



HAKA

Estonian Quality
Agency for Education

Institutional Accreditation

Assessment Report on Estonian Academy of Security Sciences

2026



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Introduction

Institutional accreditation is the process of external evaluation which assesses the conformity of a university or higher education institution's management, work procedures, study and research activities and environment to both legislation and the goals and development plan of the higher education institution itself. This is feedback-based evaluation in which an international assessment panel analyses the strengths and weaknesses of the institution of higher education based on the self-assessment report of the institution and on information obtained during the assessment visit, providing recommendations for improvement and ways of implementing them.

The aim of institutional accreditation is to assess the institution's capacity to ensure and improve the quality of teaching, research, development, and creative activity, to support institutional development, and to increase its broader impact on society.

Educational institution must undergo institutional accreditation at least once every seven years based on the regulation *Requirements and Procedure for Institutional Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions* approved by HAKA Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education as of 29.04.2025. Institutional accreditation of higher education institutions is conducted across three assessment areas and nine quality criteria.

Quality criteria refer to the characteristics of inputs, outputs, processes, or their components that allow the evaluation to the extent to which the quality of activities or outcomes meet the expectations derived from the agreed expectations of various stakeholders, including the institution's strategic objectives and applicable legislation. Compliance with these criteria is mandatory.

Guidelines are non-binding instructions or frameworks that guide activities or decision-making without being a mandatory requirement. Unlike mandatory quality criteria, guidelines offer flexibility and options for achieving objectives or implementing actions.

Strengths are considered achievements that exceed the level of the quality criteria rather than simply meeting them.

Areas of concern and recommendations point to shortcomings in meeting the quality criteria of the institutional accreditation and affect the formation of the final decision of HAKA Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education.

Opportunities for further improvement are proposals for improvement that do not contain a reference to noncompliance with the quality criteria and the inclusion or exclusion of which is at the discretion of the institution of higher education. Proposals for further developments will not affect the final decision of HAKA Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education.

COMPOSITION OF THE EXPERT PANEL

The Estonian Quality Agency for Education (**HAKA**) formed an international expert panel, which was approved by the higher education institution as well as HAKA Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education. The composition of the panel was thereafter approved by the order of HAKA director.

The panel composed of the following members:

The assessment process was coordinated by HAKA staff – **Hillar Bauman** and **Liia Lauri**.

SCHEDULE OF THE ACCREDITATION PROCESS

Date	Activity
24.04.2025	Self-assessment training was conducted by HAKA to the representatives of the institution
02.12.2025	Composition of the expert panel was coordinated with HAKA Quality Council for Higher Education
30.12.2025	Composition of the expert panel was coordinated with the institution
05.01.2026	Composition of the expert panel was approved by HAKA Director
17.12.2025	The institution submitted its self-evaluation report to HAKA
12.01.2026	HAKA forwarded the self-evaluation report and other relevant materials to the expert panel
17.12.2026	Pre-visit online meeting took place between the panel and the institution's representatives
10-12.03.2026	Site-visit to the institution
28.04.2026	HAKA sent the draft assessment report to the institution for comments
14.05.2026	The institution sent their comments on the draft report
15.05.2026	The expert panel submitted the final report to HAKA
10.06.2026	HAKA coordinator forwarded the final assessment report to the institution and HAKA Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education

The current report is published on HAKA website and the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (DEQAR) after HAKA Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education has taken the accreditation decision.

*** The panel members used artificial intelligence tools solely for language optimisation, editorial refinement, and proofreading purposes. All analytical judgments, findings, evaluations, and recommendations contained in the report remain the independent professional conclusions of the expert panel.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE ESTONIAN ACADEMY OF SECURITY SCIENCES

The Estonian Academy of Security Sciences (EASS) is a professional higher education institution operating under the Ministry of the Interior, specialising in internal security.

Established on 15 April 1992 by the Government of the Republic of Estonia, the institution has undergone several transformations. It was renamed the Estonian National Defence Academy in 1993 and adopted its current designation in 1998, following the transfer of military officer training to a separate academy in Tartu.

Its development has consistently reflected evolving operational requirements and forward-looking assessments of internal security needs. To date, more than 11,000 graduates from EASS and its predecessor institutions form a substantial part of Estonia's internal security workforce.

It provides vocational and professional higher education, as well as Master's programmes, alongside continuing education and applied research that supports the development of the internal security sector. As the only institution of its kind in Estonia, it offers distinct curricula not replicated elsewhere.

The activities of the academy take place in five locations: in Tallinn, Narva, Paikuse, Väike-Maarja and Meriküla.

The academy also plays a central role in recruitment and career development for key institutions, including the Emergency Response Centre (H.K), the Police and Border Guard Board (PPA), the Rescue Services Agency (P.A), and the Ministry of the Interior.

Its integrated model, which brings all internal security specialisations under a single academic framework, is uncommon in Europe. This structure supports interdisciplinary learning, strengthens research and development, and encourages cooperation between services beyond graduation.

The model has attracted international attention, with countries such as Ukraine, Moldova and Albania considering similar reforms. Training is delivered through specialised colleges, including the Prison Service College, Rescue College, Financial College and Police and Border Guard College, with Master's studies coordinated by the Internal Security Institute.

The academy serves around 1,100 students each year and engages nearly 7,000 participants in continuing education.

Over more than three decades, EASS has consolidated expertise from leading professionals in the field. Its academic staff includes close to 100 lecturers among approximately 270 employees, supported by around 350 visiting lecturers who bring operational experience from internal security institutions.

Graduates are primarily employed by organisations such as the Police and Border Guard Board, the Rescue Services Agency, the Emergency Response Centre, the Tax and Customs Board and the Prison Service.

The Estonian Academy of Security Sciences (EASS) is structured into academic units, support units and the Internal Security Career Centre, with recent adjustments in 2024–2025 designed to better align governance with its strategic objectives. These changes included the introduction of positions such as Vice-Rector for Research and Vice-Rector for Support Services.

The academy operates in five locations, while overall leadership is ensured by the Rector, appointed for a five-year term and responsible for institutional management. The Rector is

supported by vice-rectors overseeing research, academic affairs and support services. Academic activities are delivered through the Financial College, Police and Border Guard College, Rescue College, Prison Service College and the Internal Security Institute, each led by designated directors or a head of institute. Governance combines executive leadership with collegial decision-making.

The Council is the highest decision-making body, responsible for key areas such as strategy, curricula and research directions.

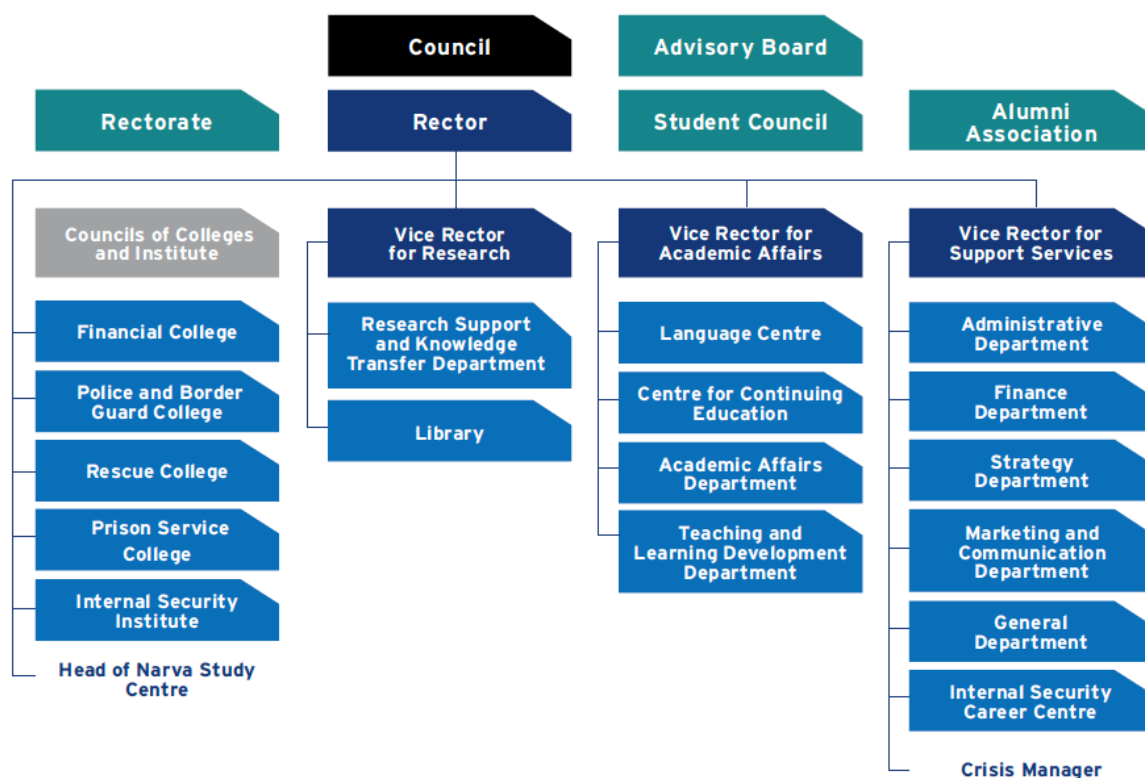
The Advisory Board links the academy with governmental institutions and society, while the student council and alumni association contribute to representation and institutional development. College and institute councils further support cooperation with sectoral partners.

Day-to-day management relies on regular coordination formats, including rectorate meetings and managerial consultations, alongside performance evaluation and feedback mechanisms.

Strategic planning is reinforced through periodic seminars focused on development priorities.

The academy maintains close cooperation with national authorities, particularly within the Ministry of the Interior, and is actively involved in international networks and organisations such as CEPOL, Frontex, eu-LISA and others. This broad cooperation framework supports both institutional development and the wider advancement of the internal security sector.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE EASS. Source – EASS SAR



SELF-ASSESSMENT REPORT AND THE VISIT

From the perspective of the evaluation panel, the Self-Assessment Report was well structured, clearly presented and carefully prepared, serving as a solid foundation for the assessment process. The report followed a logical organisation, allowing the panel to navigate efficiently through the key areas of institutional activity and to identify relevant information without difficulty.

The report demonstrated good alignment with the accreditation framework, covering the main domains and areas in a coherent manner and providing sufficient contextual information on governance, academic activities and quality assurance processes.

The preparation process itself reflected a systematic and coordinated institutional effort, supported by a clearly defined action plan and timeline. This ensured consistency across sections and indicated a shared understanding of quality assurance within the institution.

The report also facilitated the work of the panel during the site visit, as it provided a clear basis for formulating questions and identifying areas for further clarification. Overall, it was a comprehensive and well-prepared document that effectively supported the evaluation process.

Beside the Self-Assessment Report, the additional information requested by the panel members during the evaluation process was provided by the EASS representatives in a timely, precise and well-structured manner. Responses were clear, relevant and directly addressed the challenges raised, demonstrating a high level of preparedness and institutional transparency.

Supporting materials and clarifications were made available without delay, which facilitated the panel's understanding of specific aspects and contributed to the efficiency of the assessment process. The interaction reflected a professional and cooperative approach, ensuring that all requests were handled effectively and without procedural obstacles.

The site visit was very well organised, with a clear, logical and balanced programme covering all key areas of institutional activity, including strategic management, human resources, teaching and learning, research and development, and support systems.

The structure of the meetings allowed the panel to engage with a wide range of stakeholders and to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the institution. The inclusion of regular reflection sessions supported a systematic evaluation process, while the facility tour and additional interviews contributed to transparency and direct interaction.

In addition, a one-day visit to Narva was organised, in which two members of the evaluation panel participated, providing further insight into the academy's regional activities and operations.

The overall flow of the visit was smooth, with appropriate time allocation and effective coordination of all activities. The atmosphere throughout the visit was open, professional and cooperative, with EASS representatives and stakeholders engaging constructively and providing clear and relevant information.

The support offered to the panel was of a very high standard. Logistical arrangements, including transport, scheduling and on-site coordination, were handled with precision and attention to detail. Communication was clear and timely, and all requested information was made readily available.

The organisation of the visit facilitated efficient work for the panel and created conditions conducive to a thorough and well-informed assessment.

Institutional accreditation findings

Summary

The panel concludes that **the requirements of all three assessment areas are fulfilled:** Institutional Management, Learning and Teaching, and Research, Development and/or Other Creative Activity. EASS demonstrates a coherent institutional profile, clear strategic direction, strong alignment with national internal security priorities, and a well-established culture of cooperation with state institutions and other stakeholders. The institution's management framework is purposeful and increasingly mature, its learning environment is learner-centred and practice-oriented, and its RDC activities are growing in volume, structure and societal relevance.

