



Initial assessment of study programme groups

Assessment report on the joint Master study programme Countering Hybrid Threats

**Estonian Academy of Security
Sciences**

2025



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1. Introduction

Overview of the assessment process

The initial assessment is carried out by the Estonian Quality Agency for Education (HAKA) if a higher education institution has submitted an application to the Ministry of Education and Research for the right to provide instruction in a study programme group and level of higher education. A higher education institution has to apply for the right to organise studies separately at each level of higher education, i.e., bachelor's studies, master's studies, doctoral studies, integrated bachelor's and master's studies, and professional higher education. A professional higher education institution has to apply for the right to organise studies at the master level for every study programme separately.

Initial assessment is carried out based on the documents submitted by the institution as well as the assessment visit in accordance with the document ***Guidelines for initial assessment and re-assessment in higher education*** approved by HAKA Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education on 2.07.2024.

When an institution applies for the right to provide instruction, it will be ascertained whether the quality of instruction meets the requirements laid down for the relevant cycle of higher education, and whether resources and sustainability are adequate for the provision of instruction.

HAKA conducts initial assessment and re-assessment in six assessment areas:

- 1) STUDY PROGRAMME
- 2) LEARNING AND TEACHING
- 3) ORGANISATION OF STUDIES
- 4) ACADEMIC STAFF
- 5) LEARNING AND TEACHING ENVIRONMENT
- 6) FINANCIAL RESOURCES.

In the case of an initial assessment of a new higher education institution, assessment area ***7. Additional criteria for initial assessment of a study programme group and cycle in a new higher education institution*** shall likewise be assessed.

Based on the analyses, the expert panel will determine for each assessment area, whether it

- 1) **Conforms to the required standard,**
- 2) **Partially conforms to the required standard,**
- 3) **Does not conform to the required standard.**

Based on the assessment report, HAKA Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education makes a proposal to the Minister of Education and Research, whether to grant the higher education institution the right to organise studies in the relevant study programme group

and level of higher education for unspecified term, for one to three years, or not to grant the right.

HAKA conducted the initial assessment of the joint Master study programme “Countering Hybrid Threats” at Estonian Academy of Security Sciences.

In order to carry out the assessment, HAKA formed an expert panel, which included experts from higher education institutions, from outside higher education institutions, and a person who had graduated from a higher education institution no more than a year ago. HAKA coordinated the composition of the expert panel with HAKA Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education and the higher education institution.

The expert panel was composed of the following members:

Sergiu Vasile	Chair; Director of the Border Police Department, "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" Police Academy, Bucharest; Romania
Kimmo Himberg	Senior advisor, Taigawise Oy Ltd; former Rector, Police University College, Tampere; Finland
Heidi Maiberg	Student member (graduated PhD studies of the Royal Holloway University London less than a year ago) of the Panel; Estonia
Marek Kohv	Head of Security and Resilience Research Programme, International Center for Defence and Security; Estonia

The members of the expert panel completed the initial assessment training organized by HAKA. The members of the panel worked through the documents submitted by the higher education institution. During the preparatory meeting for the assessment visit, the panel prepared a preliminary visit plan, which was coordinated with the institution and HAKA. The members of the panel agreed on the topics to be clarified on the basis of the documents submitted by the higher education institution. The division of labour and tasks were agreed in the panel for the assessment visit.

On-line discussions via Teams with various groups took place on **18.03.2025**. The panel met and conducted all the meetings agreed in the schedule with the following representatives:

SESSION 1: Meeting with the project coordinator and members of working group

- ✓ I. Lindsaar – *coordinator, Institute of Internal Security, Border Management advisor*
- ✓ M. Kutser – *Institute of Internal Security, advisor*
- ✓ J. Puusalu – *Institute of Internal Security, researcher*
- ✓ T. Rätsepp – *Institute of Internal Security, research coordinator*

SESSION 2: Meeting with the study programme manager and research coordinator

- ✓ I. Vetka – *Vice Rector for Studies within EASS*
- ✓ E. Koort – *Director of the Institute of Internal Security, study programme manager*
- ✓ R. Savimaa – *Institute of Internal Security, Head of Research Center*
- ✓ K. Paavel – *Institute of Internal Security, research coordinator*

SESSION 3: Meeting with the representatives of the teaching staff

- ✓ R. Loik - *Institute of Internal Security, hybrid threat analyst*
- ✓ A. Parve – *Rescue College, analyst*
- ✓ I. Saar – *Financial College, professor*
- ✓ A. Raketski - *Frontex head*
- ✓ L. Tabur – *Institute of Internal Security, visiting lecturer*

SESSION 4: Meeting with the representatives of study support systems

- ✓ K. Saluste – *Institute of Internal Security, head of master's programme*
- ✓ D. Lütsepp – *Institute of Internal Security, study management specialist*
- ✓ A. Kaugemaa – *Digital Development Department, Educational Technologist-Project Manager*
- ✓ A. Kose – *Study Department, analyst-methodologist*

All the sessions were held according to the agenda, the representatives of the EASS replied to all the questions of the panel members and offered additional details for all the points of discussions. The online visit was very effective, successful and very well organised and managed by the representative of HAKA and the panel members.

At the end of the online visit the panel members presented the preliminary feedback to the representatives of the EASS.

HAKA sent the initial report of the panel to the higher education institution for comments on 04.04.2025.

The higher education institution submitted its comments on the initial assessment report on 16.04.2025.

When finalising the report, the panel took into account the comments of the institution.

The panel submitted the final report to HAKA on 21.04.2025.

Short overview of the Estonian Academy of Security Sciences

The Estonian Academy of Security Sciences (hereinafter the Academy) was founded in 1992 and it integrates all of Estonia's internal security education along with research and development activities. The Academy is an institution of professional higher education in the administrative area of the Ministry of the Interior providing vocational, professional higher education and Master's studies in the area of internal security.

The Academy has study centres in Tallinn, Meriküla, Paikuse, Väike-Maarja and Narva. The main study complex is in Pirita, Tallinn (Kase 61) used for instruction by all colleges and the Internal Security Institute, here is also most of the support structure of the Academy. In spring 2018, the campus in Tallinn opened a study border strip imitating the EU Eastern border currently constructed in South-East Estonia. It allows to practise border guard activities in realistic conditions. In October 2020, the study centre in Narva was opened, equipped with contemporary study and IT technology with regard to the fact that Narva includes the external border of the Schengen Area and the European Union.

There are currently about 1000 students in degree studies, divided between the Police and Border Guard College, Rescue College, Prison Service College, Financial College and the Internal Security Institute. As of 1 June 2024, the Academy employs 97 academic staff members, 14 researchers, and 160 administrative staff members. In addition, there are also around 350 visiting lecturers¹.

In 2024, the Academy stated its updated vision, mission and values in the development strategy and established three main strategic goals to be reached by 2035.

The Academy's vision is to be a partner in advancing smart security. That is to provide training, research and research-based solutions for government authorities, the broader public sector and society as a whole. The Academy aims to educate, support and engage both citizens and security providers, offering research-based analysis to decision-makers.

The Academy's closest partners in achieving its objectives and conducting instruction are the Police and Border Guard Board, Rescue Board, Emergency Response Centre, Tax and Customs Board and Prison Service.

The Academy's internationalization is carried out mainly via internal security education networks.

The Academy cooperates with more than 30 institutions providing internal security related education, participates in cooperation activities with several EU agencies and networks, e.g. European Union Agency for Law Enforcement (CEPOL), European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex), Association of European Police Colleges (AEPC), European Fire Service Colleges' Association (EFSCA), Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), Border Management Staff College (BMSC), Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance (DCAF). Since June 2018, the Prison Service College, thus also the

¹ EASS Self-analysis report, Page 7

Academy, has been a member of the European Penitentiary Training Academies Network (EPTA), bringing together 25 members from all over Europe.

The Academy contributes to international study activities in the so-called CEPOL² and Frontex Master's programmes³.

While establishing its objectives, the Academy follows various development trends in the society, and also relies on the Education Strategy, Internal Security Strategy compiled under the lead of the Ministry of the Interior and the strategies of the Academy's partner institutions.

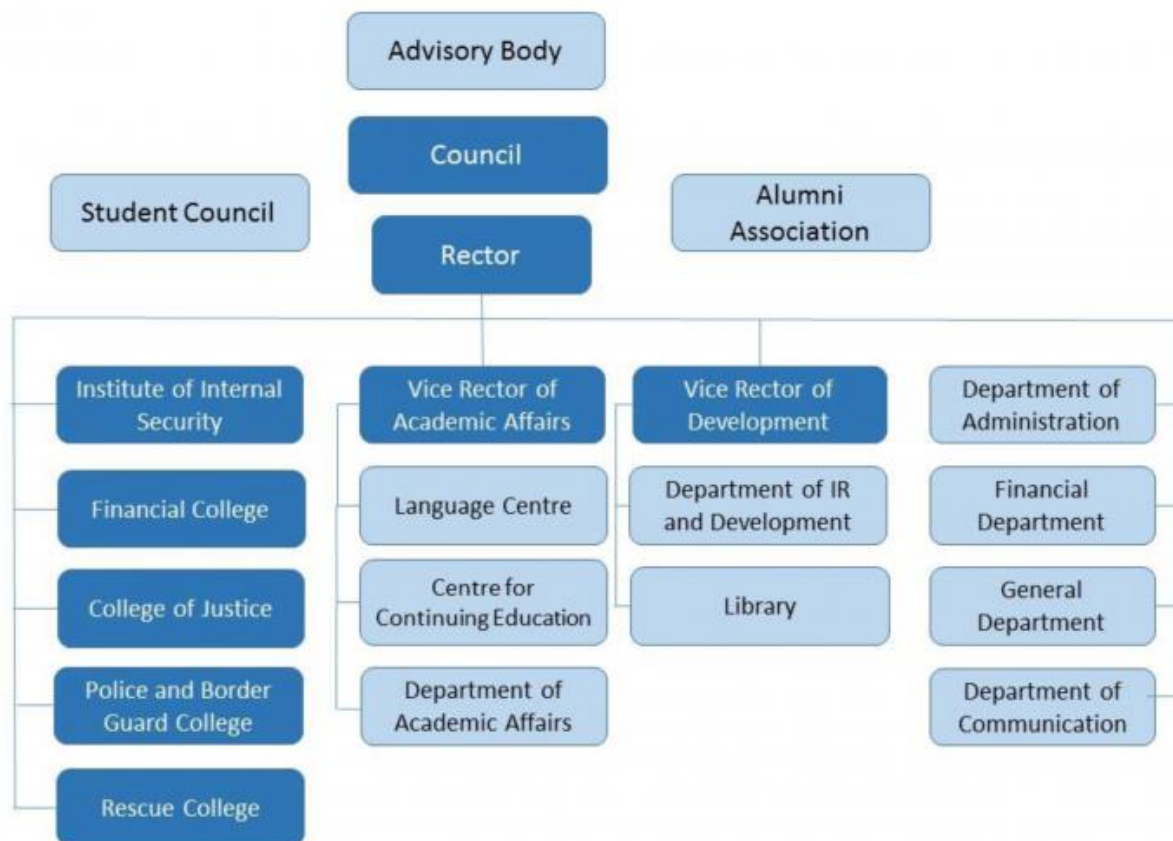
The Academy is a renowned educational institution, with its current institutional accreditation valid until 2026. In addition, the Academy it has achieved in the past years the platinum label of the Healthy Campus, golden label of the family friendly employer and a silver label of an organisation valuing mental health.

Structure of the Estonian Academy of Security Sciences⁴:

² The study volume of the CEPOL's Master's programme is 60 credit points, and upon graduation a diploma from a Spanish partner university will be issued. There are 30 institutions of higher education in the consortium. The study volume of the Frontex Master's programme is 90 credit points.

