



## **Executive Summary**

### **Renewal of Licensure**

### **National Defense College**

**April 4- 8, 2020**

An External Review Team (hereafter ERT) visited the National Defense College (NDC) from 4<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> April 2020, to evaluate the *Self-Study* (hereafter the *Self-Study*) for Renewal of Licensure. The exit interview was held on 11 May 2020.

National Defense College (NDC) was established pursuant to the Presidential Decree No. (1) of 2012 (also referenced as “Federal Law by Decree”), Article One of which decrees that: There shall be established in the UAE Armed Forces an educational institute to be known as the ‘National Defense College’ which will be based in the city of Abu Dhabi. The college shall be specifically designated and geared to prepare and train potential military leaders and civilian officers and to hone their skills in identifying and assessing challenges to national, regional and international security. The study program shall help participants better understand the fundamentals and requirements of managing and employing the state resources for the sake of protecting national interests. The College received Initial Licensure from the UAE Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research in December 2013.

NDC currently enrolls 41 Emirati students, including ten senior military officers, four from the Ministry of Interior and 27 from public-private entities. Six are women. There are currently fourteen full time faculty and several visiting faculty who are assisted by facilitators who work alongside faculty in the interactive student participation (“Syndicate” and “Knowledge Room”) classes.

The ERT acknowledges that two factors have impacted this review process: first, the time lag of eighteen months between the submission of the *Self-Study* and the review; and second, the global pandemic that deprived the ERT of the benefit of a site visit.

NDC has made every effort to provide updates of documents where details have changed during the time lag and although this has helped in the analysis the ERT has still been left with aspects that require further clarification. The review outlined a number of requirements for NDC to deliver and the ERT has also provided a significant number of suggestions to help improve identified issues.

There are a number of areas within the operating structure of NDC in terms of reporting structures and roles and responsibilities that need further clarification. Part of this clarification requires additional light to be shone on the specifics of the relationship between NDC and GHQ and demonstration that NDC is meeting particular aspects of the Standards in terms of key elements within its Policies and Procedures manual.

The ERT is aware that the delivery mode of the program is not as would be found in most traditional universities. However, members of the ERT do recognize that the NDC approach is a model commonly found internationally in many Command and Staff Colleges and there are positives that can be identified in having a mixture of academic theory balanced with high level speakers and input from experienced staff. The caveat to this is that the delivery has to meet all aspects of the Standards including ensuring that all academic content is delivered by faculty holding a terminal degree unless exemptions have been granted by the CAA.

With regard to details within the program itself the ERT has a number of points that require NDC action in order to demonstrate that the program fully meets all aspects of the Standards. Points include demonstrating that all courses are meeting the required direct class contact hours (i.e. academic lectures), although the Student Handbook (p3) defines the requirement as per the Standards this was not so obvious from the material supplied with the *Self-Study*. In addition to providing greater clarity with regard to self-assessment processes the ERT required evidence that course assessments are appropriate and are delivering to Level 9 descriptors and that there is a clear line of sight between the Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs), Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs) and the actual assessments. As part of the implication of a lack of a site visit it was necessary for NDC to provide the CAA with examples of marked (high, middle, and low) assessments associated with a sample of courses for the ERT to evaluate. The ERT concluded that there remained a lack of clear evidence that assessments are meeting the required Level 9 Standards and there is a requirement for NDC to raise its expectations of student assessments.

The ERT found that there are a number of areas that need attention that have carried forward from the initial application with regard to demonstrating a clear assessment strategy. This is further compounded by the fact that there is a significant variation in the duration of courses for which no clear rationale is provided. Assessments do not appear to be proportional to either the credit rating of the course or the percentage value of the final grade for a course. The ERT also highlight that it would be appropriate for Faculty to provide clear specifications of their expectations for assessed work in terms of length and structure as examples were found of syndicate (and individual assignments) where a wide range of submission lengths existed. The ERT suggests that NDC adopt a more coherent approach to providing students with clear specifications for the assessed work.

It is of particular concern to the ERT that there was limited evidence of assessments being at National Qualifications Framework (QF*Emirates*) Level 9 and certainly by the latter stages of the program the ERT would expect to see essay assignments demonstrating the ability to present arguments underpinned by suitable academic sources that are appropriately referenced. In this regard the ERT suggests that NDC adopt a referencing style to be applied to all written essay type assignments such as Harvard, APA or Chicago and that suitable tutorial support is

given to the students in this regard.

A particular observation from the ERT concerned the Faculty & Professional Staff Handbook because not only was it deficient in some minor respects with regard to Stipulation 1c but it also had an unhelpful balance to its structure. The Standards have very clear requirements for this document but the NDC document appears to have more, up-front, emphasis on the program(s) [including the PhD] with key Faculty issues in the back half of the document. Based on knowledge from the previous review the ERT went back to the version of the Handbook that existed for the 2014 review and concluded that its structure had a far better alignment with the Standards than is the case with the current version.

Although the *Self-Study* included a standardized short form of CV for each of the 15 Faculty it would have been appropriate, and helpful to the ERT, if the document with the full CV's for Faculty also utilized a standard template that contained key information that was aligned to the requirements in the Standards, namely, Qualifications, Academic experience, Teaching commitments and Research – publication output and research funding generation.

The ERT had some difficulty with the documentation provided with regard to Faculty departures and arrivals as they found some contradictory evidence when seen in the context of Faculty workload documentation. This aspect was also complicated by the approach of team teaching and support, which may or may not count towards the workload calculations for Faculty and the roles for the Directing Staff. It is acknowledged that many of the discrepancies could probably have been clarified as part of a site visit, but the ERT expect that in responding to the specific requirements, the issues will be resolved. The ERT did note that the *Self-Study* provided little detail covering the qualifications, roles and responsibilities for Professional Staff including details of their Professional Development activities. Although CV details of Library staff were provided and found to be appropriate there remained a lack of details of other Professional Staff.

The Student Handbook contains all of the necessary information required by a student although, again, it is questionable that the structure provides a sound alignment with the Standards with up-front material covering the program and even the PhD, which is not actually available.

In general aspects of the learning resources and physical resources were deemed to be in compliance with the expectations in the Standards and were not a cause of major concern for the ERT. However, Section 8 (Financials) presented a significant problem for the ERT due to the distance nature of the review. The *Self-Study* made it clear that key financial information required by the Standards would be provided during the site visit due to the sensitivity of the details, however, this could not be achieved. It follows that information concerning current and projected budgets over the next 5 years for the program, details of the Library operation and IT in terms of equipment spends or projected budgets to cover maintenance and equipment replacement will require a site visit in order to ensure that NDC complies fully with Section 8 of the Standards.

The main questions that arise out of the ERT analysis of NDC research expectations and

outputs were centered on not having evidence of its approach to evaluating the effectiveness of the Research activity. Although NDC provides support to Faculty to attend conferences the ERT would have expected to see more details of support for research grant generation. Overall, the ERT were impressed with the levels of research activity identified in the Faculty curriculum vitae document.

The ERT makes its requirements and suggestions in a spirit of constructive engagement, with the aim of ensuring that the Standards for Licensure and Accreditation, 2011 has been met, and to aid NDC to establish programs that will achieve its stated objectives.