In the area of **institutional management**, the panel notes a well-defined strategic framework, strong stakeholder involvement, a functioning quality culture, stable and increasingly qualified staff, and significant investments in infrastructure and digital systems. The institution demonstrates credible alignment between strategy, resources and development needs. At the same time, some areas still require consolidation, particularly the newer risk management arrangements, stronger succession planning in selected staff categories, and greater consistency in internal communication across colleges.

In the area of **learning and teaching**, EASS demonstrates a modern, coherent and flexible approach that is closely connected to labour market needs and the specific requirements of the internal security field. Study programmes are developed systematically and in cooperation with stakeholders, teaching is strongly practice-oriented and supported by high-quality infrastructure, and support systems for learners are broad and functional. Strong graduate employment outcomes confirm the relevance of the learning model. The panel nevertheless sees room for improvement in pedagogical harmonisation, visibility of feedback follow-up, some aspects of internship supervision and placements, and the broader integration of psychological support and student-facing communication.

In the area of **research, development and/or other creative activity**, the Academy has made clear progress in building a structured and strategically aligned RDC ecosystem. Its applied research profile is well suited to its mission, and the societal relevance of its outputs is strong, particularly in relation to internal security, policy support, crisis resilience and professional practice. The institution has strengthened its governance, research support structures and research capacity. Further development is needed in international visibility, formal mentoring and career pathways for early-career researchers, more systematic monitoring of long-term societal impact, and stronger support for science communication and research leadership.

The panel considers EASS to be a well-functioning, development-oriented and mission-driven institution that not only meets the accreditation requirements but also demonstrates clear capacity for further growth and impact.

Worthy of Recognition

- The Academy operates **an integrated institutional model for internal security education, applied research and professional development, closely embedded in the national internal security ecosystem**, which ensures strong alignment between teaching, research, public service needs, labour market demands and broader societal expectations, representing a distinctive approach both in Estonia and at the European level.
- The Academy's **integrated institutional model for internal security education, applied research and professional development**, which is unique in Estonia and uncommon in EU, creating strong links between teaching, public service needs and sectoral development.
- The **micro-credential and Master's-level programme "Countering Hybrid Threats"**, which stands out as a strategically relevant, innovative and internationally networked curriculum initiative responding to emerging European security needs.

- The Academy's **strong practical learning environment**, especially the Narva campus and specialised simulation and training facilities, which provide an unusually rich basis for profession-oriented learning and applied experimentation.

Strengths

- **Clear strategic identity and societal role** as Estonia's specialised higher education institution in internal security, with strong alignment between mission, strategic planning and national priorities.
- **Strong and inclusive organisational culture**, characterised by trust, collegiality, staff commitment and the institution's practice of treating students as **partners/colleagues** in development and decision-making.
- **Stable and increasingly qualified staff profile**, combining academic competence, practical professional experience and systematic staff development.
- **High-quality, modern and practice-oriented learning environment**, with well-developed physical and digital infrastructure that strongly supports teaching, training and applied learning.
- **Coherent and evidence-based curriculum development model**, with strong stakeholder involvement, internal evaluation and responsiveness to labour market and strategic needs.
- **Well-balanced integration of academic instruction and practical training**, strengthened by the active involvement of practitioners, guest lecturers and operational services.
- **Comprehensive student support framework**, including academic support, socio-economic support, internships, scholarships and extracurricular engagement.
- **Growing and strategically aligned RDC system**, with clear progress in research capacity, dedicated support structures and applied impact in the field of internal security.
- **Broad and practically relevant dissemination profile** in RDC, including journals, reports, textbooks, expert contributions and policy-supporting analyses.
- **Strong commitment to well-being and sustainability**, reflected in the Healthy Campus recognition, family-friendly employer status and investments in improved study and work environments.

Areas of concern and recommendations

- **The implementation of the revised strategic and risk management framework is still evolving, with limited evidence of systematic follow-up and long-term impact measurement.** The EASS should further consolidate the newer strategic and risk management arrangements, ensuring stronger evidence of implementation, follow-up and long-term impact measurement.
- **Succession planning and pedagogical development are not yet fully structured across the institution, and career pathways remain uneven in some areas.** The EASS should strengthen succession planning and structured pedagogical development, including clearer career pathways in selected areas and an academy-level framework for teaching competence development.
- **Internal communication practices vary across colleges, leading to inconsistencies in the dissemination of key information to students.** The EASS should improve consistency of internal communication across colleges, especially in the communication of student support, academic procedures and institutional information.
- **Curriculum development and review processes are perceived as time-consuming, limiting the institution's responsiveness to emerging needs.** The Academy, with the support of the main beneficiaries and MI should accelerate curriculum development and

review processes, so that programme renewal can respond more quickly to changing sectoral needs and emerging security challenges.

- **The content and coherence of the General Studies module are not yet fully consistent across colleges.** The Academy should review the content and added value of the General Studies module, based on implementation experience across colleges.
- **The visibility of student feedback follow-up and support services remains limited, reducing their overall effectiveness.** The EASS should improve visibility of student feedback follow-up and support services, ensuring that students clearly understand how feedback is used and what support is available.
- **In some fields, internship availability and supervision capacity remain constrained.** The EASS with the support of the main beneficiaries from MI, should strengthen internship arrangements in selected fields, particularly where placement availability or supervision capacity remains limited.
- **Psychological support services are not yet fully integrated into the institutional support system and lack sufficient visibility.** Further integrate psychological support into the institutional support system, with clearer access pathways and stronger internal visibility.
- **International scientific visibility and participation in competitive research activities remain limited.** The EASS should increase international scientific visibility and participation in competitive research cooperation, including a stronger presence in indexed journals, international projects and research leadership roles.
- **Mentoring systems and research career pathways for early-career researchers are not yet fully formalised, and monitoring of research support effectiveness is limited.** The EASS should formalise mentoring and research career pathways for early-career researchers and strengthen the monitoring of research support effectiveness and long-term research impact.

Opportunities for further improvement

- **Develop, integrate and consolidate an institution-wide Management and Leadership course framework** as a strategic educational offer and competence-development instrument. The initiative should position the Academy as a national leader in leadership training for the Ministry of the Interior, other relevant ministries, public administration actors and civil society organisations, while also strengthening internal leadership capacity and succession development.
- **Establish and accredit its own Train-the-Trainer (TtT) programme** as a structured institutional framework for developing teaching competences. This programme should provide certified training in pedagogy, adult learning principles, assessment design and effective knowledge transfer, ensuring harmonised and high-quality teaching standards across all colleges and study levels.

	The requirements of the assessment area are fulfilled	The requirements of the assessment area are partially fulfilled	The requirements of the assessment area are not fulfilled
Institutional management	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Learning and teaching	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Research, development and/or other creative activity	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONIMS

AI	Artificial Intelligence
CEPOL	European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Training
DEQAR	Database of External Quality Assurance Results
E-ITS	Estonian Information Security Standard
EASS	Estonian Academy of Security Sciences
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
ETIS	Estonian Research Information System
FRONTEX	European Border and Coast Guard Agency
FTE	Full-Time Equivalent
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
HAKA	Estonian Quality Agency for Education
MA	Master of Arts / Master's level
MI	Ministry of Interior
OSKA	Estonian labour market monitoring and future skills forecasting system
PPA	Police and Border Guard Board
PPA	Police and Border Guard Board
R&D	Research and Development
RDC Committee	Research, Development and Creative Activity Committee
RDC	Research, Development and/or Creative Activity
RDI	Research, Development and Innovation
RDIE	Research, Development, Innovation and Entrepreneurship Development Plan
RDIS 2030	Research, Development, Innovation and Entrepreneurship Strategy 2030
SAR	Self-Assessment Report
SPARK	Erasmus+ research development initiative mentioned in the report
TAN	Targeted Applied Research Funding (as referenced in SAR context)
TtT	Train-the-Trainer
VÕTA	Recognition of Prior Learning and Work Experience

I. INSTITUTIONAL MANAGEMENT

1. Strategic Management and Development

Quality criterion

The higher education institution has defined its role in the Estonian society and internationally, involving key stakeholders in the planning and management of its development. It considers societal expectations, future challenges, and the principles of sustainable development. Resource management is directly linked to the institution's priorities and development needs. The institution continuously evaluates the achievement of set goals and ensures and promotes quality in all its areas of activity.

Evidence and analysis

List of evidence used by the Panel in its analysis: The panel's analysis is based on the **EASS Self-Assessment Report (SAR)**, the *Development Strategy 2025–2035*, implementation and action plans, quality management and risk management documentation, financial and performance indicators, employee satisfaction survey results, academic ethics and AI-related regulations, as well as evidence gathered during the site visit interviews with management, academic and support staff, students, alumni and external stakeholders.

- The panel finds that the institution has established a **clear and coherent strategic management and development framework**, supported by formal strategic documents, governance regulations and regular monitoring arrangements. The *Development Strategy 2025–2035* clearly defines the institution's mission, vision, values, strategic objectives, implementation mechanisms and performance indicators. These are well aligned with Estonia's national priorities in internal security, higher education, research, innovation and sustainable development, while also addressing future societal needs and innovation challenges. The academy's role as a specialised national competence centre in internal security education and applied research is clearly evidenced.
- **The principles of sustainable development are integrated into strategic planning**, infrastructure development and organisational processes, and the links between teaching, applied research, innovation and lifelong learning are clearly visible and have strengthened during the reporting period.
- A key element of the framework is the institution's **systematic involvement of internal and external stakeholders** in planning, implementation and decision-making. Staff, learners, alumni and strategic partners participate through formal collegial bodies, advisory boards, working groups and periodic consultations.
- **Clear procedures and governance structures are in place**, including the Council, advisory bodies, student representation and other decision-making formats at different organisational levels. **Responsibilities for implementing strategic objectives are clearly assigned** through implementation programmes, unit work plans and regular monitoring procedures, while periodic reviews and performance indicators support systematic follow-up. Interview evidence confirmed that these arrangements are not only formally established but also functioning in practice.
- The panel also finds that **resource management is transparent and directly linked to strategic priorities and development needs**. The institution applies a multi-year financial planning model, supported by annual implementation plans and budget reviews. Budget growth, infrastructure investment and the expansion of research capacity indicate that strategic priorities are reflected in resource allocation decisions and that financial planning supports the achievement of institutional objectives.

- Regarding **quality assurance and continuous improvement**, the institution has established a coherent quality management framework covering both core and support processes. The quality system is based on regular planning, implementation, assessment and improvement cycles and supported by key performance indicators, surveys, periodic reviews and systematic feedback collection from students, staff, alumni and employers. This provides evidence of a functioning PDCA-type approach and a visible institutional commitment to continuous quality enhancement.
- A good example of the quality of strategic management is **the substantial investment by the Ministry in the development of the Narva training area and other EASS facilities**, including new accommodation capacity and modern training environments. The panel see this as **a major asset for strengthening the quality of the learning environment**, improving student support conditions, and enhancing the institution's long-term capacity for practical, high-quality professional education.
- The panel also reviewed the institution's approach to **academic ethics and the responsible use of artificial intelligence**. The academy has established clear academic ethics principles, relevant procedures and guidance documents, including provisions related to research ethics, integrity and responsible AI use. Interviews confirmed that staff and students are aware of these principles and that the institution provides support in addressing ethical issues.
- The institution also demonstrates a **strong contribution to societal well-being and sectoral development** through professional education, continuing education, applied research and support to public sector institutions in the field of internal security. Lifelong learning and professional development are clearly embedded in the institution's strategic mission.
- The panel notes positively that the academy has **clearly identified its strategic partners at both national and international levels and collaborates with them in a purposeful and structured manner**. Participation in international professional and academic networks is well evidenced, although further strengthening of international student mobility remains an area for development.
- The panel notes that the Academy has started to **develop significant expertise in leadership, crisis management and coordination within complex public sector environments**. Given the transferable nature of these competences, particularly in areas such as crisis response, risk management and inter-institutional coordination, there is potential to extend this expertise beyond the internal security sector to other public sector institutions and organisations facing similar governance and resilience challenges.
- The panel notes that some elements of the new strategic framework **are still in the implementation and consolidation phase**, particularly the revised risk management model and some aspects of internationalisation and impact measurement. The institution has established a structured approach to risk identification, mitigation and monitoring, and current efforts to further strengthen and formalise the risk management system are appropriate and support strategic governance.
- The panel notes **the planned launch of the institution's own Master's-level programme in Strategic Management by 2027 as a positive and forward-looking initiative**, which has the potential to strengthen institutional competence and support future development in leadership and management within the internal security sector.
- The panel notes that the institution systematically **considers future challenges such as evolving security threats, crisis resilience, technological developments and hybrid risks in its strategic planning, which supports its forward-looking role in the internal security sector**.
- The panel considers that the institution **should continue strengthening the evidence of effectiveness and measurable long-term outcomes, particularly through a stronger use of impact indicators for societal outcomes, further development of internationalisation in learning and mobility, and more systematic integration of risk management** into institutional performance monitoring.