³ In 2025, there will be at least 30 students, incl. students from Estonia, admitted to the Frontex Master's programme (Strategic Border Management, EHIS (Estonian Education Information System) code 247822). The Academy participated actively in developing both curricula, and framework agreements with both agencies were signed in spring 2014

⁴ Online source: <https://www.sisekaitse.ee/en/structure-eass> accessed on 01.03.2025



2. Assessment results and justifications of assessments

Expert panel's decision

ASSESSMENT AREA	Conforms to the required standard	Conforms partially to the required standard	Does not conform to the required standard
STUDY PROGRAMME	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
LEARNING AND TEACHING	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
ORGANISATION OF STUDIES	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
ACADEMIC STAFF	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
LEARNING AND TEACHING ENVIRONMENT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
FINANCIAL RESOURCES	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Justifications of the panel's assessments to the assessment areas

I. CONCLUSIONS AND ASSESSMENT: STUDY PROGRAMME

Based on the **analysis of the documents** and the **evidence provided** for the joint Marter's study programme "**Countering Hybrid Threats**", the Estonian Academy of Security Sciences "**partially conforms to requirements**" in the assessment area for the **Study Programme**.

The institution demonstrates **compliance** with curriculum standards, financial planning, risk management, and international collaboration. While there are weaknesses, such as the lack of **practical traineeships, military-strategic perspectives, and advanced IT/cybersecurity subjects**, these do not significantly detract from the overall quality and sustainability of the programme.

Strengths

- The need for the programme was confirmed through official letters' support from the Estonian Ministry of the Interior (19.04.2024 No. 2-1/280-2), Ministry of Foreign Affairs (21.05.2024 No. 1-11/2393-1), and Ministry of Defence (23.05.2024 No. 9-1/24/4-2), demonstrating the involvement and backing of key national security institutions.

- The programme is delivered in collaboration with Mykolas Romeris University (Lithuania) and Riga Stradins University (Latvia), ensuring a diverse and international learning environment.
- The curriculum is well-structured, with clear learning outcomes aligned with EQF Level 7 and European Union policies. It covers key areas such as hybrid threats, resilience building, strategic communication, and crisis management.

Areas of concern and recommendations

- The concept of hybrid threats is not entirely clear in the programme documentation. From an assessment viewpoint, this makes it a bit vague to mirror the goals and expected outputs of the programme against the inputs. The EU definition from 2016 could be consistently used in programme documents.
- As a recommendation, even the internship/traineeship is not a mandatory part of the master's curriculum in Estonia, the Countering Hybrid Threats programme should consider including a **mandatory internship/traineeship** within different national and/or EU agencies (e.g., Frontex, national defence institutions, or crisis management bodies) would bridge theory and practice, enhancing employability and programme visibility. This addition would not only enhance the practical applicability of the curriculum but also serve as a promotional tool - showcasing real-world relevance and increasing demand for graduates with expertise in countering hybrid threats.
- The Countering Hybrid Threats programme should incorporate **military-focused content** which would address geopolitical dimensions critical to hybrid threats. From an academic design standpoint, failure to include the military dimension would make a curriculum on hybrid threats incomplete. In addition, it is non-practical since graduates may struggle in jobs that require coordination with national defence or intelligence agencies. Even in programs with a civilian focus, basic military literacy in concepts, structures, and strategy is essential for delivering effective professionals in security policy and crisis management. This does not mean that education is militarized. Rather, a program must ensure holistic, realistic, and operationally relevant understanding. Such a program equips future policymakers, analysts, and crisis responders to engage effectively in the shared responsibility of national security.
- While Data Analysis and Management modules touch on technical skills, the curriculum lacks **dedicated IT/cybersecurity subjects**, such as cyber threat intelligence, digital forensics, or infrastructure protection. Hybrid threats increasingly exploit digital vulnerabilities, and a standalone module on cybersecurity frameworks would empower students to address cyber-physical threats.
- The submitted materials and the assessment visit did not provide sufficient clarity on how the main concepts related to strategy are conceptualized within the curriculum, leaving room for ambiguity regarding their strategic approach, key definitions, and theoretical foundations. To enhance transparency and understanding, the Academy is encouraged to elaborate on these concepts in their public materials, offering clear explanations of terms. This would not only improve stakeholder comprehension but also demonstrate the Academy's commitment to rigorous and well-defined strategic practices, fostering greater confidence among partners, and prospective students.

Opportunities for further improvement

- *The Academy could further expand its international collaboration by partnering with additional universities, research institutions, and security organizations outside the EU. This would enhance the programme's global reach and provide students with broader perspectives on hybrid threats.*
- *The Academy could establish long-term strategic partnerships with key stakeholders, such as government agencies, international organizations, and private sector companies, to ensure the programme remains relevant and aligned with industry needs.*

II. CONCLUSIONS AND ASSESSMENT: LEARNING AND TEACHING

Based on the **analysis of the documents** and the **evidence provided** for the joint Marter's study programme "**Countering Hybrid Threats**", the Estonian Academy of Security Sciences "**conforms to requirements**" in the assessment area for the **Learning and Teaching**. Nevertheless, there are some areas that need further attention such as implementing traineeships to their programme, conceptualising strategy, and providing as neutral and objective assessment methods as possible.

Strengths

- *The study design involves travelling and internationalisation which in addition to planned material can create an environment where students informally learn from each other. Intercultural communication is a transferable skill which supports tackling challenges of the changing world.*

Areas of concern and recommendations

- *The committee encourages Academy to implement, first, programmes like Turnitin to their systems as they allow graders to feedback submitted materials without knowing the name of the student. The following practice can increase neutrality towards marking. Second, the programme is encouraged to create a grading system where several graders cooperate to increase neutrality and objectivity.*
- *The programme is strongly encouraged to create a transparent system and guidelines for students that describe how allocation of supervisors is organised among three higher education institutes, especially if a student is struggling to find a suitable supervisor and how cooperation between two supervisors from different organisations is organised. Also, how the ethics committee functions, and thesis are assessed considering the variety of topics the thesis can be written about.*

Opportunities for further improvement

- *According to submitted materials and the assessment visit, teaching staff has access to trainings to improve their teaching methods as well as support from educational technologist. However, the trainings are not mandatory. The programme is encouraged to create mandatory internal training system for their staff to stay in touch with the most up-to-date teaching methods.*

III. CONCLUSIONS AND ASSESSMENT: ORGANISATION OF STUDIES

Based on the **analysis of the documents** and the **evidence provided** for the joint Marter's study programme "**Countering Hybrid Threats**", the Estonian Academy of Security Sciences "**conforms to requirements**" in the assessment area for the **Organisation of Studies**.

Strengths

- *Providing scholarships to alumni who turn their thesis into a scientific publication is a good practice that contributes to research, development of the field, as well as raises awareness of the programme.*
- *All premises within the consortium partners are built bearing physical disabilities in mind. The teaching staff and the support administrative staff are ready to offer full support for adapting and customising the training materials and documents for special needs*

Areas of concern and recommendations

- *As an area of concern, the committee sees that Academy should reconsider how mentoring is provided to students. According to current system, proactivity lies on the student. Taking into account the target audience (working professionals), mentoring should be used as a preventative measure which is integrated part of the studies with focus on time management as choosing over priorities is likely to happen among students.*

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND ASSESSMENT: ACADEMIC STAFF

Based on the **analysis of the documents** and the **evidence provided** for the joint Marter's study programme "**Countering Hybrid Threats**", the Estonian Academy of Security Sciences "**conforms to requirements**" in the assessment area for the **Academic Staff**. The academic staff teaching at the Estonian Academy of Security Sciences in master's programme Countering Hybrid Threats does conform to requirements.

Strengths

- *The members of teaching staff have academic education which rather well matches the substance matter content of the modules they teach.*
- *The members of teaching staff all have an extensive experience in university level teaching, and they all also have experience from international internal security Master programmes.*
- *The Best lecturer award is an example of a good practice to motivate teachers.*
- *The Academy provides training and development opportunities for academic staff, ensuring they are equipped to deliver high-quality education.*

Areas of concern and recommendations

- *Due to the lack of military and IT subjects within the curriculum, the programme doesn't offer technological and military expertise within its teaching staff. Considering the very wide scope of potential hybrid threats, research and experience-based input from those areas would greatly benefit the programme.*

Opportunities for further improvement

- *To attract in the future iterations of the Master's programme valuable and highly qualified teaching staff and experts, and to identify the possibility of involving more researchers and experts from the military/ defense field.*

V. CONCLUSIONS AND ASSESSMENT: LEARNING AND TEACHING ENVIRONMENT

Based on the **analysis of the documents** and the **evidence provided** for the joint Marter's study programme "**Countering Hybrid Threats**", the Estonian Academy of Security Sciences "**conforms to requirements**" in the assessment area for the **Learning and Teaching Environment**.

Strengths

- The Academy has invested in **modern IT infrastructure**, including virtual simulation centres, hybrid lecture rooms, and access to scientific databases, ensuring a high-quality learning environment.
- Highly advanced technical solutions and a variety of learning opportunities.
- Comprehensive access to electronic resources, academic support services, and e-learning platforms (notably Moodle).

Areas of concern and recommendations

- The degree of uniformity and integration of resources and platforms between partner institutions remains unclear.

Opportunities for further improvement

- To consolidate and to better coordinate with the consortium partners all the aspects regarding the learning and teaching environments, especially for the online platforms, procedures within the activities and common approach for the online teaching/assessment modules.
- Although using one online workplace (ZOOM) is beneficial from the point of clarity and convenience, it would be foresightful to have an alternative platform for backup. Since digital solutions may have unexpected problems, replacing one with another can take time, as there is an issue with timely licenses.

VI. CONCLUSIONS AND ASSESSMENT: FINANCIAL RESOURCES

Based on the **analysis of the documents** and the **evidence provided** for the joint Marter's study programme "**Countering Hybrid Threats**", the Estonian Academy of Security Sciences "**conforms to requirements**" in the assessment area for the **Financial Resources**.

The institution demonstrates **strong financial planning, adequate budgeting, and effective risk management**. While there are minor weaknesses, such as **dependence on external funding** and the **lack of explicit financial auditing information**, these do not significantly detract from the overall financial sustainability and compliance with requirements.

Strengths

- *The institution has secured external funding through EU programmes, such as Erasmus+, to support the programme.*
- *The Academy has conducted a detailed risk analysis and developed mitigating measures to address potential risks, such as the loss of EU funding or restrictions in international mobility.*
- *The Academy has a well-structured budget that supports the implementation of the curriculum, including investments in modern learning environments and state-of-the-art teaching equipment.*
- *The Academy has calculated the cost of one student place in the Master's curriculum, ensuring financial sustainability.*

Areas of concern and recommendations

- *The Academy relies heavily on EU funding for research and development activities, which poses a risk if funding is reduced or discontinued. ("Losing EU funding: Average probability. Mitigation measure: Tuition fees for students, considering introducing tuition fees." - Self-analysis report, Page 11)*

Opportunities for further improvement

- *The Academy should explore additional funding sources, such as private sector partnerships and alumni contributions, to reduce dependence on EU funding.*

3. Analysis of the joint Master study programme “Countering Hybrid Threats” by assessment areas and criteria

3.1 Study programme

3.1.1. Launching and developing of the study programme is based on the Development Plan of the higher education institution, national development plans and analyses (including labour market and advisability analyses).

Evidence and analysis

The joint Master’s “Countering Hybrid Threats” has been established with the support of European Union funding, additional funding for implementing the programme in 2026-2030 has been applied for from the Erasmus Mundus.

