation week at the beginning of the academic year, which includes the presentation of the study programs, the internal regulatory acts of the institution, the necessary institutional contacts, etc. Each student has a personal registration file deposited with the teaching secretariat. In addition, the Directorate of Support Services provides dedicated support to students guiding them through their academic journey, logistical support, extracurricular activities, internships, and sport-based competitions at both institutional and national/ international levels, and social events. The review team note that in their totality, these initiatives demonstrate a high level of support aimed at facilitating student progression and overall success. **[Evidence 5.14; 5.13; 5.11; 5.10; M6]. [Annex No. 1, Standard V.2]**
- 5.3 AAF uses various digital tools such as official email accounts, the official university website, and hard copies of publications to disseminate information. In addition to the website, AAF utilizes social networks to keep current and prospective students informed about its two study cycles. Due to the specifics of the institution and strict rules regulating digital communication, in the context of internal communication within the armed forces, communication between students and lecturers occurs through the dedicated internal network of the Armed Forces Academy, using a "Share" folder. **We were also informed that the institution in cooperation with RASH will soon implement the Pitagora system for enabling students to receive all the necessary academic information online and the review team recognizes this as an ongoing affirmation. [Evidence 5.15; 2.29]. [Annex No. 1, Standard V.3]**
- 5.4 The review team noted that the institution persistently encourages and facilitates student participation in all levels of its institutional life. Specifically, through structures such as the Student Council and Quality Assurance Commission, students have platforms to express their opinions, make suggestions, and play an active role in decision-making processes within the institution. The representation of students in these organs ensures their

participation and involvement in the decision-making process of the institution, thus enriching their educational experience and ensuring inclusivity. Furthermore, the institution provides facilities and support for the workings of the Student Council, further encouraging active student participation **[Evidence 5.19; 1.39; 5.20]. [Annex No. 1, Standard V.4]**

- 5.5 The review team noted that AAF pursues a policy of structured student orientation and counselling which is evident through their academic support services providing academic advising and full and free accommodation support. From an institutional perspective, the Public Relations and Promotion Sector acts as the Career Office, while the Human Resources Sector carries out the functions of the Alumni Office. Both these offices are responsible for organizing student activities and extracurricular activities, covering military and civilian, social, and cultural aspects, as well as providing career guidance within the armed forces. Importantly, AAF provides psychological services to support students and supports several student clubs such as:

- Art & Design Club
- History Club
- Football Club
- Basketball Club
- Volleyball Club
- Ping-Pong Club

**[Evidence 5.22; 5.23; 5.21]. [Annex No. 1, Standard V.5]**

- 5.6 As we noted earlier, AAF provides free education and in addition full financial support for students and free housing and food. This is done across the board, meaning that all social categories benefit from it. As we noted earlier this is a commendable good practice. The review team also noted that in the second cycle of studies, students who are members of the armed forces, benefit from a halved fee. Lastly, extracurricular activities and participation in the Albanian Federation of University Sports are financed by the academy's budget. **[Evidence 5.24; 5.25]. [Annex No. 1, Standard V.6]**

- 5.7 The review team noted that AAF has made efforts towards offering basic and secondary literature for students. The library is open to students from 08:00 AM to 21:00 PM and has **9467 physical titles** available in both Albanian and foreign languages. Additionally, the library encompasses all doctoral theses defended at AAF since the late 1980s and offers periodicals in Albanian and foreign languages. However, as mentioned above, the library seems to be stuck in time as it significantly lacks the digital element, which in today's world is an absolute necessity. In the previous sections we have identified it as a weakness that must be addressed head on. **[Evidence 5.26; 5.27]. [Annex No. 1, Standard V.7]**

- 5.8 The review team noted that AAF supports student employment and in many ways guarantees it. Specifically, upon completion of studies at the Armed Forces Academy, students are guaranteed employment in the Albanian armed forces. To that end, upon enrollment at AAF, students are required to sign a contract delineating the duration of their education and a 6-year service commitment in the armed forces **[Evidence 5.1; 5.15]. [Annex No. 1, Standard V.8]**