Conclusion

Based on the evidence reviewed and the analysis conducted, the panel concludes that **the quality criterion is fulfilled**.

The institution demonstrates a clear and coherent strategic management framework, strong alignment with national priorities and societal needs, effective stakeholder involvement, transparent resource management, and a functioning quality assurance system that supports continuous improvement while also addressing future societal needs and innovation challenges. While some elements, particularly the further consolidation of risk management and the strengthening of internationalisation outcomes, remain areas for continued development, these do not affect the overall fulfilment of the criterion.

Strengths

- The **strong institutional integration with the national internal security ecosystem**, which creates a clear link between strategy, public mission, applied research and labour market needs.
- The institution's approach of **treating students as partners in development and decision-making**, combined with a **strong organisational culture** that supports cooperation, shared values and institutional commitment.
- The panel notes the planned launch of the institution's own Master's-level programme in Strategic Management by 2027 **as a good example of high-quality operational development**, demonstrating the institution's capacity to translate strategic objectives into concrete educational initiatives.
- The **substantial investment by the Ministry in the development of the Narva training area and other EASS facilities**, including new accommodation capacity and modern training environments. The panel sees this as a major asset for strengthening the quality of the learning environment, improving student support conditions, and enhancing the institution's long-term capacity for practical, high-quality professional education.

Areas of concern and recommendations

- **The implementation of the revised risk management framework is still at an early stage and not yet fully embedded across the institution.** The EASS should strengthen the implementation of the risk management system by ensuring clearer integration into planning, monitoring and decision-making processes.
- **The use of impact indicators for measuring long-term societal and strategic outcomes is not yet sufficiently developed.** The EASS should expand and operationalise impact measurement by introducing clearer indicators and systematic monitoring of societal outcomes and institutional impact.

Opportunities for further improvement

- A significant opportunity for further development lies in **EASS assuming a broader national role in management and leadership development initiatives**, building on its expertise in crisis management, coordination and public sector governance, and extending its training offer beyond the internal security sector to other ministries, public institutions and civil society organisations.
- **The planned development of the Master's-level programme in Strategic Management** represents a valuable opportunity to further strengthen institutional competence and expand the **Academy's role in leadership development at national level**.

2. Human Resources Management

Quality criterion

Personnel development is based on the institution's development goals and is efficient and effective. The higher education institution values its members and ensures the application of the principle of equal treatment for all staff and learners.

Evidence and analysis

List of evidence used by the Panel in its analysis: The analysis of the **Human Resources Management** was based on the academy's SAR, the *Human Resources Strategy of the administrative area of the Ministry of the Interior for 2024–2028*, the *Development Strategy 2025–2035*, relevant analytical and regulatory documents, including the *Principles of Temporary Transfer (Rotation) of Employees of the Ministry of the Interior*, staff statistics, attestation documentation and employee survey results, Moodle and other relevant educational or support online platforms, as well as evidence gathered during the on-site interviews with management, academic staff, support staff and students.

- The panel finds that **recruitment, personnel development and staff continuity are clearly aligned with the institution's strategic objectives and long-term sustainability needs**. Human resources principles, staff development measures, succession planning and academic career progression are directly linked to the development strategy and support institutional continuity. The results of the attestation clearly demonstrate that staff development is strategically justified and effectively implemented, with a clear link between the institution's goals, staff development priorities and future competence needs. As an example, it can be mentioned the results of the year 2024 attestation, in which 11 out of 15 academic staff members were promoted, which clearly increases their motivation to develop even more.
- The academy demonstrates **stable development in staff numbers, qualification levels and research capacity**, including a measurable increase in the proportion of staff holding doctoral degrees, which rose by **2.5 percentage points, from 9.7% to 12.2%**.
- **The institution employs a sufficient and diverse academic and support staff**, maintaining an appropriate gender and age balance and combining specialists with strong practical professional experience with staff with research and development competencies. During the interviews, the panel members were able to verify that the academy maintains close cooperation with industry professionals, for example, by using part-time lecturers and practitioners from operational services, or full-time teaching staff regularly maintain and update their professional competences through practical placements, training courses, seminars and field-based engagement. This applies to almost all Colleges. This balance between professional experience and academic abilities is considered a significant advantage, especially in the context of internal security education.
- As evidenced by the information obtained from satisfaction surveys and interviews, on average, 4.3 points on a five-point scale are satisfied with their work at the academy. The panel notes positively that **academic career development is structured through regular attestation, clear career principles and systematic professional development opportunities**. Staff continuity is purposefully supported through rotation principles and cooperation with operational partner institutions, which strengthens succession planning, transfer of good practices and professional relevance. As an example, a representative of the Prison Service College, who five years ago was transferred to the academy through rotation, provides practical input, thus maintaining a real link between theoretical and practical knowledge.
- **Employees are systematically supported in the process of professional self-development**, using training, annual development discussions, internships and international

mobility opportunities. Close cooperation between academic staff and operational services is clearly demonstrated and confirmed by several practical examples provided during interviews. For example, academic staff have an annual development interview, where employee self-development and training are a mandatory part. Each employee is discussed with their training needs and wishes. For international mobility academy uses Erasmus possibilities increasingly, as example Rescue College have used it several times last years. Another example is that academic staff are required to complete internships in work environments where the teaching load is reduced. This work time is still paid for by the academy. In addition to the above, it is useful to add that the academy offers ongoing internal training focused on general skills and teaching skills. Each department has its own training budget from which the professional training of employees can be planned based on opportunities. This is determined during the annual development discussions.

- The principles of **remuneration, recognition and staff motivation are clearly defined and accessible**, and the panel identifies as a notable strength the academy's strong organisational culture and employee-centred environment. As panel members found out from interviews, that the main motivation working in academy are good colleagues to work with, management culture and working with purpose and freedom to do your job. Analysing the self-assessment report, it can be concluded that the desire to work at the academy is enormous, for example, over the past five years, an average of 49 competitions have been organized per year to fill positions. Approximately 88% of them have been successful.
- Since 2023, the academy has been awarded the **gold-level badge of a family-friendly employer**, which further confirms its commitment to staff well-being and supportive working conditions.
- Leadership and management quality are systematically assessed through **360-degree feedback surveys**, with line managers rated **4.4/5**, particularly in the areas of communication, autonomy support and work-life balance orientation.
- The institution also provides **methodological, technological and professional support for teaching staff**, particularly in curriculum development and the use of modern teaching methods. When it comes to curriculum development, they are developed in close collaboration with the industry and designed to match the current labour market, so the fact that existing practitioners work at the academy also plays a big role. The panel members, while visiting the college's infrastructure, were able to verify that the academy uses the latest technologies in its educational process, including the use of Virtual Reality (VR) as example in an emergency service and civil protection context.
- The panel had the opportunity to review **the e-learning platform Moodle**, which serves as a central tool supporting both learners and educators. It provides access to courses, learning materials and assessment information, and is widely used for delivering theoretical components of study programmes through e-courses, allowing students to focus on practical activities during contact sessions. In addition, **the Tahvel information system** supports efficient study administration.
- The evidence confirms that the academy has **sufficient academic staff, visiting lecturers, field practitioners, financial resources and infrastructure** to ensure high-quality delivery of its study programmes.
- The panel notes that, **although opportunities for pedagogical training are available, participation is not systematically required or ensured across all teaching staff**. As a result, the level of pedagogical and andragogical competence may vary between programmes and lecturers, which can affect the consistency of teaching quality.
- **Staff evaluation processes consider teaching quality, research and development activities, learner feedback, supervision performance and broader societal contribution**, which reflects a comprehensive understanding of academic performance.
- The panel also concludes that **the institution actively supports the mental and physical well-being of staff and students through preventive measures, support services and a**

healthy work environment. The principles of equal treatment are embedded in the institution's practices, and employee satisfaction results are regularly analysed and used for improvement measures. The interviews confirmed **a constructive and trust-based working environment**, characterised by cooperation, mutual respect and a shared commitment to the Academy's mission in the field of internal security and public safety. The panel members were convinced that **the Academy has every opportunity to maintain its physical fitness**, for example, in 2021 the Academy joined the "Healthy Campus" programme launched by the International University Sports Federation (FISU) to promote the well-being of the academic community in the field of physical activity and health, while focusing on mental health lectures, as well as psychological counselling.

Conclusion

The panel concludes that **the quality criterion is fulfilled.**

The EASS demonstrates **effective and strategically aligned human resources management**, supported by clear development principles, transparent career and evaluation procedures, and a strong employee-centred organisational culture.

The panel particularly notes **the positive institutional climate**, the visible commitment of management and staff to continuous improvement, and the strong sense of shared purpose across the institution.

The panel notes positively the academy's **strong organisational culture, the clear commitment of management to institutional development, and the high level of staff engagement and professional identity**, which together support the effective implementation of the institution's human resources strategy and long-term sustainability.

The relationships between management, academic staff and students are characterised by goodwill, mutual respect and trust, which contributes positively to institutional development and staff retention. The panel had an overall highly positive impression of the academy's human resources management and identifies several strengths and opportunities for further enhancement.

Strengths

- A clear strength is the **well-defined rotation principle for academic staff**, which supports the exchange of experience, strengthens professional competences and promotes the acquisition of new skills. Rotation also contributes to the transfer of good practices from partner institutions, strengthens interdisciplinary coordination and enhances cooperation across state administrative institutions. This was particularly evident in examples provided by the **Prison Service College**.
- Another notable strength is the **strong institutional culture and staff commitment**. The discussions with management and staff clearly demonstrated a united and highly motivated academic community, strongly committed to the fields of internal and national security. Staff satisfaction and pride in working at the academy were clear during the interviews.
- The panel also highlights as a good practice the **systematic involvement of field professionals in teaching**, particularly the use of part-time lecturers and practitioners from operational services, such as in the **Rescue College**. This strengthens the practical relevance of studies, connects teaching with real professional environments, and supports student employability and professional networking.
- A further strength is the requirement that **full-time teaching staff regularly maintain and update their professional competences through practical placements, training courses, seminars and field-based engagement**. This ensures that academic staff retain up-to-date practical skills and remain aligned with current developments in the sector.

Opportunities for further improvement

- A further development opportunity would be for the academy to **design and deliver its own pedagogical development programme (accredited/certified)**, for example a **“Train the Trainer” course**, involving specialists in pedagogy and teaching methodology. The programme could strengthen internal teaching competences and potentially be offered as a professional development course to other institutions.
- The institution could further strengthen its approach **to supporting the mental and physical well-being of staff and learners**, including the continued development of preventive measures, well-being services and systematic monitoring of staff workload and work-life balance.
- **To educate and inform teachers and staff on recognising violence and preventing risks.** Teaching staff currently require further training and guidance on identifying and appropriately addressing cases of **emotional or sexual violence, bullying and harassment**, as well as preventive risk management in the learning environment.

3. Infrastructure and Information Management

Quality criterion

The management and development of physical and digital infrastructure is purposeful, sustainable, and economically viable. Internal and external communication at the institution is two-way, goal-oriented, and managed. Information management and administration is purposeful, and data protection and data security are ensured.

Evidence and analysis

List of evidence used by the Panel in its analysis: The panel's analysis is based on the **EASS SAR**, the *Development Strategy 2025–2035*, infrastructure and information management documentation, communication procedures, employee and learner satisfaction survey results, cybersecurity and data protection audit evidence, as well as information gathered during the site visit and interviews with management, staff and students.

- The panel finds that the **management and development of physical and digital infrastructure are clearly aligned with the institution's strategic priorities and long-term sustainability objectives**. EASS currently operates across five locations, namely Tallinn, Narva, Paikuse, Väike-Maarja and Meriküla, which is resource-intensive from both operational and financial perspectives. The institution has responded strategically by making significant efforts and investments to consolidate academic activities into fewer locations.
- In line with the **Development Strategy 2025–2035**, the future focus is placed on the development of educational infrastructure in Tallinn, Väike-Maarja and Narva, which the panel considers a justified, purposeful and sustainable strategic direction. The development of infrastructure and information assets is directly linked to the priorities set out in the development strategy.
- Modern and secure campus infrastructure effectively supports **teaching, training, research and operational activities**, with continuous upgrades aligned to institutional needs (simulation center, prison simulation environment, emergency response simulation center classroom) The panel notes positively the significant infrastructure investments already completed, particularly the **Narva campus**, which stands out as a strong example of successful infrastructure planning involving staff, students, and local stakeholders. The objective of continuous development was highlighted, for example, as a shared priority during discussions with the leadership of the Narva campus and the local chief of police. It was recognized that one means of supporting continuous development is to establish a shared vision of future requirements. These requirements stem from changes in the security environment, and development efforts are aimed at building the capacity and responsiveness needed to address them.
- During the interviews, students explicitly recognised the **institution's efforts to improve well-being conditions**, particularly through the development of new dormitory facilities and the creation of a modern, socially supportive and comfortable campus environment for the future.
- The institution also provides a **modern learning environment**, including specialised laboratories, simulation spaces, sports facilities, library services and digital learning infrastructure that adequately support the achievement of learning outcomes and professional competencies. The views of both students and teachers – also reflected in the survey results – indicate that good working conditions have been achieved, both in terms of the physical work environment and the equipment.
- The panel finds that EASS has established a **systematic and effective data management organisation**, closely connected to the institution's strategy and quality management framework. Key performance indicators supporting the implementation of the strategy are

clearly defined and regularly monitored by both management and staff, which supports evidence-based decision-making and organisational development.