Partners implementing the curriculum are Estonian Academy of Security Sciences (Academy), Mykolas Romeris University (Lithuania, hereinafter MRU) and Riga Stradins University (Latvia, hereinafter RSU). The named partners signed a consortium agreement in 2024. All partners are legally recognised as universities or institutions of higher education that according to the respective national legal acts have the right to provide Master’s level education and participate in the implementation of the joint curriculum.

At the level of the Estonian Academy of Security Sciences the programme is managed *the Internal Security Institute (hereinafter the ISI)*.

The 90-ETCS curriculum is conducted in the form of full-time module study with a nominal study period of 1.5 years, the language of instruction is English. The curriculum is a part of the curriculum group of internal security studies. Graduates receive a Master’s degree.

To ensure a fair distribution within the Consortium of the students taking part in the JMCHT Programme, the Partner institutions agreed on the following points:

- MRU hosts the students during the first semester in 1, 2, 3 Modules;
- RSU hosts the students during the second semester in 4, 5, 6 Modules;
- EASS hosts the students during the third semester in 7, 8, 9 Modules;

The launch and development of the "Countering Hybrid Threats" study programme is firmly grounded in the strategic objectives of the Estonian Academy of Security Sciences, national development plans, and labour market analyses. The Academy’s Development Plan, which extends to 2035, highlights the necessity of fostering an ecosystem for internal security research, providing innovative learning experiences, and ensuring societal security (*Estonian Academy of Security Sciences 3.0 Development Strategy 2025–2035*⁵).

⁵ Online source: https://www.sisekaitse.ee/sites/default/files/inline-files/EASS%203.0%20Development%20Strategy%202025%E2%80%932035_0.pdf accessed on 01.03.2025

The curriculum was developed in response to a training needs analysis commissioned by the European External Action Service, which identified a gap in structured educational programmes addressing hybrid threats. Additionally, the programme aligns with Estonia's Internal Security Strategy and other national policies. The involvement of key stakeholders, including the Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Ministry of Defence—who provided official support letters—demonstrates the national advisability of the programme.

Furthermore, the integration of a hybrid threats module into the Academy's internal security Master's programme in 2024, followed by a successful pilot micro-degree programme, validated the demand for such studies. The high number of applicants from diverse sectors, including government offices, law enforcement, and critical infrastructure providers, underscores the labour market need for specialized education in countering hybrid threats.

The programme's development is directly supported by strategic planning, national policies, and empirical labour market needs, ensuring its relevance and sustainability.

3.1.2. Employers and other stakeholders of the study programme group are involved in the study programme's development.

Evidence and analysis

The development of the "Countering Hybrid Threats" study programme actively involved employers and key stakeholders to ensure its relevance and alignment with labour market needs. The programme was designed in collaboration with a consortium that includes the Estonian Academy of Security Sciences, the Austrian Ministry of the Interior, eu-LISA, the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats (HybridCoE, Finland), TalTech, and the Estonian Ministries of the Interior and Foreign Affairs.

Furthermore, the curriculum development process was supported by additional partners, including the Croatian Police Academy, Mykolas Romeris University (Lithuania), and Riga Stradins University (Latvia). These institutions maintain strong connections with employers and other stakeholders, ensuring that the curriculum and learning outcomes align with the demands of the labour market.

The need for the programme **was also confirmed through official letters' support** from the Estonian Ministry of the Interior (19.04.2024 No. 2-1/280-2), Ministry of Foreign Affairs (21.05.2024 No. 1-11/2393-1), and Ministry of Defence (23.05.2024 No. 9-1/24/4-2), demonstrating the involvement and backing of key national security institutions.

Additionally, prior to launching the full programme, the Academy tested the demand for such studies by integrating a 21 ECTS module on countering hybrid threats into its internal security Master's programme in 2024. The overwhelming response to this module, as well as a subsequent international micro-degree programme, further validated the necessity of employer-driven curriculum development.

The study programme has been developed in close collaboration with employers and relevant stakeholders, ensuring that it meets labour market needs and prepares graduates with skills essential for countering hybrid threats.

3.1.3. The study programme meets the requirements and trends in international legislation that regulate the professional field, and if an occupational qualification standard exists takes into consideration the acquisition and implementation of the knowledge and skills described therein.

Evidence and analysis

The **"Countering Hybrid Threats"** study programme was designed and aligned with international legislation, regulations, and professional standards relevant to internal security and hybrid threat mitigation. The curriculum incorporates key aspects of European Union policies, legal frameworks, and strategic approaches to countering hybrid threats, ensuring that students acquire competencies that comply with international security requirements.

The **"Countering Hybrid Threats"** study programme was developed in collaboration with key stakeholders, including European partners, all of which are actively involved in shaping EU-wide policies on security and hybrid threat responses. This ensures that the curriculum reflects current international legal requirements and trends.

The study programme takes into consideration the necessary qualifications and skills required in the field, as demonstrated by the strong involvement of internal security institutions, law enforcement agencies, and ministries of the Interior, Foreign Affairs, and Defence. These stakeholders have ensured that the programme provides the necessary legal, strategic, and operational knowledge required for professionals in the field.

The **"Countering Hybrid Threats"** study programme is designed to address hybrid threats within the framework of **European Union policies** and **legal frameworks**, ensuring that students are equipped to work within the regulatory environment of international security.

Evidence: *"The curriculum provides a platform for exchanging experiences and enhancing competence by offering up-to-date knowledge, critical analytical and administrative capacity at the strategic level, which is essential for making complex management decisions in a changing society."* (Programme Curriculum, Page 1)

"The student critically analyses hybrid threats in the context of global, European and national security; analyses the security strategies aiming to ensure sustainable security concepts in the contemporary hybrid threats environment; discusses international and European Union policies and legal framework responding to hybrid threats, considering provisions of fundamental rights." (Programme Curriculum, Module 1, Page 3)

The **"Countering Hybrid Threats"** study programme curriculum emphasizes the importance of **fundamental rights** and **ethical standards**, which are central to international legislation and occupational standards in the field of internal security.

Evidence: *"The student promotes respect for fundamental rights, professional and ethical standards, while ensuring internal security."* (Programme Curriculum, Page 1)

"The student explains the role of protection of fundamental rights in preparation for responding to hybrid threats, including in cooperation with civil-military and other stakeholders." (Programme Curriculum, Module 4, Page 4)

The **"Countering Hybrid Threats"** study programme includes modules that focus on **international cooperation** and **prevention strategies**, which are critical components of international legislation and occupational standards in countering hybrid threats.

Evidence: *"The student explains the specifics of modern crimes of hybrid nature, relevant criminal procedure concepts and their connection with the principles of fundamental rights; identifies problems, recommends and elaborates tools and methods of protection against hybrid threats by working in a team."* (Programme Curriculum, Module 5, Page 4)
"The student critically analyses the importance of using relevant tools and means of cooperation in preventing and countering hybrid threats." (Programme Curriculum, Module 5, Page 4)

The **"Countering Hybrid Threats"** study programme incorporates **strategic and crisis communication skills**, which are essential for complying with international standards and occupational requirements in managing hybrid threats.

Evidence: *"The student applies strategic and crisis communication skills in the context of hybrid threats with regard to ethical values and evaluates their efficiency."* (Programme Curriculum, Page 1)

Evidence: *"The student explains the basic principles of communication ethics while managing threats of hybrid nature."* (Programme Curriculum, Module 6, Page 4)

The curriculum ensures that students can conduct **independent research** and apply **data analysis methods**, which are key skills required by international legislation and occupational standards in the field of internal security.

Evidence: *"The student collects and systematises empirical data to solve research problems and carries out independently small-scale scientific research in the field of hybrid threats."* (Programme Curriculum, Page 1)

"The student applies the techniques of conducting interviews and observations as well as text and discourse analysis." (Programme Curriculum, Module 7, Page 4)

The **"Countering Hybrid Threats"** study programme prepares students for **leadership and management roles** in hybrid environments, which are critical for addressing complex security challenges as outlined in international legislation and occupational standards.

Evidence: *"The student proposes combined approaches for management and leadership for encountering modern security challenges and threats based on modern theories, considering professional ethics, fundamental rights, and principles of equal treatment of diverse groups."* (Programme Curriculum, Module 8, Page 5)

By integrating international legislative trends, regulatory frameworks, and occupational qualification standards, the programme ensures the educational platform for the graduates to be prepared to navigate the evolving challenges of hybrid threats within the legal and operational landscape of both national and international security environments.

The study programme **"Countering Hybrid Threats"** meets the requirements and trends in **international legislation** that regulate the professional field of internal security and

hybrid threats. It also takes into consideration the acquisition and implementation of the knowledge and skills described in relevant occupational qualification standards.

To support inclusive and practice-based learning, the curriculum includes practical activities in various learning environments across all modules, with educational field trips organized whenever possible.

According to the information received, practical fieldwork component is included in Module 8- Management and Leadership in the Context of Hybrid Threats and Hybrid Crises. The learning strategy of Module 8 aims to facilitate the integration of all gained knowledge and skills through case study-based learning. The visit to the European Union's external border is organised for one week. The learners will visit Narva, in the location of Frontex Contingent 7 for Norway, Sweden, Finland, Baltic States, Poland and Slovakia. The same location is used for organising experiential learning phase of several Frontex courses. Students will visit border crossing points at the EU external border, meet with experts and get experience in the implementation of integrated border management.

3.1.4. The learning outcomes of the study programme are equivalent and comparable to the learning outcomes of the academic cycles of higher education described in Annex 1 of the Standard of Higher Education.

Evidence and analysis

The learning outcomes of the "Countering Hybrid Threats" study programme are equivalent and comparable to the learning outcomes of the academic cycles of higher education described in **Annex 1 of the Standard of Higher Education**. This is evidenced by the detailed alignment of the curriculum's learning outcomes with the requirements for Master's level education, as outlined in the document. Below are specific pieces of evidence that support this point:

The curriculum ensures that students gain a **systematic overview and broad knowledge** of contemporary hybrid threats, their forms, risks, and challenges. This aligns with the requirement in Annex 1 of the Standard of Higher Education for Master's level graduates to possess **advanced knowledge** in their field of study.

Evidence: *"Upon completing the Master's studies curriculum, the student has a systematic overview and broad knowledge of contemporary hybrid threats, forms of their appearance, risks, challenges and trends arising from globalisation and their influence on regional and national internal and border security."* (Programme Curriculum, Page 1)

The curriculum emphasizes **critical analysis** and the ability to **solve complex problems**, which are key learning outcomes for Master's level education as per Annex 1.

Evidence: *"The student critically analyses hybrid threats in the context of global, European and national security."* (Programme Curriculum, Module 1, Page 3) *"The student critically analyses tendencies of contemporary warfare regarding hybrid threats."* (Programme Curriculum, Module 2, Page 3) *"The student critically evaluates actions countering*

information advocacy and influence activities." (Programme Curriculum, Module 8, Page 5)

The curriculum requires students to conduct **independent research** and apply scientific methods, which is a core requirement for Master's level graduates according to Annex 1.

Evidence: *"The student collects and systematises empirical data to solve research problems and carries out independently small-scale scientific research in the field of hybrid threats."* (Programme Curriculum, Page 1) *"The student conducts research and applied studies, analyses and interprets their results, including independently formulates and solves problems."* (Programme Curriculum, Module 9, Page 5) *"The student draws up the MA thesis plan selecting the appropriate research and data collection methods pursuant to the topic and aim of the research."* (Programme Curriculum, Module 3, Page 3)

The curriculum develops **strategic thinking** and **management skills**, which are essential for Master's level graduates as described in Annex 1.