- 5.9 The review team noted that AAF maintains strong relationship with its alumni since almost all of them are directly employed in the armed forces upon graduation. The review team noted that while the academy does not have a dedicated alumni office, the Personnel Recruitment Center within the armed forces maintains all necessary information about the

career progression of its graduates and serves as a coordinator for lifelong training and education of both military and civilian personnel within the armed forces. **[Evidence 5.1].**  
**[Annex No. 1, Standard V.9]**



## Findings

### Good practice

The review team identified the following feature of good practice:

- The extraordinary support provided to students through dedicated payment and free housing and food is identified by the review team as good practice. **[Annex No. 1, Standard V.1]**

### Weaknesses

The review team did not identify any weaknesses.

### Recommendations

The review team did not identify any recommendation.

### Affirmation of action being taken

The review team identified the following affirmation:

- The ongoing implementation of the Pitagora system in cooperation with RASH for enabling students to receive all the necessary academic information online is recognized by the review team as an ongoing affirmation. **[Annex No. 1, Standard V.3]**

## Judgement

The standards for Students and their Support are **Fully Met**.





## List of Evidences

### List A: List of annexes:

List of evidence provided as part of self-evaluation documents, annex of SER. These annexes on EER are referred as **Evidence 1.**, **Evidence 2.**, etc:

- RVB\_AFA\_Akreditim Institucional \_ Shqip
- RVB\_AFA\_Akreditim Institucional \_ Anglisht
- RVB\_Aneksi\_Tabelat\_Përmbledhese
- Deklarata e vertetësisë (autenciteti) e Rektorit \_AFA

### Annexes

- Ev\_1\_VKM\_156\_Statusi\_vecante\_AFA.pdf
- Ev\_2\_Ligji\_64\_2014\_Pushtet\_Komand\_FA.pdf
- Ev\_2a\_Urdher\_1090\_Proced\_Menaxh\_Person.pdf
- Ev\_3\_Urdher\_MAS\_MM\_833\_VSA.pdf
- Ev\_4\_Urdher\_MM\_35\_Riorgan\_AFA.pdf
- Ev\_5\_Urdher\_195\_GVB\_AFA.pdf
- Ev\_6\_Njoftim\_ASCAL\_Akreditimi.pdf
- Ev\_7\_Vendim\_136\_Krijimi\_SHLUO.pdf
- Ev\_8\_PLani\_Punes\_GBV.pdf
- Ev\_9\_Protokoll\_nr\_57\_SA.pdf
- Ev\_10\_VSA\_38\_Keshilli\_Profesor.pdf
- Ev\_11\_VKP\_38\_Procedura.pdf
- Ev\_12\_Lista\_Doktoratave.pdf
- Ev\_13\_Urdher\_MAS\_206\_SH\_Ushtarake.pdf
- Ev\_14\_Urdh\_MAS\_266\_267\_TIK\_NAV.pdf
- Ev\_15\_Urdher\_MAS\_375\_M\_Profesional.pdf
- Ev\_16\_Urdh\_MAS\_MM\_Ndrysh\_Statuti\_AFA.pdf
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- Ev\_5.27\_Plani\_blerjes\_librave\_rinj.pdf
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#### **List B: Meetings held during the visit**

Meetings are referred to throughout the report using the abbreviation **M1, M2, etc**

M1: Review team meet with the Institutional Coordinator.

M2: Review Team meet with the Rector.

M3: Review team meet with a sample of first and second cycle students.

M4: Review team meet with a sample of support/administrative staff.

M5: Review team meet with a sample of teaching staff.

M6: Review team meet with the Institutional Coordinator.

M7: Review team meet with senior managers.

M8: Review team meet with external partners and alumni.

M9: Review team meet with representatives of the internal quality assurance unit.

M10: Review team meet with the Self-evaluation team.

M11: Review team meet with the Rector to summarize the major lines of enquiry and related matters pursued during the review.

Tour of Facilities.