- **Digital information systems** are integrated and centrally managed, ensuring reliable access to academic, administrative and financial data. These arrangements demonstrate that information management and administration are purposeful and strategically embedded.
- Strong **data protection and cybersecurity measures** are in place and aligned with national regulations and institutional risk management practices. The panel notes positively that EASS applies the **E-ITS information security standard** based on the Cybersecurity Act and successfully passed an information security audit in 2025. In addition, external audits of personal data processing were conducted in 2023 and 2024, covering student and staff data respectively. Following these audits, action plans were developed and responsible persons assigned for addressing identified deficiencies. These measures provide strong evidence that data security, data protection and user privacy are effectively ensured. Stable IT services and user support further strengthen continuity, efficiency and institutional resilience.
- The panel also finds that EASS has established **clear and transparent communication processes** and uses effective internal and external information exchange channels. Communication is centrally coordinated by the **Department of Marketing and Communication**, and activities are based on approved principles for internal and external communication. This supports a structured, two-way and goal-oriented approach aligned with institutional values and strategic objectives.
- **The institution updated its brand and visual identity in 2022–2023**, formalised through a **brand book** that provides the basis for a coherent communication language across the institution. The academy maintains an external website in both Estonian and English, an internal website and several social media channels. Interviews confirmed that staff and students generally experience the communication culture as open and participatory, with students actively involved in communication and feedback processes.
- The panel notes that **minor inconsistencies remain in communication practices across the colleges**. During the interviews, differences were observed in how information and support are communicated to students depending on the college, and employee survey results indicate that communication with colleagues from other units can sometimes be difficult. While these challenges do not affect overall compliance with the criterion, the panel considers that a more centralised and unified methodology for student information and awareness across colleges would further improve consistency, transparency and the overall student experience. The academy's recognition through the **Healthy Campus Programme awards in 2022 and 2024**, which reflects a strong commitment to well-being, sustainability and the quality of the institutional environment.

Conclusion

Based on the documentary evidence, the interviews and the on-site visit, the panel concludes that the quality criterion is fulfilled.

Infrastructure management is clearly a strategic priority for EASS, and the development of physical and information assets is directly aligned with the objectives of the **Development Strategy 2025–2035**. The panel notes positively the high level of infrastructure planning and the significant developments already achieved, with a well-balanced allocation of priorities across teaching, research and administrative functions. The learning environment is modern, diverse and strongly practice-oriented, supported by specialised infrastructure, digital learning tools and field-based teaching arrangements.

The operation of the academy across five sites has created structural and resource-related challenges. The panel considers the decision to consolidate activities and strengthen the remaining campuses to be well justified and strategically sound. In this context, the **Narva**

campus stands out as a strong example of successful planning and stakeholder involvement, including staff, students, and local operational partners.

The panel also confirms that EASS has established **efficient and secure IT services**, together with a systematic and effective data management framework that supports evidence-based decision-making and the development of data-driven services. Information security and data protection have been appropriately prioritised and are implemented in a structured and credible manner.

While some concerns remain regarding the consistency of internal communication, particularly differences between colleges in how information is provided to students and the challenges of communication across units, these challenges do not undermine the overall positive assessment.

The panel concludes that the **management and development of physical and digital infrastructure are purposeful, sustainable, and economically viable, while ensuring effective communication, reliable information management and strong data security.**

Strengths

- A clear strength is the **strong strategic alignment of infrastructure and information resource development with the institution's long-term goals and priorities.** Investments are clearly purpose-driven and support teaching, research, training and administrative functions in a sustainable and economically viable manner.
- The panel also notes as a significant strength the **well-developed digital ecosystem**, including up-to-date study management systems, document management solutions, e-learning platforms, learning analytics tools and other centrally managed digital services that effectively support both academic and administrative processes.
- Another strength is the **quality and modernity of the learning environment**, including secure and well-equipped campuses, specialised training facilities, access to up-to-date academic and scientific literature, and relevant research databases.
- The panel further highlights the **modern and secure campus infrastructure**, which provides strong support for teaching, practical training and operational activities, with the Narva campus standing out as a particularly strong example of successful infrastructure development.
- A further strength is the institution's **well-structured external communication**, which is aligned with institutional values and strategic objectives and ensures that accurate and updated information on the academy's core activities is publicly available.
- The panel also notes positively the academy's recognition through the **Healthy Campus Programme awards in 2022 and 2024**, which reflects a strong commitment to well-being, sustainability and the quality of the institutional environment.

Areas of concern and recommendations

- The panel identified an area requiring further improvement in relation to **internal communication management and the consistency of student information across colleges.** The interviews and employee feedback indicate that there are different approaches between colleges regarding how information and support services are communicated to students. In addition, communication and information exchange between units appear to be less efficient than desirable.
- While all colleges provide the necessary support and information, the **lack of a more standardised approach may affect consistency, transparency and the overall student experience.** The panel therefore considers that the efficiency of information exchange and inter-unit cooperation requires more systematic development.
- The panel recommends that EASS **establish a more centralised and unified communication methodology across all colleges**, particularly in relation to student

guidance, support services and the dissemination of essential academic and administrative information. A common framework for student communication and awareness-raising would strengthen consistency, improve accessibility of information and support a more coherent institutional experience for all learners.

SUMMARY OF THE ASSESSMENT AREA: INSTITUTIONAL MANAGEMENT

ASSESSMENTS BY QUALITY CRITERIA:

	Quality criterion is fulfilled	Quality criterion is substantially fulfilled	Quality criterion is partially fulfilled	Quality criterion is not fulfilled	Worthy of recognition
Strategic management and development	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Human resource management	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Infrastructure and information management	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Conclusion

Based on the analysis of the three criteria under this assessment area, the panel concludes that **the requirements of the assessment area are fulfilled.**

EASS demonstrates a clear and coherent management framework, supported by a well-defined strategic direction, a functioning quality culture, and governance arrangements that involve staff, students and external stakeholders in institutional development. Strategic planning is closely linked to national priorities, the needs of the internal security sector, and the institution's long-term development objectives. Resource planning, infrastructure development and personnel development are generally aligned with these priorities and support the institution's sustainability.

The panel notes several clear strengths across the area, such: *the academy's strong societal role and strategic positioning in the field of internal security, the development of a more structured research and development capacity, stable and increasingly qualified human resources, a strong employee-centred organisational culture, and purposeful investments in modern physical and digital infrastructure.* The institution also demonstrates systematic monitoring, effective data management, and credible attention to information security, staff well-being and quality enhancement.

The panel identified some aspects that would benefit from further development such: *the continued consolidation of the new strategic and risk management arrangements, stronger succession planning in some staff categories, the consolidation role of the EASS in Management and Leadership domains, the establishing of the own TtT accredited course, and greater consistency in internal communication, especially in the way information and support are communicated to*

students across different colleges. These aspects do not amount to non-compliance and do not weaken the overall positive assessment of the area.

Taken as a whole, the evidence shows that EASS manages this assessment area in a purposeful, responsible and development-oriented manner. The institution not only meets the requirements but also demonstrates a clear capacity to build further on the strengths already identified.

II. LEARNING AND TEACHING

4. Development of Studies and Study Programmes

Quality criterion

In developing studies and study programmes, the higher education institution considers the needs and expectations of society and the labour market, its development goals, field-specific competence and available resources, and ensures compliance with higher education and vocational standards as well as international trends. The curricula are research-based and coherent, their development is continuous and evidence-based. A functional internal evaluation system has been established for the ongoing development of the curricula.

Evidence and analysis

List of evidence used by the Panel in its analysis: The panel's analysis is based on the **EASS SAR**, curriculum statutes and internal evaluation procedures, labour market and OSKA analyses, employer and student feedback, strategic documents, mobility data, and evidence gathered during interviews with management, academic staff, students and external stakeholders.

- The panel finds that the **planning and implementation of studies in both degree, vocational and continuing education are strongly aligned with national strategies, institutional goals and labour market needs**. Curriculum planning is explicitly linked to the Internal Security Strategy, employer needs, professional standards, and the academy's strategic priorities. The procedures established by the EASS for the internal evaluation of study programmes (both every three years and partial evaluations conducted annually) demonstrate regular supervision and monitoring of the quality of higher and vocational education programmes, their alignment with the working environment and the ability to respond quickly to urgent changes and current developments in the operations of services. During the interview, College representatives confirmed that working groups are formed for partial evaluations of higher and vocational education programmes involving representatives of teaching staff, students and employers. Based on the results of various surveys (students, employers, employees), as well as research and analysis, updates are carried out to the programmes. Updates to vocational education programmes are mainly carried out annually. Examples mentioned during the interview included recent thematic additions to the police study programme on domestic violence, communication and tactics. While in the vocational education programme for rescuers, based on the analysis of internship, the defence of the internship has been replaced by a discussion, and the results achieved during the internship are assessed by the internship supervisor, for example, at a rescue station. Colleges emphasized their very good cooperation with the services, which allows for the immediate implementation of operational or anticipated (future) changes in the programmes.
- Student admissions are centrally planned in cooperation with the Ministry of the Interior and based on three-year forecasts, demonstrating a structured yet sufficiently flexible approach to workforce planning in the sector.
- Integration of **continuing education with degree studies** plays a strong role in lifelong learning and sectoral competence development, with more than **7,000 participants annually**, which demonstrates both institutional relevance and capacity. It is a particular strength and reflects a mature approach to lifelong learning and professional development. Approximately **80% of continuing education activities support institutions within the Ministry of the Interior**, as well as public and private sector organisations, senior leaders, volunteer police officers and rescuers. (*EASS SAR; continuing education statistics; interviews*). The inclusion of **highly relevant topics** such as crisis management and civil protection further strengthens societal preparedness for emergency situations. Innovative formats, including the EU-level

micro-credential programme “**Countering Hybrid Threats**”, demonstrate responsiveness to emerging security challenges and evolving educational needs. Continuing education courses also show high levels of learner satisfaction.

- The panel notes positively that **study programme development is systematic, continuous, research result and evidence-based**. A clear framework exists for opening, amending and closing study programmes, regulated through the curriculum statute and internal evaluation procedures. Curriculum changes are based on internal evaluations, labour market analyses, OSKA reports, employer and student feedback, professional standards and strategic forecasts. Concrete examples include the restructuring of vocational programmes, the introduction of new curricula in taxation and customs, and the updating of programmes in response to emerging developments such as hybrid threats, organised crime and changing security risks. The institution also closes outdated curricula when no longer relevant and introduces new programmes in response to evolving sectoral needs. For example, during the reporting period and due to changes in the needs of the labour market the curricula for EOD technicians, Information and Investigation Officers and Case Managers were closed. At the same time - new programmes created, and innovative formats such as micro-credentials and Master’s degree curricula - Countering Hybrid Threats are introduced as needed and based on analysis of training needs in the field of hybrid threats and cyber security at EU level. More significant changes have been done to Prison Guard curriculum (60 ECVET) which did not meet the professional needs of the prison service in terms of its length and focus. It is planned to close 60 ECTS curriculum in 2026. Instead 2 different level programmes have developed – the vocational education curriculum (30 ECVET) and continuing education curriculum (Level 5).
- **Research results produced by academics, practitioners and researchers are integrated into curricula, modules and practical training activities**. Several concrete examples illustrate this approach. In the Rescue Service curriculum, group-based case analysis is used as part of the assessment in the Combustion Chemistry module. At the Financial College, research on the shadow economy has been incorporated into a dedicated elective course offered to Erasmus students. In vocational training for prison officers, a Dynamic Security module has been introduced, supported by the development of a Moodle-based e-textbook. At the Police and Border Guard College, action research has led to the revision of practical teaching methods, including the use of learning diaries in traffic supervision training and the application of vehicle-related special supervision measures.
- A clear strength is the **inclusive stakeholder involvement in curriculum development**. Internal evaluation working groups include academic staff, employers, students, alumni and external experts, and improvement plans are systematically developed following each review cycle. This broad-based participation supports institutional responsiveness and strengthens the relevance and sustainability of the curricula.
- The panel finds that the **programmes are comprehensive and coherent**: with clearly aligned learning outcomes and consistently assessed across courses, module and subject level (but with a different regularity across colleges –said by Students). The proportion of contact learning, independent work, practical work and internships is well structured and appropriately regulated. Academic staff approved that if needed - adjustments are made, for example, by changing teaching methods or approaches. Best practises example was provided by Prison Service College on final assessment- it takes place in prison environment and supervisors are assessors. But still there is a need for further strengthening the cooperation between teaching staff and the quality of teaching and methodological consistency across different subjects-say students.
- There are variety and flexibility in learning options as curricula offers elective subjects for both higher education and vocational students. It tailors their studies according to their interests and career goals.
- The panel notes positively the strong integration of theoretical and practical learning, which is particularly important in the context of the academy’s professional higher education profile.