Evidence: *"The student demonstrates the capacity to work in positions requiring strategic thinking, comprehends and copes with challenges and controversies related to hybrid threats."* (P Programme Curriculum, age 1) *"The student employs appropriate tools and techniques to strategically manage civilian, human and technical resources, makes decisions in case of hybrid crises, and critically evaluates their own and peers' problem-solving performance."* (Programme Curriculum, Module 8, Page 5)

The curriculum ensures that students develop **communication skills** and adhere to **ethical standards**, which are key learning outcomes for Master's level education.

Evidence: *"The student applies strategic and crisis communication skills in the context of hybrid threats with regard to ethical values and evaluates their efficiency."* (Programme Curriculum, Page 1) *"The student explains the basic principles of communication ethics while managing threats of hybrid nature."* (Programme Curriculum, Module 6, Page 4) *"The student promotes respect for fundamental rights, professional and ethical standards, while ensuring internal security."* (Programme Curriculum, Page 1)

The curriculum requires students to apply their knowledge in practical contexts, such as designing solutions and managing crises, which aligns with the requirement for Master's level graduates to apply their knowledge in complex and unpredictable situations.

Evidence: *"The student designs solutions, elaborates methods of social resilience and protection to respond to hybrid threats."* (Programme Curriculum, Page 1) *"The student proposes combined approaches for management and leadership for encountering modern security challenges and threats based on modern theories."* (Programme Curriculum, Module 8, Page 5)

The curriculum fosters a commitment to **continuous learning** and **professional development**, which is a key learning outcome at Master's level graduates as per Annex 1.

Evidence: *"The student maintains a commitment to continuous learning and professional development."* (Programme Curriculum, Page 1)

The curriculum is designed to meet the requirements of **EQF Level 7** (European Qualifications Framework), which corresponds to Master's level education. This ensures that the learning outcomes are internationally comparable.

Evidence: *"HYBRIDIM includes 11 outputs, the most important of which is the implementation of the EQF Level 7 joint curriculum Countering Hybrid Threats that is nationally recognised in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania."* (Self-analysis report, Page 8)

The learning outcomes of the "Countering Hybrid Threats" study programme are **equivalent and comparable** to the learning outcomes described in **Annex 1 of the Standard of Higher Education**. The curriculum ensures that graduates possess advanced knowledge, critical thinking, research skills, strategic management capabilities, and ethical competence, all of which are required for Master's level education. This alignment is further reinforced by the programme's adherence to **EQF Level 7**, ensuring international comparability and recognition.

3.1.5. The study programme is coherent and has a comprehensive structure. The title of the study programme is in line with the learning outcomes of the modules and courses within the study programme.

Evidence and analysis

The 90-ECTS curriculum is conducted in the form of full-time module study with a nominal study period of 1.5 years. The Partner institutions agreed on the following points:

- MRU hosts the students during the first semester in 1, 2, 3 Modules;
- RSU hosts the students during the second semester in 4, 5, 6 Modules;
- EASS hosts the students during the third semester in 7, 8, 9 Modules;

The curriculum is structured into **9 modules**, each with clearly defined learning outcomes that build upon one another to provide a comprehensive understanding of hybrid threats and their countermeasures.

Evidence: *"The 90-ECTS curriculum is conducted in the form of full-time module study with a nominal study period of 1.5 years."* (Self-analysis report, Page 2).

The modules cover key areas such as hybrid threat phenomena, research methodology, resilience building, prevention, strategic communication, data analysis, and management in hybrid crises, culminating in a Master's thesis (Programme Curriculum, Pages 3-5).

The title **"Countering Hybrid Threats"** accurately reflects the focus of the programme, which is to equip students with the knowledge and skills to understand, analyse, and respond to hybrid threats.

Evidence: *"The curriculum aims to develop students' strategic thinking skills to be able to comprehend and cope with challenges and controversies related to hybrid threats in the*

internal security area in the light of European Union policy and societal contexts." (Programme Curriculum, Page 1).

The learning outcomes of each module directly relate to countering hybrid threats, such as: *"The student critically analyses hybrid threats in the context of global, European and national security."* (Programme Curriculum, Module 1, Page 3) *"The student develops skills to elaborate methods of social resilience and protection against hybrid threats."* (Programme Curriculum, Module 4, Page 4) *"The student acquires the knowledge and skills to apply strategic and crisis communication skills in case of hybrid threat situations."* (Programme Curriculum, Module 6, Page 4).

The modules are arranged in a logical sequence, starting with foundational knowledge (e.g., concepts and characteristics of hybrid threats) and progressing to advanced skills (e.g., strategic communication, management, and research).

Evidence:

Semester I focuses on foundational knowledge (e.g., hybrid threat phenomena, research methodology).

Semester II builds on this with practical skills (e.g., resilience building, prevention, and cooperation).

Semester III culminates in advanced application (e.g., data analysis, management, and the Master's thesis) (Programme Curriculum, Pages 3-5).

Each module contributes to the overall goal of countering hybrid threats, ensuring coherence and alignment with the programme's title.

Evidence: *"The curriculum provides a platform for exchanging experiences and enhancing competence by offering up-to-date knowledge, critical analytical and administrative capacity at the strategic level, which is essential for making complex management decisions in a changing society."* (Programme Curriculum, Page 1).

The reviewed documents and the online assessment visit highlight a comprehensive and well-structured Master's curriculum in *Countering Hybrid Threats*. However, the programme appears to lack explicit emphasis on three critical areas: traineeship/practical experience, military perspectives, and advanced IT/cybersecurity subjects, which are essential for a holistic approach to countering hybrid threats.

EASS (Estonian Academy of Security Sciences) has adopted a well defined concept as the foundation for its curriculum. The assessment team considers it very positive that EASS adheres to this definition consistently throughout its academic program. The definition states that hybrid threats are multi-domain in nature, encompassing a wide array of sectors, including, crucially, the military domain.

On a strategic leadership level of the state, all domains—civil, political, informational, economic, and military—are essential to proper functioning of the society. National defense, including its military components, must be seen as being essential in responding to hybrid threats. The spectrum of threats requires a comprehensive response approach.

Effective defence against hybrid threats calls for an integrated approach where military and civilian actors collaborate across phases of prevention, detection, response, and recovery.

From an academic design standpoint, failure to include the military dimension would make a curriculum on hybrid threats incomplete. In addition, it is non-practical since graduates may struggle in jobs that require coordination with national defence or intelligence agencies. Even in programs with a civilian focus, basic military literacy in concepts, structures, and strategy is essential for delivering effective professionals in security policy and crisis management. This does not mean that education is militarized. Rather, a program must ensure holistic, realistic, and operationally relevant understanding. Such a program equips future policymakers, analysts, and crisis responders to engage effectively in the shared responsibility of national security.

It is highly questionable whether a radicalized youth, a cyberattack against another state, or systematic dissemination of disinformation could be tackled as mere social threats?

Understanding and addressing hybrid threats requires a comprehensive framework that does not artificially separate the social from the military, but rather sees them as part of a unified, multidimensional threat environment.

The assessment team encourages EASS to carefully consider its core approach to the program.

While the curriculum includes theoretical and research-focused modules, it does not incorporate a **mandatory traineeship or practical fieldwork component**. Given that hybrid threats are inherently operational and dynamic, hands-on experience in real-world settings - such as internships with law enforcement, border security agencies, or crisis management institutions - would bridge the gap between theory and practice.

While *Data Analysis* and *Management* modules touch on technical skills, the curriculum lacks **dedicated IT/cybersecurity subjects**, such as cyber threat intelligence, digital forensics, or infrastructure protection. Hybrid threats increasingly exploit digital vulnerabilities, and a standalone module on cybersecurity frameworks would empower students to address cyber-physical threats. The Academy's existing IT infrastructure (e.g., XVR simulations) could be leveraged to create lab-based learning for these competencies.

Addressing these gaps would enhance the programme's applicability, ensuring graduates possess not only strategic and theoretical expertise but also practical, military, and technical proficiencies demanded by modern hybrid threat landscapes.

3.1.6. The joint study programme and cooperation agreement thereof meet the requirements set in subsections 11 and 19 of the Higher Education Act.

Evidence and analysis

The joint study programme "**Countering Hybrid Threats**" and its **cooperation agreement** meet the requirements set in **subsections 11 and 19 of the Higher Education Act**.

The programme is developed and implemented by a **consortium** of three institutions: Estonian Academy of Security Sciences, Mykolas Romeris University (Lithuania), and Riga

Stradins University (Latvia). This ensures compliance with subsection 11, which requires joint programmes to involve multiple institutions.

Evidence: *"Partners implementing the curriculum are Estonian Academy of Security Sciences, Mykolas Romeris University (Lithuania) and Riga Stradins University (Latvia)." (Self-analysis report, Page 4).*

"Consortium Agreement on Joint Master's in Countering Hybrid Threats 2026-2030"

A **consortium agreement** was signed in 2024, outlining the responsibilities of each partner, ensuring compliance with subsection 19, which requires formal agreements for joint programmes.

Evidence: *"The named partners signed a consortium agreement in 2024." (Self-analysis report, Page 4)*

"Consortium Agreement on Joint Master's in Countering Hybrid Threats 2026-2030"

The agreement ensures that all partners apply the same **assessment requirements** and **quality standards**, meeting the requirement for consistent quality across institutions.

Evidence: *"All partners act similarly when implementing the curriculum, applying the same assessment requirements and quality standards." (Self-analysis report, Page 4)*

"Consortium Agreement on Joint Master's in Countering Hybrid Threats 2026-2030"

"Quality Assurance Handbook, 30 September 2024"

The programme is **nationally recognized** in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, and graduates receive a joint diploma, fulfilling the requirement for recognized qualifications.

Evidence: *"The joint diploma will be signed by the leaders of the higher education institutions conducting the studies." (Programme Curriculum, Page 2)*

"Self-analysis report, the Estonian Academy of Security Sciences"

"Quality Assurance Handbook, 30 September 2024"

CONCLUSIONS AND ASSESSMENT: STUDY PROGRAMME

Based on the **analysis of the documents** and the **evidence provided** for the joint Master's study programme **"Countering Hybrid Threats"**, the Estonian Academy of Security Sciences **"partially conforms to requirements"** in the assessment area for the **Study Programme**.

The institution demonstrates **compliance** with curriculum standards, financial planning, risk management, and international collaboration. While there are weaknesses, such as the lack of **practical traineeships, military-strategic perspectives, and advanced IT/cybersecurity subjects**, these do not significantly detract from the overall quality and sustainability of the programme.

Strengths

- *The need for the programme was confirmed through official letters' support from the Estonian Ministry of the Interior (19.04.2024 No. 2-1/280-2), Ministry of Foreign Affairs (21.05.2024 No. 1-11/2393-1), and Ministry of Defence (23.05.2024 No. 9-*

1/24/4-2), demonstrating the involvement and backing of key national security institutions.

- The programme is delivered in collaboration with Mykolas Romeris University (Lithuania) and Riga Stradins University (Latvia), ensuring a diverse and international learning environment.
- The curriculum is well-structured, with clear learning outcomes aligned with EQF Level 7 and European Union policies. It covers key areas such as hybrid threats, resilience building, strategic communication, and crisis management.

Areas of concern and recommendations

- The concept of hybrid threats is not entirely clear in the programme documentation. From an assessment viewpoint, this makes it a bit vague to mirror the goals and expected outputs of the programme against the inputs. The EU definition from 2016 could be consistently used in programme documents.
- As a recommendation, even the internship/traineeship is not a mandatory part of the master's curriculum in Estonia, the Countering Hybrid Threats programme should consider including a **mandatory internship/traineeship** within different national and/or EU agencies (e.g., Frontex, national defence institutions, or crisis management bodies) would bridge theory and practice, enhancing employability and programme visibility. This addition would not only enhance the practical applicability of the curriculum but also serve as a promotional too - showcasing real-world relevance and increasing demand for graduates with expertise in countering hybrid threats.
- The Countering Hybrid Threats programme should incorporate **military-focused content** which would address geopolitical dimensions critical to hybrid threats. From an academic design standpoint, failure to include the military dimension would make a curriculum on hybrid threats incomplete. In addition, it is non-practical since graduates may struggle in jobs that require coordination with national defence or intelligence agencies. Even in programs with a civilian focus, basic military literacy in concepts, structures, and strategy is essential for delivering effective professionals in security policy and crisis management. This does not mean that education is militarized. Rather, a program must ensure holistic, realistic, and operationally relevant understanding. Such a program equips future policymakers, analysts, and crisis responders to engage effectively in the shared responsibility of national security.
- While Data Analysis and Management modules touch on technical skills, the curriculum lacks **dedicated IT/cybersecurity subjects**, such as cyber threat intelligence, digital forensics, or infrastructure protection. Hybrid threats increasingly exploit digital vulnerabilities, and a standalone module on cybersecurity frameworks would empower students to address cyber-physical threats.
- The submitted materials and the assessment visit did not provide sufficient clarity on how the main concepts related to strategy are conceptualized within the curriculum, leaving room for ambiguity regarding their strategic approach, key definitions, and theoretical foundations. To enhance transparency and understanding, the Academy is encouraged to elaborate on these concepts in their public materials, offering clear explanations of terms. This would not only improve stakeholder comprehension but also demonstrate the Academy's commitment to

rigorous and well-defined strategic practices, fostering greater confidence among partners, and prospective students.

Opportunities for further improvement

- *The Academy could further expand its international collaboration by partnering with additional universities, research institutions, and security organizations outside the EU. This would enhance the programme's global reach and provide students with broader perspectives on hybrid threats.*
- *The Academy could establish long-term strategic partnerships with key stakeholders, such as government agencies, international organizations, and private sector companies, to ensure the programme remains relevant and aligned with industry needs.*

3.2 Learning and Teaching

3.2.1. Conditions for admission and graduation have been formalised, are clear and transparent; requirements to prospective students stem from prerequisites for the completion of the study programme.

Evidence and analysis

Conditions for admissions are clear and transparent. Admission principles and rules, such as members of the admission panel, admission requirements and criteria, necessary documents, are clearly stated in the Student Handbook (p. 6-8).

Grad Applicants must hold a Bachelor's degree (BA) or equivalent, have 2 years of professional work experience in internal security or a related field, and demonstrate English proficiency at B2 level.

The Online Motivational Interview (Students Handbook, page 8) assesses the applicant's motivation, readiness for research, and understanding of the EU and global security environment, further aligning with the programme's objectives.

Furthermore, online motivational interview is part of the admission process. Student Handbook also illustrates aim of the interview (p. 8). The handbook also provides information on how selection of students is organised. Panel members also have an assessment tool to use during the interviews.

Conditions for graduation are clear and transparent. Students' rights and duties are described in the Student Handbook (p. 11-12). Principles of marking, attendance, absence, and programme progression are illustrated in detail.

For instance, while participating virtually, students must use their video cameras and microphones. While principles of missing school due to illness are clearly stated, more clarity is needed on rules of absence in case of force majeure where a request cannot be submitted to the Partner Program Manager in three working days before the absence.

Graduation requires the completion of all modules (90 ECTS) and the successful defence of a Master's thesis (Curriculum Countering Hybrid Threats, page 3). The programme allows for the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), where students can be exempted from certain modules if they have already achieved the learning outcomes through prior formal or non-formal education (Students Handbook, page 19).

The Research Methodology and Academic Writing module (10 ECTS) specifically requires students to write academic texts and conduct research in English, making language proficiency a critical prerequisite (Curriculum Countering Hybrid Threats, page 3).

The Master's thesis (Curriculum Countering Hybrid Threats, page 5) requires students to conduct independent research, demonstrating their ability to apply the knowledge and skills gained during the programme.

3.2.2. Academic staff members to be involved are aware of the objectives of the study programme and their role in achieving these objectives.

Evidence and analysis

Objectives of the study programme and the role of academic staff members in achieving these objectives are described in several submitted materials. For instance, in “2_Curriculum Countering Hybrid Threats”, as well as in the list of academic staff members, their background, and subjects they aim to teach (Appendix 2 Table 3 Academic staff teaching on the curriculum), and comparison on the learning outcomes of the curriculum and standard of higher education (Comparing the learning outcomes).

Furthermore, interviewees shared a joint understanding of the objectives of the study programme during the assessment visit.

The Quality Assurance Handbook (page 6) states that the Partner Programme Boards monitor the delivery of the programme and ensure that the content and teaching methods align with the programme's objectives.

Academic staff are required to participate in regular feedback and review processes to ensure the programme meets its goals (Quality Assurance Handbook, page 10).

The Quality Assurance Handbook (page 8) emphasizes the importance of continuous professional development for academic staff, including training in teaching methods and the use of digital tools, to ensure they are equipped to deliver the programme effectively.

Staff are also encouraged to engage in research and development activities related to hybrid threats, further aligning their expertise with the programme's objectives (Quality Assurance Handbook, page 8).

The Students Handbook (page 22) highlights the role of academic staff as mentors, guiding students through the programme and supporting their academic and professional development. This ensures that staff are actively involved in helping students achieve the programme's learning outcomes.

3.2.3. Planned learning and teaching including independent work and traineeships form a whole. Planned study methods motivate learners to take charge of their studies and achieve learning outcomes.

Evidence and analysis

Planned learning and teaching include contact and independent work (mostly 60 vs 200 per study module) (Student Handbook, p. 10).

As emphasised in the Student Handbook, contact learning takes place both in the online environment and on site at the educational institution. In the first semester, a 2-week contact studying session takes place in Lithuania, in the second semester in Latvia.

Independent study focuses on theoretical literature and preparation for the module (Student Handbook, p. 10).

Although the programme is created due to a practical need for expertise for acknowledging hybrid threats, preventing, and tackling them, the programme does not provide a traineeship opportunity as it is planned for working professionals who bring their knowledge back to their organisations (source: assessment visit).

The Quality Assurance Handbook (page 7) highlights that the programme uses diverse learning methods (e.g., case studies, simulations, group work) to encourage learner autonomy and active participation. However, from the assessment visit, it is unclear how coherent is the use of diverse learning methods as the teaching staff has the freedom to choose their teaching methods.

Nevertheless, the study programme is designed to support progression. Studies are for free except if a student does not pass exam or an assessment. Not receiving a positive result will incur in a tuition debt that must be paid in less than a month (Student Handbook, p. 13).

3.2.4. Learning and teaching supports, besides the acquisition of speciality skills, the development of transferable skills, which contribute to tackling the challenges of the changing world.

Evidence and analysis

The programme supports development of transferable skills related to independently doing data analysis and academic work. More precisely, to conduct social science research and compose academic text as well as ability to independently and creatively conduct research on MA level in the field of internal security (Curriculum, p. 4-5).

The Students Handbook (page 26) highlights the mobility periods in different countries, fostering intercultural competence and the ability to work in international teams. The programme's international environment encourages students to develop global perspectives and adaptability, essential for navigating a changing world.

The programme promotes ethical values and professional standards across all modules (Curriculum Countering Hybrid Threats, pages 3-5), ensuring that students develop a strong sense of responsibility and integrity, which are transferable to any professional setting.

According to the assessment visit, students are thoroughly taught about the concepts regarding strategy, strategic thinking and communications. Whilst it is related to the speciality skills, understanding such concepts is also linked with tackling the challenges of the changing world. Nevertheless, it remained unclear how strategy is conceptualised.

3.2.5. Appropriate methods and means (incl. the use of digital technologies) are planned for the assessment of learning outcomes; assessment is transparent, objective and supports the development of students.

Evidence and analysis

Appropriate methods and means are planned for the assessment of learning outcomes. As phrased during the assessment visit, teaching staff has freedom to choose between various assessment ways and they tend to mix several. Therefore, it principles of quality assurance, assessment is reliable, with clear and consistent processes for the setting, assessment criteria and grading. Furthermore, it focuses on measuring student attainment of the intended learning. (p. 7-8).

Assessment is either distinctive or non-distinctive. A 6-stage matrix is used that brings together the 6-level descriptors that refers how descriptors refer to the corresponding national grading level (Student Handbook, p. 13). Furthermore, Student Handbook declares clear principles how to use A.I in studying, including written tasks.

As a principle stated in the Quality Assurance Handbook, assessment is transparent, objective and supports the development of students and does not create disadvantages for any group or individual.

The Quality Assurance Handbook (page 7) highlights the use of digital tools for assessments, such as Moodle for submitting assignments and plagiarism detection software (e.g., StrikePlagiarism) to ensure academic integrity.

The Students Handbook (page 12) mentions that online exams and electronic submission of papers are part of the assessment process, leveraging digital technologies for efficiency and accessibility.

According to provided materials and online assessment visit, grading is conducted by the teaching staff. Principles of several graders are not practiced. If the course has several teachers, they share grading among each other. As Moodle is the central environment between students and teaching staff, it is used for uploading written tasks.

As the programme entails writing MA thesis, Academy and its partners must be ready to assess and feedback students' ethics applications and MA thesis. Based on the information provided (submitted materials and interviews during assessment visit), organisation and planning of allocating supervisors, organising work of the ethics committee remained unclear.

CONCLUSIONS AND ASSESSMENT: LEARNING AND TEACHING

Based on the **analysis of the documents** and the **evidence provided** for the joint Master's study programme **"Countering Hybrid Threats"**, the Estonian Academy of Security Sciences **"conforms to requirements"** in the assessment area for the **Learning and Teaching**. Nevertheless, there are some areas that need further attention such as implementing traineeships to their programme, conceptualising strategy, and providing as neutral and objective assessment methods as possible.

Strengths

- *The study design involves travelling and internationalisation which in addition to planned material can create an environment where students informally learn from each other. Intercultural communication is a transferable skill which supports tackling challenges of the changing world.*

Areas of concern and recommendations

- *The committee encourages Academy to implement, first, programmes like Turnitin to their systems as they allow graders to feedback submitted materials without knowing the name of the student. The following practice can increase neutrality towards marking. Second, the programme is encouraged to create a grading system where several graders cooperate to increase neutrality and objectivity.*
- *The programme is strongly encouraged to create a transparent system and guidelines for students that describe how allocation of supervisors is organised among three higher education institutes, especially if a student is struggling to find a suitable supervisor and how cooperation between two supervisors from different organisations is organised. Also, how the ethics committee functions, and thesis are assessed considering the variety of topics the thesis can be written about.*

Opportunities for further improvement

- *According to submitted materials and the assessment visit, teaching staff has access to trainings to improve their teaching methods as well as support from educational technologist. However, the trainings are not mandatory. The programme is encouraged to create mandatory internal training system for their staff to stay in touch with the most up-to-date teaching methods.*

3.3 Organisation of studies

3.3.1. The organisation of studies is unambiguously regulated and information thereof publicly available; it allows to cater for the needs of different learners (including learners with special educational needs) as well as specificities of the study programme group.

Evidence and analysis

The organisation of studies is unambiguously regulated and information thereof publicly available. Information various steps of studying like selection or integration of students as well as assessment is stated in Student Handbook.

According to Quality Assurance Handbook, the quality structure of the studies entails four entities: Partner's Academic Council/Senate/ Rectorate (or equivalent), Governing Board, the Institution's Programme Board and the Quality Assurance, and Appeal Committee (p. 4). Student representative belongs to latter three bodies and its role is transparently declared in the cited Handbook.

The Students Handbook and Curriculum Countering Hybrid Threats are made available to students at the beginning of the programme (Students Handbook, page 9), ensuring that all relevant information is publicly accessible.