The module-based learning model has improved curriculum coherence and reduced fragmentation. Strong examples were provided, particularly by the Prison Service College, regarding the development of final assessment practices (e.g., it takes place in prison environment and supervisors are assessors) and the integration of practical learning outcomes. Prison service College has created replica models of several Estonian prison facilities, allowing trainees to practically develop real prison guard competencies in highly realistic conditions by acting out practical scenarios under the guidance of a guest lecturer-practitioner.

- A notable strength is the revised General Studies module which has been settled into each higher education curricula providing **integration of transversal and general competences** such as communication, cooperation, resilience, critical thinking, persuasion, coping with stressful situations, future skills and operational competence based on employer expectations and sectoral requirements as well as the development of research skills and broader academic competences. At the same time, the panel notes that some colleges have identified the need to review the content of optional subjects in General studies module by integrating teamwork, change management competencies.
- The institution also demonstrates a **strong learner-centred digital environment supporting curriculum delivery and development**. The use of Moodle, H5P, Articulate, simulations and learning analytics tools provides modern support for teaching, learning and curriculum improvement. Confirming the competitive level of the academy's digital courses, several of courses have received quality marks: during the past 5 years, the EASS has submitted 9 e-courses for the quality mark competition – 5 of them have received the quality mark. The latest achievement - the civil protection training programme received the quality mark in 2025 indicating a competitive level of digital pedagogy and instructional design.
- The panel particularly highlights the introduction of **innovative programme formats**, including micro-credentials and the Master's-level programme **Countering Hybrid Threats**, developed in response to EU-level needs in hybrid threats and cybersecurity. This demonstrates the institution's capacity for innovation, responsiveness and international cooperation.
- The programmes also provide **flexibility and learner choice**, including elective courses for both higher education and vocational students, allowing students to align their studies with career goals and personal interests.
- The institution has also developed a realistic and well-adapted approach to **internationalisation**, considering the specific national security orientation of many programmes. This includes short-term mobility, Erasmus modules, joint Master's programmes such as European Joint Master's Degree in Strategic Border Management and *Countering Hybrid Threats*, and the planned international summer school "**Security in a Changing World**" in 2026. Interview evidence confirmed that mobility opportunities are actively used, particularly through exchanges with partner institutions in Germany, Poland and Norway.
- At the same time, the panel notes several areas for further enhancement. The institution itself acknowledges that the **process for developing and approving new curricula remains too time-consuming**, although work has already begun to streamline and accelerate this process. This is an important and positive step that should continue to ensure a more agile response to rapidly evolving sectoral needs, labour market developments and emerging security challenges. A more efficient curriculum development cycle would further strengthen the institution's capacity for timely change management and innovation.
- A further challenge relates to the **student feedback system**. While the survey framework is comprehensive and well designed, the panel considers that stronger student participation is necessary to ensure sufficiently robust and representative data for quality enhancement purposes. In addition, survey results and the corresponding improvement measures should be communicated more systematically and visibly to students to strengthen transparency, trust and the effectiveness of the feedback loop.

The panel concludes that the institution has established a **functional and mature internal evaluation system for the continuous development of curricula**, and that study programme development is research-based, coherent, evidence-driven and strongly aligned with societal and labour market expectations.

Conclusion

Based on the evidence reviewed and the analysis conducted, the panel concludes that **the quality criterion is fulfilled**.

The Estonian Academy of Security Sciences demonstrates a **strategically well-designed, structured, coherent and modern approach to the development of studies and study programmes**, effectively addressing labour market requirements, sectoral developments and emerging future security challenges across different levels of education.

The development of study content is **systematic, evidence-based and feedback-driven**, supported by strategic planning, active stakeholder involvement and continuous internal evaluation. This approach significantly strengthens the relevance, quality and long-term sustainability of internal security education and ensures that study programmes remain aligned with professional standards and societal needs.

Strengths

- A significant strength is EASS's clear commitment to **flexibility, innovation and international relevance in curriculum development**, particularly demonstrated through the development of the **micro-credential and Master's-level programme "Countering Hybrid Threats."** This programme is a strong example of **responsive and future-oriented curriculum design**, directly addressing emerging educational and professional needs in the fields of hybrid threats and cybersecurity. It supports **lifelong learning**, is well integrated with degree studies, and at the same time demonstrates the academy's strong capacity for **internationalisation and cross-border academic cooperation**. The panel particularly notes that the programme was developed based on a **systematic analysis of EU-level training needs** in hybrid threats and cyber security. It brings together key topics relevant to current and future security challenges across Europe within a single, highly relevant and unique curriculum.
- A further notable strength is the **broad international and institutional partnership framework** underpinning this initiative. Developed with **EU funding**, in cooperation with partners from **Austria, Finland and three Estonian ministries**. In 2024, the Estonian Academy of Security Sciences piloted a micro-credential program in English entitled 'Countering Hybrid Threats' in cooperation with Mykolas Romeris University and the Croatian Police Academy. The micro-credential and Master's-level programme "Countering Hybrid Threats stands out as an example of **good practice in international, interdisciplinary and strategically aligned curriculum development**. It also strengthens the academy's visibility and competitiveness at the European level.

Areas of concern and recommendations

- The panel recommends that EASS **continue and further intensify the ongoing efforts to streamline and accelerate the development and approval process for new curricula**. A more efficient and agile curriculum development cycle is essential to ensure timely responsiveness to rapidly evolving sectoral needs, labour market developments and emerging security challenges, while further strengthening the institution's capacity for innovation and effective change management.

- The panel recommends that EASS develop and implement a **more effective mechanism to ensure consistently high student participation in feedback surveys** across all study programmes. In addition, survey results and the improvement actions derived from them should be communicated more systematically to students, including through the intranet, to strengthen transparency and demonstrate the impact of student feedback on programme development.

Opportunities for further improvement

- To further strengthen the **internationalisation of study programmes**. While international cooperation is already well developed and several short-term mobility and joint programme initiatives are in place, the institution would benefit from identifying additional solutions to support **more active bilateral student mobility**, with a particular focus on **longer-term mobility opportunities** where feasible.

5. Learning and teaching

Quality criterion

The higher education institution systematically implements a learning-centred approach that supports the development of self-directed learners and encourages them to take responsibility for planning their studies and careers. The institution's admission requirements and procedure ensure fair access to higher education. The content and process of learning and teaching are research-based, and the knowledge and skills of graduates correspond to the constantly evolving needs of the labour market and the expectations of society.

Evidence and analysis

List of evidence used by the Panel in its analysis: The panel's analysis is based on the **EASS SAR**, admissions and study regulations, internship documentation, student feedback surveys, graduate employment data, thesis regulations, evidence gathered during the site visit, and interviews with management, academic staff, students, employers and external stakeholders.

- The panel finds that EASS demonstrates a **systematic and well-embedded learner-centred approach**, strongly aligned with the institution's mission, the needs of the internal security sector and the expectations of society. The learning environment is modern, practice-oriented and highly supportive of the development of self-directed, responsible and professionally competent learners. Modern laboratories, smart classrooms, virtual simulation environments and field-specific facilities, particularly the **Narva campus**, provide an authentic real-time professional setting for internships and practical activities and make a significant contribution to the overall quality of the study experience.
- The panel notes positively that the institution offers **degree, vocational and continuing education pathways**, responding effectively to the needs of different learner groups, including working professionals and sectoral partners. Study planning in particular is based on a student-centred approach in order to ensure diversity in studies, as well as variety in course content and delivery while striving to distribute the study workload as evenly as possible. For example, to balance employee absences from a single employer, several study groups begin their studies in the middle of the academic year. During interviews it was emphasized that learning is tied to real-life problem solving (security, crises, law enforcement), focusing on transferable skills (analysis, communication, decision-making) and further enhances the relevance of their studies.
- Admission requirements and procedures are found to be **transparent, fair and supportive of learner readiness**, with clear pathways for entry and good alignment with labour market needs and service requirements. It was also emphasized during interviews, that a focus in the admissions process is on entrance interviews. Early orientation initiatives, including internal security awareness and training activities in secondary schools, contribute positively to accessibility and informed study choices. The possibility for candidates to apply to up to three programmes further supports flexibility and access
- The internal regulatory framework for learning and teaching is **robust and well established**. Key documents, including the study regulations, curriculum statute, internship guidelines, thesis and examination procedures, and timetable principles, are accessible and well known to teachers, guest lecturers and students. In addition, plagiarism detection systems and guidance on the responsible use of artificial intelligence in academic work are in place.
- Learning and teaching are **strongly linked to up-to-date sectoral expertise and operational practice** also incorporating the results of scientific research. Students found the teaching staff to be highly professional, knowledgeable, open and innovative, with strong

commitment to student support, cooperation and continuous self-development. Student survey results also show that teachers and their competence are rated as the strongest area, receiving a high grade (4.36 out of 5). Teachers assured the panel about their direct connection to the operational field which in turn ensures immediate access to current information, regulatory documents, methodologies and service-specific practices, which strongly supports both teaching and applied research. The active involvement of academic staff, practitioners, guest lecturers and foreign experts ensures that teaching remains current, relevant and practice oriented. During the tour around the EASS, the Panel could observe practical group work at a virtual simulation classroom where crises situations were simulated and solved by different college students led by practitioners from services.

- The panel also notes positively that **research, development and creative activities (RDC) are integrated into teaching**. Students are given opportunities to participate in research projects and development activities together with teachers and practitioners, which strengthens analytical, methodological and research skills. For example, in 2025, students at the Prison Service College were involved in the work of a research group and developed two research papers on changes to the daily schedule at Tallinn Prison and prisoners sleep quality. A scientific article presenting the results is currently in preparation. Research resulted in amendments to Tallinn Prison's internal regulations (daily schedule), which are planned to be extended to other prisons as well.
- At the EASS the teachers and practitioners are granted a considerable degree of autonomy in implementing the study process. Thanks to a highly modern and digital learning environment, they can experiment with various pedagogical approaches like simulations, problem-based learning, practical scenarios, as well as quickly adapt content to the needs of students or current service requirements. As a result, study programmes are better able to respond to the needs of different target groups — both future and already practicing police and border guard officers, rescuers, prison officers etc. and to provide modern, practice-based teaching.
- Teaching involves a **broad range of active and meaningful pedagogical methods**, including simulations, digital tools, laboratories, practical exercises and internships. Assessment is objective, learning-supportive and aligned with intended learning outcomes. If students have additional needs or encounter difficulties during their studies, they feel comfortable providing feedback to staff immediately after class and do not fear repercussions, as they feel they are treated as colleagues. They also perceive that teachers are responsive to and guided by student feedback. Students survey results also indicate satisfaction with both the study environment, study plan, workload and the diversity and suitability of teaching methods (3,88 out of 5). Teachers emphasized that highly practical and experiential learning environment (simulations, field-related exercises, internships) let students learn by doing, plan their actions and evaluate outcomes. encourages to experiment and learn from mistakes.
- The balance between theoretical and practical learning is a clear institutional strength. The positive outcome of this approach has been proved by employer satisfaction with the education of higher education graduates. Professional higher education graduates had consistently high points in all three assessed areas in the 5-point scale survey based on data from 2020-2024 (3.6 in knowledge, 3.9 in skills and 4.0 in attitudes). The results were even higher for master's level graduates (4.0 in knowledge, 4.3 in skills and 4.2 in attitudes). Students on the master's level additionally highlighted the diversity of student backgrounds as a major strength, as it enriches classroom discussion and peer learning through different experiences and perspectives. The EASS supports working students by providing recognition of prior learning or experience, allowing them to plan their studies alongside work shifts. The EASS ensures access to digital and blended learning environments – the academy exhibits extensive use of e-learning, online materials and remote learning activities. It was highlighted by teachers that flexibility and direct communication between students and teaching staff are essential. If students need to miss a class due to work commitments, alternative assignments are agreed upon individually between the lecturer and the student. Students noted that the proportion of workload, independent work and assessments are consistent. However,

master's level students suggest reviewing the balance between in-person and remote (hybrid) lectures for working students.