The Quality Assurance Handbook (page 11) states that information about the programme, including admission requirements, assessment procedures, and support services, is well-documented and publicly available to all stakeholders.

The Quality Assurance Handbook (page 7) emphasizes that the programme respects the diversity of students and their needs, enabling flexible learning paths.

The Students Handbook (page 11) highlights that students with special educational needs can request alternative ways of assessment to ensure they can achieve the learning outcomes. For example, students with disabilities may be allowed to complete assignments in formats that accommodate their needs.

Based on the assessment visit, the committee learnt that all in-person study places are accessible via wheelchair. Whilst materials are not accompanied by initial design to students with disabilities or disorders that affect learning, Academy is open to making such changes once the need occurs.

Accommodation of student is not provided by the programme. However, as shared in the assessment visit, every higher education institute's personnel provides information on possible places suitable for student accommodation.

According to the assessment visit, students have the opportunity to apply to two scholarships: one during their studies to finish their MA thesis, the other after their studies once they have turned their thesis into a scientific article.

3.3.2. Traineeships are regulated, requirements for the completion of traineeships have been laid down and written preliminary agreements have been concluded with organisations offering traineeship opportunities.

Evidence and analysis

Although the programme is created due to a practical need for expertise for acknowledging hybrid threats, preventing, and tackling them, the programme does not provide a traineeship opportunity. Therefore, the traineeships are not regulated, requirements for the completion of traineeships have not been laid down and written preliminary agreements have not been concluded with organisations offering traineeship opportunities.

Nevertheless, the Students Handbook (page 26) mentions that students are required to undertake mobility periods in different countries (Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia). These periods involve direct teaching and practical activities at partner institutions, providing students with real-world experience in diverse security environments.

The organisation and requirements for these mobility periods are clearly outlined in the Students Handbook, ensuring that students understand the expectations and objectives.

Furthermore, the programme encourages students to engage with stakeholders such as law enforcement agencies, government bodies, and international organizations (Students Handbook, page 6). These interactions can lead to informal traineeship opportunities or internships outside the formal curriculum

The Master's thesis (Curriculum Countering Hybrid Threats, page 5) requires students to conduct independent research and apply their knowledge to a specific problem related to hybrid threats. This research can involve collaboration with industry professionals, government agencies, or international organizations, providing students with practical experience similar to a traineeship.

Therefore, the traineeships are not regulated, requirements for the completion of traineeships have not been laid down and written preliminary agreements have not been concluded with organisations offering traineeship opportunities.

3.3.3. The higher education institution has in place rules for academic recognition as well as for recognizing prior studies and work experience.

Evidence and analysis

According to Student Handbook, EASS has rules in place for recognising formal and non-formal education completed in various educational and training institutions as well as independently learned within the framework of work experience, daily activities and free time (informal learning) (p. 19-20).

Procedure of recognising prior learning is in place and described in the Student Handbook in detail (p. 20-21).

3.3.4. The higher education institution has devised a plan for fostering international (including virtual) mobility among students enrolled in the study programme group.

Evidence and analysis

The MA programme is international by design (teaching in three locations). According to the interviewees conducted during the assessment visit, the Academy plans to provide mobility with several countries in Europe (for instance, Moldova) to support study mobility and international cooperation (for instance, Ukraine).

3.3.5. The higher education institution has in place fair and transparent rules for dealing with complaints.

Evidence and analysis

According to Student Handbook, students are supported in expressing dissatisfaction and seeking resolution to problems encountered with the purpose of improving quality of study process. Students are encouraged to share their complaints regarding course delivery learning environment and teaching staff/participant behaviour.

The hierarchy of complaints is in place, student must first approach programme student administrator who will endeavour to resolve the issue informally. Next steps, or if student administrator is not suitable, students are invited to report an issue to the Quality Assurance and Appeal Committee (p. 17).

According to the interviews conducted at the assessment visit, complaints can be submitted in person as well as anonymously.

The higher education institution has in place fair and transparent rules for dealing with appeals. As stated in Student Handbook, a student (or former student) has the right for appeal against a decision, an administrative act, pre administrative act or action related to educational activities, based on the principles presented in the Administrative Procedure Act and procedures established by Partners (p. 15).

There are clear deadlines both for (former) students and school personnel.

3.3.6. The higher education institution has developed a system of regular internal review of study programmes. In the course of internal review feedback from various stakeholders (students, alumni, employers, academic staff) is analysed and taken into consideration, among other actions.

Evidence and analysis

According to Quality Assurance Handbook, EASS has two regular review processes: internal and external review.

The Quality Assurance and Appeal Committee (QAAC) holds regular internal reviews of the programme after the end of each iteration of the Degree Programme.

Focus of internal reviews is on quality culture, including making sure that everything is correct with transparency and documentation, Student Admission, recognition of prior learning, composition of staff, and the content and learning methods of the modules are appropriate for the achievement of the intended learning outcomes and students' progress.

Regular internal review of the programme contributes to the procedures for the periodic review of the Programme. The review is started after the end of each iteration of the programme.

As stated in the handbook, external review of the programme is conducted after each second iteration of the Programme. It is conducted by two external reviewers proposed by the Programme Board and appointed by the Chair of the Governing Board and contracted by Consortium with the aim to ensure that the structure, content, academic coherence and assessment procedures for the programme are well defined, made explicit to students and achieve academic standards appropriate to the award; through regular and systematic processes of curriculum review and feedback from students, action is taken to introduce improvements to the programme; and the programme is exposed to external scrutiny to ensure transparency of processes and to ensure the programme remains current and valid (p. 12).

The external evaluation has several levels. First, the Quality Assurance and Appeal Committee prepares documents that are submitted to external reviews for the review. The Partner Programme Boards prepare a Reaction document in response to the external reviewers' reports.

The reaction documents together with the reviewers' report are then considered by the QAAC. The outcome of the periodic review is reported to the Governing Board, all students and stakeholders involved.

3.3.7. Counselling is ensured for students (study and career counselling as well as psychological counselling); measures for monitoring and supporting academic progress of students have been devised.

Evidence and analysis

Support provided to students covers student representation the Programme Student Administrator and the Partner Programme Managers as contact points in case of academic concerns. According to Student Handbook, mentoring of students is an integral part of the graduate experience for both.

Furthermore, teaching Staff mentoring is broader than advising a student as to the programme of study to fulfil programme requirements and distinct from formal instruction in a given discipline (p. 23).

According to the assessment visit, mentoring (which can entail study and career counselling) is not an integrated part of study experience, but support provided to those who approach personnel with that need.

Mentoring is conducted by teaching staff or support personnel on ad hoc basis. In terms of psychological support, students can have access to psychologist appointments through Academy.

CONCLUSIONS AND ASSESSMENT: ORGANISATION OF STUDIES

Based on the **analysis of the documents** and the **evidence provided** for the joint Master's study programme "**Countering Hybrid Threats**", the Estonian Academy of Security Sciences "**conforms to requirements** " in the assessment area for the **Organisation of Studies**.

Strengths

- *Providing scholarships to alumni who turn their thesis into a scientific publication is a good practice that contributes to research, development of the field, as well as raises awareness of the programme.*
- *All premises within the consortium partners are built bearing physical disabilities in mind. The teaching staff and the support administrative staff are ready to offer full support for adapting and customising the training materials and documents for special needs*

Areas of concern and recommendations

- *As an area of concern, the committee sees that Academy should reconsider how mentoring is provided to students. According to current system, proactivity lies on the student. Taking into account the target audience (working professionals), mentoring should be used as a preventative measure which is integrated part of the studies with focus on time management as choosing over priorities is likely to happen among students.*

3.4 Academic staff

3.4.1. Procedures for the selection and recruitment of academic staff are fair and transparent.

Evidence and analysis

Estonian Academy of Security Sciences (EASS) has necessary procedures for selection and employment of academic staff in place. They are given in the academic staff career management principles of EASS.

Permanent academic staff position recruitment is done through a public competition. The Council of EASS is required to approve each recruitment.

There is an alternative recruitment route: EASS rector may appoint a visiting lecturer to a permanent academic position directly, without a public competition. A candidate for such recruitment is required to have successfully passed a five-year temporary employment.

The rector has the power to appoint employees to a visiting academic staff position. This can be done in two cases: 1) if the public competition for the position failed, or 2) if the position is of temporary nature.

3.4.2. The qualifications of prospective academic staff members meet the requirements laid down in legislation as well as those stemming from the specificities of the study programme group and academic cycle.

Evidence and analysis

Five members of EASS academic staff teach in the Countering Hybrid Threats program. Two of them carry a Ph.D. degree, one is a Ph.D. candidate and two have graduated with a Masters degree.

The academic education degree level of the teachers is adequate for the programme. It is also noteworthy that each teacher has experience from EU level joint internal security Master programmes, having taught in the European Law Enforcement Training Agency CEPOL and/or European Border and Coast Guard Agency FRONTEX programmes.

Based on the agreed share of duties between the three participating academic institutions, EASS teachers are responsible for Management in the context of hybrid threats and hybrid crises as well as Data analysis modules (Nrs 7 and 8 in the curriculum). Accordingly, their background is in law, political science or public administration.

3.4.3. The number of academic staff to be involved in the study programme group is adequate and enables achieving the objectives of the study programmes as well as the learning outcomes.

Evidence and analysis

According to the Curriculum document of the programme, Module 7 Data analysis is 5 ECTS while Module 8 Management in the context of hybrid threats and hybrid crises is 10 ECTS. One ECTS corresponds to approximately four full working days for a student. Teacher's workload, on the other hand, consists of planning of studies, teaching, student guidance and appraisal. It is estimated that in a programme of the type in question, with its number of students, one ECTS could correspond to approximately three to six weeks of full-time work.

The share of the total workload of each teacher provided for the programme varies from 0.25 to 1.0. All in all, 4.25 FTE is reserved for programme teaching, which is very satisfactory indeed in relation to the extent of the aforementioned modules.

3.4.4. Prospective academic staff members regularly engage in continuing education at institutions of higher education or research from abroad, take part in international research projects and deliver presentations at high level conferences.

Evidence and analysis

Each of the five members of the teaching staff are full time university professors or teachers. There is thus a weighty reason to trust that they engage in research and give presentations in domestic and international scientific conferences.

The programme QA handbook provides: "Continuous teacher professional development is valued and strongly encouraged." However, no information is given on how this applies to members of teaching staff who come from external universities.

3.4.5. The academic staff to be involved have adequate teaching and digital skills for supporting the development of self-directed learners. The conditions and procedure for the appraisal of academic staff have been formalized. The higher education institution has plans for creating opportunities for continuing education and personal development (including for topping up digital skills) for academic staff members.

Evidence and analysis

All members of the teaching staff are full time university professors or teachers with a long experience in teaching at academic institutions. There is no reason to question their competence in teaching and in necessary digital skills.

The development of digital educational skills of academic staff are being excellently supported. A specific Digiait website is available on the intranet, and an online training series Digiamps is also available.

During the online interviews it was clarified regarding the appraisal for teaching staff that there are procedures in place, self-assessment presented to a certain commission and the teaching staff could be promoted – 4 level steps carrier for the researcher. Moreover, there are conditions for how much the teaching staff should write/publish, to coordinate, and other regulated criteria. The appraisals are usually from 3 to 5 years, but any teaching

staff could ask for appraisal at any time. All professors, researchers and teachers are required to deliver a self-assessment each year. The teachers are required to publish a minimum of three research papers each year.

During the interviews it was mentioned that professors need to publish only three papers within five years. External lecturer attestation criteria are the same as for permanent staff.

3.4.6. The level and volume of research, development and creative activities undertaken by academic staff to be involved is sufficient for conducting studies and supervising student work in the relevant cycle of higher education. Where doctoral studies are under assessment: supervisors of doctoral theses actively engage in research and doctoral theses have successfully been defended under their supervision.

Evidence and analysis

There are currently two international EU funded projects running in the field of developing academic programmes on hybrid threats. EASS has a strong role in both HYBRIDC and HYBRIDIM.

The documentation provided describes EASS research and development activities in general terms, but not specifically on the substance matter of the programme in question.

The documentation thus does not provide information on relevant R & D activities of the members of academic staff to justify an assessment.

The online interviews held by the members of the panel clarify that the research-based study programme contains a wide area of hybrid threats especially from the Russia side, the conflict in Ukraine as a main event, migration and other factors, the research topics are cover also in the context of LV and LT and recently publication in the field.

There are teaching staff at the level of the EASS that published several scenario papers on Russia over the past two years on instrumentalization of migration, cyber influencing EU and Ukraine, underwater protection and EU-NATO cooperation on hybrid warfare.

Master's thesis topics are connected with research themes. Moreover, there are new topics proposed by the students. The students are coordinated to create research useful for operational needs. Moreover, Frontex agency is present with a relevant project research programme where the same approach exists.

The figures 0.25 and 1.0 in the Table on academic staff refer to their share of the workload, the share of a teacher put on the programme. It contains both teaching, research and other work input.

3.4.7. The age structure of academic staff to be involved ensures sustainability in the study programme group.

Evidence and analysis

The teachers in Module 7 are 45 and 52 years old, in Module 8 their ages are between 48 and 60. All the teachers have, without any doubt, proper experience for this kind of a programme. At the same time at least most of them still have plenty of productive work years ahead. The assessment team is confident that the age structure of the programme academic staff will guarantee sustainability within the programme.

CONCLUSIONS AND ASSESSMENT: ACADEMIC STAFF

Based on the **analysis of the documents** and the **evidence provided** for the joint Master's study programme "**Countering Hybrid Threats**", the Estonian Academy of Security Sciences "**conforms to requirements**" in the assessment area for the **Academic Staff**. The academic staff teaching at the Estonian Academy of Security Sciences in master's programme Countering Hybrid Threats does conform to requirements.

Strengths

- *The members of teaching staff have academic education which rather well matches the substance matter content of the modules they teach.*
- *The members of teaching staff all have an extensive experience in university level teaching, and they all also have experience from international internal security Master programmes.*
- *The Best lecturer award is an example of a good practice to motivate teachers.*
- *The Academy provides training and development opportunities for academic staff, ensuring they are equipped to deliver high-quality education.*

Areas of concern and recommendations

- *Due to the lack of military and IT subjects within the curriculum, the programme don't offer technological and military expertise within its teaching staff. Considering the very wide scope of potential hybrid threats, research and experience-based input from those areas would greatly benefit the programme.*

Opportunities for further improvement

- *To attract in the future iterations of the Master's programme valuable and highly qualified teaching staff and experts, and to identify the possibility of involving more researchers and experts from the military/ defense field.*

3.5 Learning and teaching environment

3.5.1. An environment has been created for teaching and learning as well as related research, development and creative activities (lecture rooms, labs, seminar rooms, spaces for independent work by students, digital learning environment etc.), which is sufficient and meets modern requirements for achieving the objectives of study programmes.

Evidence and analysis

First, the Academy has committed to ensuring a learning environment for students in which all the prerequisites necessary for successful study are met. Student Handbook, 5. Students' Rights and Duties. The student has the right to: the conditions necessary for learning, including a safe learning environment that supports the achievement of learning outcomes.

Secondly, the Academy and its partners are committed to ensuring that students in this program receive the same conditions as they offer to students in their other programs. Given that the practices of other programs have been in place for years, there is no reason to doubt the inconsistency of these conditions. Quality Assurance Handbook, 4.1 Learning Resources and Study Environment.

All Partners commit to making available all reasonable human, physical and digital resources necessary to support learning and the achievement of the learning outcomes to students and teaching staff involved in the delivery of the JMCHT Programme. Partners provide students and teaching staff with access to information resources (provided that the disclosure of such information is duly authorised by the Partner), including electronic resources, for the entire duration of the JMCHT Programme.

Each Partner institution will provide access to its e-learning platform (Moodle).

Partners provide students with academic and non-academic support normally provided to all other students. Innovation in programme delivery includes Programme is delivered through an appropriate mix of open, digital and participative learning environments, including learning conducive workplaces and are supported by state-of-the-art and accessible infrastructure, equipment and technology, and versatile pedagogies and tools, learning methods support the development of digital culture and academic staff engage in digital technological self-improvement.

Consortium Partners have access to state-of-the-art infrastructure, have in place digitalisation strategies.

Thirdly, the campus provides constant access to the internet with the ability to connect various devices for presentations and seminars. **Self-analysis report.** The entire campus is equipped with Wi-Fi providing students and academic staff seamless connection. The lectures will be conducted in classrooms equipped with smartboards, HDMI connection, network and video conference equipment.

The activities carried out by the Academy meet the requirements.

3.5.2. The digital infrastructure at the higher education institution (including network, digital equipment, software and services, study information system, helpdesk, digital security etc) is up-to-date. Digital infrastructure meets the needs of students in the study programme group, teaching and other staff at the higher education institution.

Evidence and analysis

The Academy's IT solutions are provided by the SMIT (IT and Development Centre, Ministry of the Interior), which also manages all the institutions of the Ministry of the Interior. SMIT is an experienced and dedicated service provider with 24/7 response capabilities.

Self-analysis report. In view of the field of activity of the Academy, the main ICT services and support are provided by the IT and Development Centre of the Ministry of the Interior (hereinafter SMIT), with further support provided by the secondary data centre at the Academy. Central document management as well as property, transport and weapons management systems are used.

Moodle is used as the Academy's virtual learning environment. All written assignments are uploaded on Moodle so that they could be checked with plagiarism detection software StrikePlagiarism, if necessary. In January 2020, the Academy transferred to the study information system Tahvel.

The workstations and teamwork are transferred to Office 365 cloud environment, considerably increasing the possibilities for work regardless of the device or location. XVR On-Scene simulation software is used as the simulation environment.

Additionally, **Self-analysis report.** All classrooms have modern standardised learning technology: touchscreens, laptop connections and hybrid learning capability – sound system and camera.

The exceptions are specialised laboratories with their technical capabilities based on particular needs, for instance, interrogation rooms, simulation centre, video studio.

Around 40 unique virtual simulation scenarios are completed annually. First successful attempts have been made to create content for virtual and hybrid reality glasses.

There are various digital environments for instruction, supporting and developing the studies, for instance: Kahoot, Slido, Zoom, Teams, Adobe package, Limesurvey, Adobe Captivate, Snagit, OBS Studio, DaVinci Resolve etc.

The activities carried out by the Academy meet the requirements.

3.5.3. Support for digital learning and teaching is available for students and teaching staff.

Evidence and analysis

Various supporting technologies, materials, and activities are used to support digital learning and teaching for students and faculty.

Self-analysis report. The Academy uses IT hardware and system monitoring via MS SCCM with more than 500 monitored devices and services and MS Active directory-based electronic identity management infrastructure maintenance. There are in place self-service

photocopying, printing and scanning systems, print server and 5 Xerox machines. Printing security is ensured – files sent to the print server are automatically encrypted, ID verification is conducted via personalised chip.

In order to ensure the development of the infrastructure, information and technical equipment needed for the implementation of the curricula pursuant to the needs of the development of instruction and the curricula, there is a digital development department cooperating with SMIT specialists.

Two educational technology specialists and a multimedia specialist assist the academic staff in preparing study materials. According to assessment visit, specialists provide trainings where participation is voluntary.

In 2022, the online training series Digiamps (Digital Bite) was introduced. It takes place once a month with the approximate duration of 30 minutes. Each training session introduces one software, programme or other technology that helps the Academy's staff and lecturers to simplify their work. The trainings are recorded and can be watched on YouTube and the intranet.

A course has been designed in the Moodle environment to support the academic staff where they can see the training recordings and learn about the new possibilities of using Moodle.

All classrooms have modern standardised learning technology: touchscreens, laptop connections and hybrid learning capability – sound system and camera. The exceptions are specialised laboratories with their technical capabilities based on particular needs, for instance, interrogation rooms, simulation centre, video studio. Around 40 unique virtual simulation scenarios are completed annually.

The activities carried out by the Academy meet the requirements.

3.5.4. Access to up-to-date textbooks; research publications and other study materials as well as access to research databases necessary for conducting studies, research, development and creative activities in the study programme group are ensured to students and teachers of the respective study programme group.

Evidence and analysis

Academic databases are available to both students and lecturers. The database lists are sufficient for successful study in this program.

Self-analysis report. To support research and teaching activities, access to nine scientific databases is currently ensured: EBSCOhost Web, SAGE Journals Online, Oxford University Press, ProQuest Ebook Central, ScienceDirect, Wiley, Scopus, Cambridge University Press and Taylor & Francis Online.

The activities carried out by the Academy meet the requirements.

CONCLUSIONS AND ASSESSMENT: LEARNING AND TEACHING ENVIRONMENT

Based on the **analysis of the documents** and the **evidence provided** for the joint Marter's study programme "**Countering Hybrid Threats**", the Estonian Academy of Security Sciences "**conforms to requirements**" in the assessment area for the **Learning and Teaching Environment**.

Strengths (if applicable)

- The Academy has invested in **modern IT infrastructure**, including virtual simulation centres, hybrid lecture rooms, and access to scientific databases, ensuring a high-quality learning environment.
- Highly advanced technical solutions and a variety of learning opportunities.
- Comprehensive access to electronic resources, academic support services, and e-learning platforms (notably Moodle).

Areas of concern and recommendations

- The degree of uniformity and integration of resources and platforms between partner institutions remains unclear.

Opportunities for further improvement

- To consolidate and to better coordinate with the consortium partners all the aspects regarding the learning and teaching environments, especially for the online platforms, procedures within the activities and common approach for the online teaching/assessment modules.
- Although using one online workplace (ZOOM) is beneficial from the point of clarity and convenience, it would be foresightful to have an alternative platform for backup. Since digital solutions may have unexpected problems, replacing one with another can take time, as there is an issue with timely licenses.

3.6 Financial resources

3.6.1. The educational institution has adequate funds necessary for conducting high quality studies in the study programme group as well as for the provision of adequate and up-to-date support services and supporting the development of academic staff. The higher education institution has a plan for raising funds needed for advancement of study programme group related research, development and/or creative activities.

Evidence and analysis

The Academy's revenue comes from multiple sources, including **state funding**, **external funding**, and **economic activities** such as continuing education.

Evidence: *"The revenue of the Academy's annual budget consists of state revenue, external funding, other subsidies, and revenue from economic activity, including continuing education."* (Self-analysis report, Page 10)

The Academy has a **well-structured budget** that supports the implementation of the curriculum, including investments in modern learning environments and state-of-the-art teaching equipment.

Evidence: *"The budget of the Academy is drawn up on the basis of the objectives of the development plan and the budgetary possibilities. The development plan envisages an increase in the share of payroll, investments in modern learning environment and state-of-the-art teaching equipment in the budget and in the share of other sources of funding in addition to the state budget."* (Self-analysis report, Page 10)

The cost of one student place in the Master's curriculum **"Countering Hybrid Threats"** has been calculated and approved, ensuring financial sustainability.