- Internships are **well integrated into the learning process**, with clearly defined requirements, close cooperation with employers and structured supervision arrangements. The panel received strong evidence of employer engagement and improvements in supervision since the previous assessment. However, some challenges remain, including a limited number of placements in certain fields, particularly within the **Tax and Customs Board**, and the need for mentors and supervisors with sufficient dedicated time to support students. Additional internship opportunities would further strengthen this area.
- The panel identified the **strong balance between academic teaching and practical knowledge**. For example, the content of the Level 4 professional standard for a rescuer, along with the defined knowledge and skills, is integrated into the modules of the rescuer training program, demonstrating the closest possible transfer of workplace competencies into education. Guest lecturers, practitioners and foreign experts contribute real-life field experience, strengthening the integration of theory and practice and keeping students updated with current sectoral developments.
- Students also benefit from access to **CEPOL and FRONTEX online courses**, as well as the possibility to attend lectures in other colleges, which broadens professional perspectives and enhances the relevance of studies. For example, in March 2025 students of Police and Border guard College participated in FRONTEX Common Core Curriculum – Interoperability Assessment Programme activity. It aims primarily to assess to what extent the EU common standards for border guards has been integrated into the national curricula, assesses whether the interoperability related job competencies acquired by the students meet the requirements of the curriculum and - whether the curriculum meets the requirements of working life, while promoting interoperability at the same time.
- The institution maintains a consistent focus on **balancing academic standards with practical requirements**. Study completion methods have evolved to offer greater flexibility, with students now able to choose between a final examination and a traditional diploma thesis. Research activities support critical thinking, while final exams are used to demonstrate practical skills. For example, in the Rescue College, the format of the final exam has not been chosen. The diploma thesis remains the preferred option for most students and continues to play an important role in strengthening research skills and applied research in the field of security.
- Teachers noticed some gaps in support, for example, the Prison Service does not provide suggested research topics, while the Rescue Board does. Also, now more students, especially after bachelor's studies need more help choosing a topic and support of supervision. Thus, the panel notes that coordination between ministries, services and EASS could be further improved in relation to research topic proposals and thesis supervision.
- The panel notes positively the institution's **feedback culture and student involvement in quality enhancement**. Students actively contribute feedback on teaching, curricula and the organisation of studies. However, many students reported that they are not sufficiently aware of how their feedback is subsequently used. While staff were described as highly approachable and open to concerns, the communication of follow-up actions and improvement measures through official channels should be strengthened.
- The panel finds strong evidence that the **knowledge and competences acquired correspond well to labour market expectations**. Completion rates of **70-89%** compare favourably with the Estonian average, and graduate employability is very strong, with approximately **86-87% employed in the security sector**, demonstrating strong labour market relevance and the effectiveness of the learning and teaching model.
- Students also highly appreciate the **free gym, sports activities, mobility opportunities and social events**, which contribute positively to well-being and foster interaction between students from different programmes.

- Although national legislation does not require pedagogical qualifications as a mandatory requirement for teaching staff, and EASS provides opportunities for teachers and guest lecturers to develop these competences through external training, the panel considers that **further strengthening pedagogical and andragogical competences would add significant value** to the quality of teaching and learning. Enhanced expertise in teaching methods, assessment design, learner-centred pedagogy and adult learning principles would further support consistent teaching quality across programmes and strengthen the learning experience for both degree and vocational students and adult learners in continuing education.

The **Learning and Teaching area is well developed, coherent and strongly aligned with the quality criterion**, with clear strengths in learner-centred pedagogy, practice orientation, labour market relevance and sectoral responsiveness.

Conclusion

Based on the evidence reviewed and the analysis conducted, the panel concludes that **the quality criterion is fulfilled**.

EASS systematically implements a **learning-centred and students-centred approach to teaching and learning**, considering that students have different needs, abilities and study paths, including the challenge of combining studies with work. The institution provides a strong and practice-oriented learning environment, transparent admission procedures, research-based and professionally relevant teaching, and well-structured internships supported by close cooperation with employers and operational services.

The panel notes clear strengths in the **quality of the learning environment, the competence and commitment of teaching staff, the integration of research and practice into teaching**, the relevance of continuing education, and the strong labour market outcomes of graduates. At the same time, some aspects would benefit from further development, particularly the visibility of follow-up actions based on student feedback, the balance of hybrid and contact learning for some target groups, and the availability of internship placements and supervision in certain fields.

The panel finds that the institution meets the requirements of the criterion and demonstrates a strong capacity for further improvement.

Strengths

- A clear strength of EASS is the **well-balanced integration of academic instruction and practical training**, which ensures that students develop both strong theoretical foundations and profession-specific operational competences relevant to the internal security sector.
- The panel also notes positively the **open and supportive academic culture**. Students consistently reported that teaching staff are approachable, receptive to feedback and create a safe learning environment in which concerns can be raised without fear of negative consequences. This contributes significantly to learner engagement, trust and well-being.
- Another notable strength is the **high degree of professional autonomy granted to teaching staff** in the organisation of courses, learning activities and teaching methods. This institutional flexibility supports innovation in pedagogy and allows programmes to respond effectively to the needs of different learner groups.
- The panel further highlights the institution's **strong recognition of diverse student needs**, particularly its support for students who combine studies with professional responsibilities. Flexible study arrangements and adaptive teaching formats contribute positively to accessibility, learner success and retention.

Areas of concern and recommendations

- **To improve coordination between ministries, services and the academy regarding research topic proposals and thesis supervision.** Coordination of research topic proposals and thesis of supervision should be improved. Students would particularly benefit from the appointment of a **dedicated agency supervisor** when choosing to write a thesis on a topic proposed by the respective agency. As a significant proportion of dropouts in Master's studies occur during the thesis phase, consideration should be given to **starting thesis work already in the first semester.**

Opportunities for further improvement

- **To enhance learning flexibility in Master's programmes and strengthen the consistency of assessment practices across all study levels.** Master's students would benefit from a greater use of **hybrid or online learning options**, especially when balancing professional responsibilities alongside studies. It is also recommended to either reduce the number of group assignments where appropriate or establish **clear and precise individual assessment criteria** for each participant in group work in all study levels.
- **To strengthen the internship system.** Common solutions should be identified together with the **Tax and Customs Board**, specifically in relation to the availability of internship placements. In addition, dedicated mentors should be assigned with sufficient time, motivation and clearly defined responsibilities to guide students during their internships.

6. Support Systems for Learning and Teaching

Quality criterion

The higher education institution considers the diverse needs of learners, monitors and supports their academic progress, development, and well-being.

Evidence and analysis

List of evidence used by the Panel in its analysis: The panel's analysis is based on the **EASS SAR**, the guidance document "*Support System for Student Development and Coping*" (updated in 2022), dropout and scholarship statistics, student feedback surveys, study regulations, and evidence gathered during interviews with management, academic staff, support staff and students.

- The panel finds that EASS has established a **clear, up-to-date and institution-wide student support system**, designed to support study choices, strengthen responsibility for learning, reduce dropout, and improve students' academic coping and labour-market readiness.
- Student support is centrally coordinated by the **Department of Academic Affairs**, in close cooperation with the colleges and other support units, ensuring a structured, consistent and academy-wide approach to learner support.
- A notable strength is the institution's **strong day-to-day support capacity**. A team of **nine academic assistants** provides systematic guidance on timetables, thesis procedures, scholarships, urgent study issues, academic progression and potential dropout risks, including support for students on academic leave or following external study pathways. Their close cooperation with **group leaders** strengthens the support network further, enabling early identification of academic or personal challenges and supporting closer communication between students and the institution.
- The panel notes positively that the institution **considers the diversity of learners** through flexible and inclusive support arrangements. These include opportunities to return to studies, external study options, counselling services, recognition of prior learning and work experience (**VÕTA**), preparatory Estonian language courses, and study programmes accessible to learners with special needs, such as the **Call Taker curriculum**. These measures contribute positively to equal access, lifelong learning and student retention.
- The effectiveness of the support arrangements is clearly evidenced in practice. The panel notes that both the **overall dropout rate and the first-year dropout rate are below the Estonian average**, which provides strong evidence that the admission system, academic monitoring and learner support measures function effectively. In interviews the learners were satisfied but suggested sharing more information about support systems. Moreover, within the EASS SAR p 42 survey results showed that satisfaction with the support services that are directly related to learning is high.
- A further strength is the academy's **well-developed scholarship and socio-economic support system**. This includes basic, additional and special scholarships, such as scholarships for call takers, sports scholarships, regional scholarships and support for Master's-level research work.
- In bachelor's and vocational programs students may also receive **free meals, accommodation, uniforms and reimbursed travel expenses**, which significantly reduces barriers to study and supports retention and equal opportunities.
- The institution also provides a **modern digital learning support environment**, including Moodle for all modules and subjects, technical support from educational technologists, interactive learning tools, plagiarism detection systems and the growing use of learning analytics to monitor student learning and support risk groups.

- Student feedback indicates high levels of satisfaction with the study information systems, e-learning environment and on-site information tools. The panel also notes positively that weaker areas identified in previous feedback, particularly accommodation and catering services, have been followed by targeted improvement actions and investments.
- The panel finds that EASS has established a **transparent and well-regulated framework for handling complaints, appeals, academic misconduct and ethical issues**. Procedures are clearly documented in the Study Regulations and related misconduct procedures, known to both students and staff, and applied in practice. The low number of appeals and legal disputes suggests a high level of trust in these mechanisms.
- Students are actively supported in their development **beyond the classroom**. They participate in governance, community engagement and extracurricular activities, particularly through the **student council**, volunteer initiatives, school visits, job fairs, preparatory internal security training camps and other institutional activities.
- A particularly positive cultural observation from the interviews was that EASS staff frequently referred to students as “**colleagues/partners**” which reflects a respectful, learner-centred and professionally mature institutional culture.
- The panel also notes positively the institution’s **strong support for student well-being and inclusion**, including sports and health promotion activities, free access to gym facilities, mobility opportunities and social events that strengthen interaction between students from different programmes.
- Students also recognised the academy’s significant efforts to improve well-being conditions, particularly through the development of new dormitory facilities and the planning of a more modern, socially supportive and comfortable study environment for the future. (*EASS SAR p. 45; student interviews*)
- At the same time, the panel identified several areas requiring further attention. While support services are available and functioning, students indicated that their **visibility and communication could be improved**, so that all learners are fully aware of the support options available. This applies particularly to counselling services, complaint procedures and reporting channels for misconduct and ethical concerns. Clearer communication through official institutional channels would strengthen accessibility and trust.
- While the institution provides **mobility opportunities** and has created formal mobility windows within study programmes, participation remains limited and uneven across fields. Evidence suggests that the structured nature of curricula, professional obligations and insufficient visibility of opportunities constrain wider uptake. Students reported difficulties in integrating mobility into their study plans without affecting progression. This indicates a need for more flexible curriculum design, clearer planning of mobility periods and stronger communication and guidance.
- In addition, given the increasingly demanding professional pathways of students and broader trends related to mental health, the panel notes that the **demand for psychological counselling services is increasing**. Currently, such support is provided through an external partner. The panel considers that this area may require further strengthening to ensure sufficient capacity, accessibility and stronger integration within the overall student support framework.

The institution **effectively considers the diverse needs of learners and systematically monitors and supports their academic progress, development and well-being**, with clear strengths in academic support, socio-economic support, inclusion and student engagement.

Conclusion

Based on the documentary evidence, the interviews and the on-site visit, the panel concludes that **the quality criterion is substantially fulfilled**.

EASS has established an **effective and well-structured support system for the early identification of student-related challenges**, including academic, organisational and well-being issues. A clear strength is the active communication within the support process and the presence of multiple support roles, including **group leaders, mentors, academic assistants and teaching staff**, who collectively play an important role in recognising and addressing issues at different stages of the study cycle. The institution clearly considers the **diversity of learners and their differing needs**.

The panel notes particularly positively the institution's **strong day-to-day support capacity**, with **nine academic assistants** providing systematic guidance on timetables, thesis procedures, scholarships, study progression and potential dropout risks. Support systems are regularly monitored and improved based on student feedback, and high satisfaction levels are reported in relation to study information systems, the e-learning environment and on-site information tools.

The institution also has a **transparent and well-regulated framework for complaints, appeals and academic misconduct**, which is generally known to students and staff and applied in practice. The low number of appeals and legal disputes indicates trust in these procedures. However, the panel notes that the **visibility and accessibility of information on complaints procedures and misconduct reporting should be further strengthened**.

Student involvement in institutional life is strong, both through the **student council and active participation in community projects, volunteer initiatives and institutional activities**, which contributes positively to students' sense of belonging and engagement.