Evidence: *"In agreement with the Ministry of the Interior, the Academy has developed and approved a methodology for calculating the basic cost of the curriculum. Accordingly, the cost of one student place in the Master's curriculum Countering Hybrid Threats at current input prices and taxation principles is 10,108 euros. The cost of tuition is approved by the Council of the Academy."* (Self-analysis report, Page 10)

"When submitting an application for studies, the applicant shall: pay a non-refundable application fee to the University's account in the following amount:

- 1. international applicants – 100.00 Euro (one hundred Euros 00 cents) for EU member states and non-EU countries.*
- 2. applicants who are citizens of the Republic of Estonia, Republic of Latvia and Republic of Lithuania, who have obtained their secondary/higher education in an accredited education institution of the mentioned countries – 20.00 EUR (twenty Euros 00 cents)."*

(Joint Maser's in Countering Hybrid Threats Programme - Students Handbook, Page 7)

The programme is designed to be financially viable, with a minimum of 20 students and a maximum of 25 students per cohort.

Evidence: *"The minimum number of admitted students is 20 and the maximum number is 25. The minimum number covers the costs of implementing the curriculum while the maximum number is established on the basis of the principles of the quality of instruction."* (Self-analysis report, Page 10)

The Academy actively seeks **external funding** through EU programmes and other sources to support research, development, and creative activities related to the study programme group.

Evidence: *"The Academy has around 10 externally funded projects underway. Projects are proportionally divided as follows: 70% development cooperation projects (including funding from Erasmus+, Nordplus, and European Commission Union Civil Protection Knowledge Network programmes) and 30% research and development projects (including Frontex and EU internal security fund projects)."* (Self-analysis report, Page 8)

The Academy has secured funding for the **"Countering Hybrid Threats"** curriculum through Erasmus+ projects, ensuring the sustainability of the programme.

Evidence: *"The Academy also coordinates the Erasmus+ funded HYBRIDIM project (No 101127138) with the aim of developing the architecture of the joint international MA programme of 90 ECTS at the three Baltic universities."* (Page 8, Self-analysis report)

"The project HYBRIDC (2022-1-EE01-KA220-HED-000089329) is a 3-year project stemming from the general training on hybrid threats and their emergence models in autumn 2022." (Page 8, Self-analysis report)

The Academy employs a significant number of academic staff and researchers, ensuring the delivery of high-quality education and research activities.

Evidence: *"As of 1 June 2024, the Academy employs 97 academic staff members, 14 researchers, and 160 administrative staff members. In addition, there are also around 350 visiting lecturers."* (Self-analysis report, Page 7)

The Academy has made significant investments in its **learning environment**, including modern classrooms, simulation centres, and IT infrastructure.

Evidence: *"The entire campus is equipped with WiFi providing students and academic staff seamless connection. The lectures will be conducted in classrooms equipped with smartboards, HDMI connection, network and video conference equipment."* (Self-analysis report, Page 9)

"For the joint curriculum, the study centre in Tallinn includes a classroom with 33 computers, a multimedia classroom, two simulation rooms with XVR technology, 20 hybrid lecture rooms, and a lecture room for about 200 students." (Self-analysis report, Page 9)

The Academy has also invested in **digital tools** and platforms to support teaching and learning.

Evidence: *"Moodle is used as the Academy's virtual learning environment. All written assignments are uploaded on Moodle so that they could be checked with plagiarism detection software StrikePlagiarism, if necessary."* (Self-analysis report, Page 9)

The Academy provides **training and development opportunities** for academic staff, ensuring they are equipped to deliver high-quality education.

Evidence: *"Digitali" website has been established on the intranet to support the development of the digital skills of the academic staff on educational technology issues. It includes video instructions on the use of Moodle, Teams, and Zoom, also recordings of various trainings and a section for useful tips.*" (Self-analysis report, Page 10)

The Academy also ensures access to **scientific databases** and resources to support research activities.

Evidence: *"To support research and teaching activities, access to nine scientific databases is currently ensured: EBSCOhost Web, SAGE Journals Online, Oxford University Press, ProQuest eBook Central, ScienceDirect, Wiley, Scopus, Cambridge University Press, and Taylor & Francis Online."* (Self-analysis report, Page 10)

The Academy has a **risk analysis** in place to ensure the sustainability of the curriculum, including measures to mitigate financial risks such as the loss of EU funding.

Evidence: *"The Institute has drawn up a risk analysis of the curriculum and drafted risk mitigation activities. For example, in case of losing EU funding, the Academy considers introducing tuition fees."* (Self-analysis report, Page 11)

"Losing EU funding: Average probability. Mitigation measure: Tuition fees for students, considering introducing tuition fees." (Self-analysis report, Page 11)

The **Estonian Academy of Security Sciences** has **adequate financial resources** to support high-quality studies, modern infrastructure, and academic staff development. The institution's budget is well-structured, with significant investments in learning environments and IT infrastructure. Additionally, the Academy actively secures **external funding** through EU programmes and other sources to support research, development, and creative activities.

The institution also has a **risk mitigation plan** in place to ensure the sustainability of its programmes, demonstrating a robust financial strategy for advancing the **"Countering Hybrid Threats"** study programme group.

3.6.2. Financial reports for the higher education institution or keeper thereof are publicly available. Annual reports for the higher education institution or keeper thereof have undergone financial auditing unless stipulated otherwise in legislation.

Evidence and analysis

The received documents do not explicitly state that **financial reports** for the **Estonian Academy of Security Sciences** are publicly available or that its **annual reports** have undergone financial auditing. However, based on the context and the Academy's adherence to **state accounting rules** and **budgetary guidelines**, it can be inferred that the institution follows standard financial reporting and auditing practices required by Estonian legislation.

The Academy's financial planning and accounting are based on **state accounting rules** and **budgetary guidelines**, which typically require transparency and auditing.

Evidence: *"The accounting of economic activity is based on the state accounting rules as well as the budgetary guidelines of the Academy."* (Self-analysis report, Page 10)

The Academy's budget is approved by the **Council of the Academy**, indicating a level of oversight and accountability.

Evidence: *"The cost of tuition is approved by the Council of the Academy."* (Self-analysis report, Page 10)

The Academy receives **external funding** from EU programmes, which typically require financial reporting and auditing as part of grant compliance.

Evidence: *"The Academy has around 10 externally funded projects underway. Projects are proportionally divided as follows: 70% development cooperation projects (including funding from Erasmus+, Nord Plus, and European Commission Union Civil Protection Knowledge Network programmes) and 30% research and development projects (including Frontex and EU internal security fund projects)."* (Self-analysis report, Page 8)

While the documents do not explicitly state that financial reports are publicly available or that annual reports have been audited, the Academy's adherence to **state accounting rules, budgetary oversight, and external funding requirements** strongly suggest that it complies with standard financial reporting and auditing practices as stipulated by Estonian legislation.

All the aspects regarding to the financial resources were clarified or validated during the online assessment visit.

3.6.3. When planning studies in the study programme group, the higher education institution has conducted a risk analysis and devised a long-term (five years) financial projection, which among other things includes the calculation of a student place, an analysis of risks stemming from the operating environment and planned mitigating measures thereof.

Evidence and analysis

The Academy has conducted a detailed **risk analysis** for the curriculum, identifying potential risks and outlining mitigation measures.

Evidence: *"The Institute has drawn up a risk analysis of the curriculum and drafted risk mitigation activities."* (Self-analysis report, Page 11)

Specific risks identified include **loss of EU funding, restrictions in international mobility, and partner organizations failing to fulfil their obligations.**

Evidence: *"Losing EU funding: Average probability. Mitigation measure: Tuition fees for students, considering introducing tuition fees."* (Self-analysis report, Page 11)

"COVID-19 leads to illness among students and restrictions in international mobility: Average probability. Mitigation measure: Timely notification of the funder of any problems encountered and students falling ill, finding solutions in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Student Handbook." (Self-analysis report, Page 11)

"Partner organisations cannot fulfil their obligations: Low probability. Mitigation measure: Implementation of the respective provisions given in the Quality Handbook and Student Handbook." (Self-analysis report, Page 11)

The Academy has developed a **financial projection** for the curriculum, including the calculation of the cost of a student place.

Evidence: *"In agreement with the Ministry of the Interior, the Academy has developed and approved a methodology for calculating the basic cost of the curriculum. Accordingly, the cost of one student place in the Master's curriculum Countering Hybrid Threats at current input prices and taxation principles is 10,108 euros. The cost of tuition is approved by the Council of the Academy." (Self-analysis report, Page 10)*

The financial projection ensures the sustainability of the programme, with a minimum of 20 students and a maximum of 25 students per cohort.

Evidence: *"The minimum number of admitted students is 20 and the maximum number is 25. The minimum number covers the costs of implementing the curriculum while the maximum number is established on the basis of the principles of the quality of instruction." (Self-analysis report, Page 10)*

The Academy has planned **mitigating measures** to address potential risks, ensuring the continuity and quality of the programme.

Evidence: *"The Quality Committee shall analyse the feedback and collected data, bring out the advantages and disadvantages and provide recommendations for improving the implementation of the curriculum. For instance, the recommendation could be the transfer of a particular topic into another module or changing the lecturer depending on the feedback." (Self-analysis report, Page 11)*

The Academy has also considered the possibility of introducing **tuition fees** in case of losing EU funding.

Evidence: *"Losing EU funding: Average probability. Mitigation measure: Tuition fees for students, considering introducing tuition fees." (Self-analysis report, Page 11)*

The **Estonian Academy of Security Sciences** has conducted a comprehensive **risk analysis** and developed a **long-term financial projection** for the **"Countering Hybrid Threats"** study programme group. This includes the calculation of a student place, an analysis of risks stemming from the operating environment, and planned mitigating measures to ensure the sustainability and quality of the programme. This demonstrates the Academy's proactive approach to financial and operational planning.

Moreover, according to the received information, the EASS is a higher education institution of applied sciences operating under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of the Interior. The budget for 2023 of the Ministry of the Interior is 560 million euros. More detailed information on the preparation of the state budget and its distribution is published on the website of the Ministry of Finance.

The audited annual report of the Ministry of the Interior is published in accordance with the State Budget Act.

Since 1 January 2013, the state accounting and financial reporting service has been performed by the State Support Services Centre, managed by the Ministry of Finance.

Budget execution of the Ministry of the Interior's area of government for 2023

https://www.siseministeerium.ee/sites/default/files/documents/2024-06/SIM%20VA%20EA%20t%C3%A4itmise%20aruanne%202023%20veebi_0.pdf

Since 1 January 2013, the State Accounting and Financial Reporting Service has been provided by the State Support Services Centre, managed by the Ministry of Finance.

CONCLUSIONS AND ASSESSMENT: FINANCIAL RESOURCES

Based on the **analysis of the documents** and the **evidence provided** for the joint Master's study programme "**Countering Hybrid Threats**", the Estonian Academy of Security Sciences "**conforms to requirements**" in the assessment area for the **Financial Resources**.

The institution demonstrates **strong financial planning, adequate budgeting, and effective risk management**. While there are minor weaknesses, such as **dependence on external funding** and the **lack of explicit financial auditing information**, these do not significantly detract from the overall financial sustainability and compliance with requirements.

Strengths

- *The institution has secured external funding through EU programmes, such as Erasmus+, to support the programme.*
- *The Academy has conducted a detailed risk analysis and developed mitigating measures to address potential risks, such as the loss of EU funding or restrictions in international mobility.*
- *The Academy has a well-structured budget that supports the implementation of the curriculum, including investments in modern learning environments and state-of-the-art teaching equipment.*
- *The Academy has calculated the cost of one student place in the Master's curriculum, ensuring financial sustainability.*

Areas of concern and recommendations

- *The Academy relies heavily on EU funding for research and development activities, which poses a risk if funding is reduced or discontinued. ("Losing EU funding: Average probability. Mitigation measure: Tuition fees for students, considering introducing tuition fees." - Self-analysis report, Page 11)*

Opportunities for further improvement

- *The Academy should explore additional funding sources, such as private sector partnerships and alumni contributions, to reduce dependence on EU funding.*