The panel also notes positively the academy's commitment to **student well-being and social support**, including sports and health promotion activities, as well as social and economic support measures such as meals, accommodation, uniforms and travel reimbursement, depending on the programme and study level.

A particularly positive indicator of the institutional culture is the fact that staff members referred to students as "**colleagues**," reflecting a respectful, inclusive and learner-centred environment.

At the same time, the panel considers that the internal support framework would benefit from further strengthening, particularly in relation to **psychological counselling services**. While counselling support is currently provided through an external partner, the panel recommends more fully integrating psychological support into the institutional support system in order to ensure sufficient accessibility and continuity for both students and staff.

Overall, the panel concludes that the institution **effectively monitors and supports students' academic progress, development and well-being, while recognising the diverse needs of its learner population**.

Strengths

- A key strength of EASS is the existence of a **clear, structured and up-to-date student support system**, based on the guidance framework "*Support System for Student Development and Coping*" (updated in 2022). The institution demonstrates a strong commitment to learner-centred support by explicitly considering the **diversity of learners**, including different study formats, social backgrounds and support needs.
- Another significant strength is the **systematic monitoring and continuous improvement of support services based on student feedback**. High satisfaction levels are consistently reported in relation to the study information systems, the e-learning environment and on-site information tools, demonstrating that feedback is effectively used for service enhancement.
- The panel also highlights the academy's **well-developed socio-economic support measures**. Scholarships and free support services, including catering, accommodation, uniforms and travel reimbursement, make a substantial contribution to equal opportunities, student retention and learner well-being. These measures clearly support students in focusing on their studies and are reflected in the **dropout rate remaining below the Estonian average** in both higher and vocational education.

- A further strength is the **active involvement of students in institutional governance and community engagement**. Through the student council and participation in community projects, volunteer activities, job fairs, school visits and preparatory internal security camps, students play a visible role in institutional life and decision-making processes. This contributes positively to students' sense of belonging, civic engagement and professional identity.
- The institution also demonstrates a strong commitment to **student well-being**, supported through sports facilities, health promotion activities and a broader supportive campus environment.
- The panel notes as a particular strength the **positive relationship and communication culture between students and staff**. The respectful, approachable and collegial interaction observed during the visit reflects a strong institutional culture that supports trust, openness and learner success.

Areas of concern and recommendations

- The panel identified the need to **further strengthen the internal support framework, particularly in relation to psychological counselling services**. At present, support is provided mainly through external arrangements, including chaplaincy and external counselling partners, which are not yet fully integrated into the academy's overall support system. The panel recommends that EASS **integrate psychological support services more systematically into the student and staff support framework**, ensuring clear access pathways, continuity of support and sufficient capacity to respond to growing well-being needs.
- A further area requiring improvement concerns the **visibility and communication of available support services**. Although a range of support mechanisms is in place, students indicated that awareness of these services is not always consistent. The panel therefore recommends that EASS make **additional efforts to communicate support services more clearly and proactively**, for example through official communication channels, programme-level information, the student council and onboarding processes, so that all students are fully aware of the help and guidance available to them.
- Students reported difficulties in integrating mobility into their study plans without affecting progression. This indicates a need for more flexible curriculum design, clearer planning of mobility periods and stronger communication and guidance.

Opportunities for further improvement

- The panel also recommends **strengthening student academic support structures**, including the possible increase in the number of student support and mentoring staff. This could further improve personalised guidance, strengthen student-faculty relationships, support retention and enhance the student learning experience.

SUMMARY OF THE ASSESSMENT AREA: LEARNING AND TEACHING

ASSESSMENTS BY QUALITY CRITERIA:

	Quality criterion is fulfilled	Quality criterion is substantially fulfilled	Quality criterion is partially fulfilled	Quality criterion is not fulfilled	Worthy of recognition
Development of studies and study programmes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Learning and teaching	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Support systems for learning and teaching	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Conclusion

Based on the analysis of the three criteria within this assessment area, the panel concludes that **the requirements of the assessment area are fulfilled.**

EASS demonstrates a **coherent, practice-oriented and learner-centred approach** to the planning, delivery and support of learning and teaching. Study programmes are developed systematically and, on an evidence-based basis, with clear links to labour market needs, national priorities in internal security, stakeholder expectations and emerging security challenges. The panel notes positively the institution's strong capacity to update curricula, integrate continuing education with degree studies, and introduce innovative formats such as micro-credentials and joint or international programmes.

The learning and teaching process is supported by a **high-quality and diverse study environment**, professionally competent and committed teaching staff, strong involvement of practitioners and guest lecturers, and a good balance between academic learning, research activity and practical training. Graduate employability and completion rates provide convincing evidence that the knowledge and skills acquired correspond well to the needs of the labour market and society.

The EASS has established **well-functioning support systems for learning and teaching**, including systematic academic support, effective monitoring of student progress, flexible study arrangements, scholarships and socio-economic support measures, and structured internship and guidance processes. The institution clearly considers the diverse needs of learners and demonstrates a supportive and respectful study culture.

The panel identified **several areas that would benefit from further development.** These include *strengthening the visibility of support services and feedback follow-up, further improving pedagogical competences and the consistency of teaching and assessment methods, enhancing the availability of internship placements and supervision in some fields, improving coordination on research topics and thesis supervision, and more fully integrating psychological support into the institutional support framework.*

The panel also sees room for *further strengthening long-term international mobility and for accelerating curriculum development processes in response to rapidly changing sectoral needs.*

These challenges mentioned above do not amount to partial fulfilment and do not weaken the overall positive judgement. The panel therefore concludes that EASS **meets the requirements of the assessment area**, with a solid foundation for further improvement and development.

III. RESEARCH, DEVELOPMENT AND/OR OTHER CREATIVE ACTIVITY

7. Setting of the goals and quality management in RDC

Quality criterion

The higher education institution bases the goal setting and implementation of its research, development, and/or other creative activities on its mission, societal expectations, future needs, and principles of code of conduct for research integrity and sustainable development. The institution has defined specific and measurable quality criteria, analysed the results, and applied them in decision-making processes, in setting strategic development directions, and in planning development activities.

Evidence and analysis

List of evidence used by the Panel in its analysis: The panel's analysis is based on the **EASS SAR 2025**, EASS 2019, the *Development Strategy 2025–2035*, national strategic documents in the field of internal security and research, institutional quality assurance documentation, RDI governance and financial reports, and evidence gathered during the site visit and interviews with management and research staff.

- The panel finds that EASS has established a **clear, coherent and increasingly mature framework for setting goals and managing the quality of research, development and innovation (RDI) activities**. The institution bases the goal setting and implementation of its RDC activities on its mission, strategic vision and long-term development objectives, ensuring clear alignment with the Academy's role in the internal security sector.
- The institution's RDC objectives are firmly anchored in its long-term strategic framework, particularly the **Development Strategy 2025–2035**, which explicitly identifies the creation of a "*well-functioning research and development ecosystem for internal security*" as one of its three core strategic aims.
- The Academy's RDC activities are clearly designed to **respond to societal expectations, national priorities and future security-related challenges**, including crisis resilience, policy support, security governance and evidence-based decision-making.
- The EASS demonstrates strong alignment with national strategic documents, including the **Internal Security Development Plan 2020–2030**, the **Research and Development, Innovation and Entrepreneurship Development Plan 2021–2035**, and the **RDI Strategy of the Ministry of the Interior 2030**.
- The panel notes positively that the Academy's research profile is **predominantly applied, mission-driven and strongly focused on internal security challenges**. Research outputs include applied studies, policy reports, forecasting analyses, innovation projects and practical solutions for state institutions. This applied orientation is fully consistent with the institution's mission as a professional higher education institution serving the Ministry of the Interior and associated agencies.
- RDC planning and monitoring processes are **systematic and supported by clearly defined institutional responsibilities**. The Strategy Department plays a central role in monitoring indicators and implementation, while the strengthened governance model includes the **Vice-Rector for Research**, the **Research, Development and Innovation Committee**, and annual planning cycles at unit level. The panel considers this governance structure appropriate and conducive to strategic coherence between institutional objectives and operational research activities.

- The institution has established **specific, measurable and regularly monitored quality indicators for RDC activities**, including outputs, scientific relevance, societal impact, capacity development, sustainability and knowledge transfer. The results of monitoring and evaluation are systematically analysed and used to inform **strategic decisions, resource allocation and the planning of future development activities**. For example, the increased emphasis on quality and impact indicators has led EASS to the reorientation of RDC priorities toward applied, policy-relevant research areas, the targeted allocation of additional state funding for research since 2023, the establishment of dedicated research structures and a centralised research support unit to strengthen project participation and research capacity.
- The panel notes that quality management in RDC has shifted from a predominantly output-based approach to one that emphasises **quality, impact and strategic relevance**. This is reflected in the **prioritisation of applied research topics aligned with internal security needs, the introduction of impact-based criteria in research evaluation, and their use in funding and project selection decisions**. The change is also visible in the **allocation of additional state funding for research, the establishment of specialised research units, and the growing focus on outputs that support policy-making and professional practice**. These developments indicate that the revised principles are being operationalised in research planning and implementation.
- The integration of RDC quality management into the **overall institutional quality system** is also evident. The Academy's quality assurance framework, built around the **Deming cycle and updated in 2025**, explicitly incorporates research and innovation processes into strategic planning, implementation, monitoring and continuous improvement mechanisms. This demonstrates a clear evidence-based and strategically aligned approach to RDC management.
- The Academy has made **visible progress in strengthening research capacity**. According to the self-assessment report, the number of researchers increased significantly during the previous strategic cycle, from **3.5 to 12.8 FTE researchers**, while the number of staff with research obligations increased by approximately **30%, reaching 60 staff members by the end of 2024**. This demonstrates a substantial institutional investment in research capability and a clear commitment to developing RDC as a strategic pillar.
- The panel also notes positively the establishment of **dedicated research structures**, including the research centre within the Internal Security Institute, the **Remote Sensing Research and Development Centre**, and the **Civil Protection Research and Development Centre**. These structures support thematic concentration, stronger institutional visibility and the development of expertise in priority security domains.
- **Resource allocation is purposeful and increasingly aligned with strategic priorities**. Compared with the previous assessment period, the scale and structure of research funding have strengthened significantly. In **2016–2019**, the Academy operated with approximately €2.0 million in externally funded RDI projects, whereas in the current period it has substantially expanded its funding base. Since **2023**, the introduction of dedicated state budget funding for research has enabled a notable increase in RDC capacity and stability. In parallel, the Academy has strengthened its project-based funding profile: in **2020–2025** it secured nearly €2.7 million in international R&D funding, including major projects such as the €1 million EU Internal Security Fund project, the €400,000 HYBRIDC Erasmus+ project, the GUARDIANS Horizon project (€157,737), the EUMA project (€64,897), and a Frontex-funded project (€59,994). Domestic R&D cooperation and commissioned research contributed an additional approximately €121,000. While earlier evidence suggests project-based activity at a smaller scale, the present figures indicate a substantial expansion, both in volume and strategic integration, with R&D now representing 9.4% of the Academy's total budget.
- The panel notes an increasing **thematic concentration of research priorities**, aligned with the Academy's strategic focus on internal security. Research activities are clustered around

key areas such as **crisis management and civil protection, cybersecurity and hybrid threats, border and migration management, and societal resilience**. This is supported by the establishment of specialised structures, including the Civil Protection Research and Development Centre and the Remote Sensing R&D Centre, as well as targeted projects such as those addressing hybrid threats and EU security cooperation.

- While research, development and creative activities are integrated into teaching, the panel observed that **coordination between units responsible for RDC and those responsible for study programme development could be further strengthened** to ensure more systematic integration of research outputs and project-based learning into curricula.
- While the Academy demonstrates a broad range of dissemination activities, the panel observed that **the communication of research outputs, conferences, journal publications and their impact is not yet fully systematic or consistently visible across institutional and public channels**.
- **Funding, infrastructure and human resources for RDC** are therefore allocated in a purposeful and increasingly strategic manner, supporting the effective organisation and long-term development of research capacity. At the same time, the panel notes that further diversification of competitive international research funding would strengthen long-term sustainability and international visibility.
- The institution also demonstrates a clear commitment to **research integrity, academic ethics, data protection and information security**, supported by internal regulations and quality assurance processes. The framework for academic ethics and quality management is clearly documented, and the Academy demonstrates awareness of compliance with good scientific practice. However, the panel considers that the visibility of dedicated procedures for reporting and handling research misconduct cases could be further strengthened and more explicitly linked to RDC governance processes.

The panel concludes that EASS has established a **structured, evidence-based and strategically aligned system for setting goals and managing quality in RDC**, with clear progress in governance, capacity building, quality assurance and societal relevance.

Conclusion

Based on the evidence reviewed in the self-assessment report, supporting documentation and discussions during the interviews, the panel concludes that **the quality criterion is fulfilled**.

The Academy has established a **coherent and well-functioning framework for RDC goal setting and quality management that is clearly aligned with its mission, strategic objectives and the needs of the internal security sector**. The system is supported by defined governance structures, measurable indicators, increasing research capacity and an evolving quality management culture. Research activities are strongly practice-oriented and generate visible societal value.

At the same time, further strengthening of internationally competitive research funding, thematic concentration of research priorities and more explicit procedures for research integrity monitoring would further enhance the maturity and impact of the RDC system.

Strengths

- A key strength of EASS is the **clear strategic alignment of RDC activities with the institution's mission, long-term development strategy and the priorities of the internal security sector**. Research goals are not developed in isolation but are directly linked to national security needs, public sector expectations and future societal challenges.
- The Academy demonstrates a **well-structured governance and quality management framework for RDC**, with clearly defined responsibilities at strategic and operational levels,

including the Strategy Department, the Vice-Rector for Research and the Research, Development and Innovation Committee.

- A notable strength is the **strong applied and mission-driven research profile**, with research outputs directly supporting policy development, forecasting, crisis preparedness and evidence-based decision-making for state institutions and partner agencies.
- The institution has shown **visible progress in strengthening research capacity**, including a significant increase in dedicated research staff, the creation of specialised research centres and improved internal coordination mechanisms.
- The integration of RDC management into the overall institutional quality assurance framework is particularly positive, demonstrating a **mature quality culture based on measurable indicators, monitoring and continuous improvement**.
- Another strength is the Academy's **close connection between research activities and professional practice**, which enhances the relevance, usability and societal impact of research outputs in the field of internal security.
- The panel highlights the institution's increasing ability to attract project-based national and international funding, as evidenced by participation in multiple externally funded projects and the growth of international R&D funding, which reached approximately €2.7 million during the reporting period.

Areas of concern and recommendations

- Although the Academy participates in national and European projects, its visibility and positioning in international research networks could be further enhanced. The panel recommends **increasing participation in international research projects, partnerships and academic networks**, including taking more active coordinating or leadership roles in collaborative initiatives.
- The panel identified the need for stronger links between the units responsible for research and those responsible for study programme development and teaching. It is recommended to **strengthen institutional coordination between RDC and educational activities**, to better integrate research outputs, methodologies and project participation into curricula and student learning.

Opportunities for further improvement

- The panel notes a positive trend towards thematic concentration of research priorities. To further strengthen this approach, it is recommended to define more clearly a limited number of priority research areas in which the Academy can build excellence and concentrate resources.
- The Academy's research activities, conferences, scientific events, journal editions and publication outputs should be communicated more systematically and visibly, both internally and externally. The panel recommends **more active promotion of conferences, research events, journal issues and applied research outputs**, including clearer presentation of outcomes and impact in institutional reporting and public communication.
- The Academy is well positioned to become a leading centre for applied research in internal security. The panel recommends developing **clear milestones, strategic partnerships and measurable objectives** to strengthen its role as a national knowledge hub and centre of excellence in the field.

8. Effectiveness of RDC and its impact on society

Quality criterion

The volume and quality of RDC outputs as well as the trends in the institution's research and/or creative fields align with the goals set by the institution and confirm the sustainability of RDC activities. The RDC activities have significant scientific and societal impact due to the specific characteristics of the institution, both at the national and international level.

Evidence and analysis

List of evidence used by the Panel in its analysis: The panel's analysis is based on the **EASS SAR 2025**, EASS SAR 2019 publication and RDC statistics, institutional strategic and monitoring documents, evidence gathered during interviews with management, research staff and external stakeholders, and observations from the site visit.

- The panel finds that the **effectiveness of EASS's research, development and innovation activities has clearly increased during the reporting period**, and that the volume, profile and use of RDC outputs are broadly aligned with the institution's strategic goals and societal mission. The volume of RDC outputs demonstrates a clear upward trend and is particularly aligned with the Academy's strategic objectives in the fields of **internal security, crisis management, cyber security, border management and societal resilience**.
- The EASS SAR 2020-2025 presents a substantial body of knowledge-transfer outputs over the reporting period of the current development cycle (approximately 2020–2024), including **659 publications in total**, of which **120 are classified as high-level publications**. These outputs cover a wide range of formats, including **scientific journal articles, monographs, dissertations, commissioned research reports and analyses, conference papers, textbooks, educational publications, popular science articles and media contributions**. Compared with the previous assessment period, when the Academy reported **168 publications for 2014–2017**, this represents a **significant increase in overall publication volume**, indicating a strong upward trend in research productivity and dissemination activity. The growth reflects the expansion of research capacity and a more systematic integration of research and knowledge transfer into institutional activities. This breadth and increase in output are consistent with the Academy's mission and confirm that RDC activities have become a more visible and sustainable component of institutional performance. As a professional higher education institution serving the internal security sector, the Academy's RDC profile is predominantly **applied, policy-relevant and practice-oriented**, and this is consistently reflected in the type of outputs produced and their uptake by public authorities and professional users.
- The panel notes positively the **growing volume and diversity of research outputs**. The institution ensures a sufficient and diversified volume of RDC activities across its core fields of study, including **peer-reviewed scientific publications, applied studies, commissioned research, analytical reports, textbooks, educational materials and popular science outputs**.
- A major strength identified by the panel is the **strong societal and policy impact of RDC activities**. Research outputs directly support decision-making, operational planning, strategic forecasting and innovation in the internal security sector at national level. The Academy actively promotes the practical application of research results, translating research into **policy recommendations, professional methodologies, training materials and innovative solutions** for issues of public importance.

- The SAR explicitly demonstrates that policy-supporting reports and applied analyses are continuously produced to support practical problem-solving and evidence-based governance. The panel considers this a particularly important form of societal impact, fully aligned with the Academy's institutional profile and mission.
- The institution has also established a **systematic monitoring mechanism for RDC effectiveness**, including regular review of output volume, scientific quality, societal relevance and alignment with strategic goals. From 2023 onwards, increasing attention has been given to the volume and impact of research work, with relevant data analysed **twice a year**. Quality criteria now explicitly include **scientific impact, social impact and sustainability**, and monitoring results are increasingly used to support management decisions, staffing priorities, resource allocation and development planning. The panel notes positively that this reflects a mature and functioning link between research performance and institutional management.
- The dissemination of RDC results is **broad, diversified and well developed**. Research dissemination takes place through scientific journals, policy reports, public expert contributions, conferences, textbooks, popular science articles and media publications, ensuring that results reach both professional audiences and the wider public. A particular institutional strength is the Academy's publication platform, especially the journals **Security Spectrum: Journal of Advanced Security Research** and **Turvalisuskompas**. These journals serve complementary purposes: one contributes to broader international academic and policy discussion, while the other supports dissemination in Estonian and promotes evidence-based decision-making among domestic professional and governmental audiences. The panel considers these journals an important institutional mechanism for ensuring that research results reach both scholarly and practitioner communities.
- The panel also notes positively the Academy's **wide-ranging public outreach and knowledge-transfer activity**. In addition to scientific publications, the Academy reports, over the reporting period of the previous development cycle (approximately 2020–2024), **85 popular science articles, 233 articles in magazines and newspapers, 20 textbooks and educational publications, and 70 published reports on projects, commissioned research or analyses**. These figures indicate strong efforts to communicate research findings beyond academic audiences and to ensure broader social relevance and accessibility.
- EASS maintains **close cooperation with government agencies, the Ministry of the Interior, European bodies and research partners**, which significantly increases the applicability, visibility and real-world use of research outputs. Its role within the Ministry's administrative area and its participation in European and international networks support the translation of research into policy, doctrine, professional training and innovation. The panel considers this close relationship between research, practice and stakeholder demand to be one of the defining strengths of the Academy's impact.
- The panel finds that **the effectiveness of RDC is reflected in its integration with teaching and professional training**. Educational outputs, including higher education textbooks and learning materials, extend the reach of research into the study process and continuing education. The Academy's model of integrating curricula, research and lifelong learning create favourable conditions for strengthening sectoral competence-building. At the same time, the panel notes **that this integration is not yet fully systematic across all units, and further strengthening of coordination between research and teaching** would enhance the consistent use of research outputs in curricula.
- The panel notes that the Academy's next development stage should place stronger emphasis on **international scientific visibility and impact**. The SAR itself identifies the ambition to increase high-level publishing in internationally recognised outlets, ideally **Q1 journals**, and to strengthen the position of **Security Spectrum** within international indexing systems. The panel agrees that this is an important next step in strengthening the scientific profile of RDC activities alongside the already strong applied and societal impact.

- At the same time, the panel notes that research activities are often carried out alongside substantial teaching and administrative responsibilities, which may limit the time available for sustained research engagement. The reliance on project-based funding and the absence of clearly defined protected time for research create structural constraints that can affect research productivity and long-term planning.
- A further area for development concerns the **more systematic follow-up of the long-term use and downstream effects of RDC results**. While the Academy already demonstrates convincing examples of policy support, dissemination and practical use, a more structured model for tracing uptake, implementation and long-term societal impact would further strengthen the evidence base for demonstrating national and international relevance.

The panel concludes that EASS demonstrates **clear and growing effectiveness in RDC activities**, with outputs that are substantial in volume, clearly aligned with institutional goals, and already producing visible impact in policy, practice, education and public discourse. The institution's specific mission and field profile justify a strong emphasis on applied impact, and in this respect the Academy performs strongly.

Conclusion

Based on the evidence reviewed and the analysis conducted, the panel concludes that **the quality criterion is fulfilled**.

The volume and quality of EASS's RDC outputs are aligned with the institution's goals and confirm the growing sustainability of its research and development activities. The Academy has developed a credible and increasingly effective applied research profile in internal security, supported by a rising volume of publications, policy-oriented analyses, educational outputs and broad dissemination activities.

The panel notes particularly positively the clear societal relevance of the Academy's RDC activities. Research results are used in policy development, professional practice, training and public communication, and the Academy has established effective channels to ensure that its outputs reach both decision-makers and broader professional audiences. The close link between RDC, teaching and the needs of the internal security sector is a major strength.

At the same time, further strengthening of international scientific visibility and more systematic follow-up of the longer-term use and impact of research results would enhance the Academy's position further. These challenges do not undermine the overall positive assessment. The panel therefore concludes that the criterion is fulfilled.

Strengths

- A major strength is the Academy's **strong applied research profile**, with RDC activities directly supporting policymaking, professional practice, strategic forecasting and innovation in the internal security sector.
- The Academy demonstrates a **substantial and diversified body of RDC outputs**, including high-level scientific publications, commissioned studies, reports, textbooks, educational publications and popular science outputs.
- The institutional publication platforms, especially **Security Spectrum** and **Turvalisuskompas**, are a clear strength, as they support both international and domestic dissemination of research results and strengthen the practical uptake of research.
- Another strength is the Academy's **close cooperation with government agencies, public institutions and international networks**, which enhances the applicability and societal impact of research.
- The Academy demonstrates **effective knowledge transfer to teaching and professional training, with RDC results used in curricula, textbooks and sectoral competence development**. While this integration is well established in several areas, further

strengthening of systematic links between research and teaching would enhance consistency across the institution.

Areas of concern and recommendations

- **The monitoring of societal impact is not yet sufficiently systematic, and there is limited evidence of how research results are used in policymaking, professional practice and training activities.** The EASS should develop more robust mechanisms for monitoring societal impact, including a systematic assessment of the use and long-term effects of research outputs.
- **International research participation is present but remains limited in scale and leadership roles, with relatively low involvement in coordinated or lead-partner positions.** The EASS should expand international research participation and strengthen leadership capacity through more active engagement in international programmes, networks and collaborative projects.
- **Research productivity is affected by structural constraints related to workload and reliance on project-based funding.** The EASS should address these constraints by introducing more stable institutional support mechanisms and ensuring clearer allocation of protected time for research activities.

Opportunities for further improvement

- **Further enhance interdisciplinary research cooperation,** ensuring closer collaboration across academic units and with external partners to address complex and cross-sectoral security challenges more effectively.
- **Strengthen the international visibility of research outputs,** with continued efforts to secure the inclusion of *Security Spectrum* in recognised international indexing databases and to increase publication in internationally recognised peer-reviewed journals.
- **Systematise the dissemination of conference and expert-event outputs,** ensuring the regular publication of proceedings, analytical reports and policy briefs to enhance the visibility and practical impact of research results.
- **Strengthen institutional support for science communication and knowledge transfer,** including targeted guidance and tools for effectively communicating research findings to policymakers, practitioners and the wider public.

9. Support System for RDC and Career Support for Early-career Researchers

Quality criterion

The higher education institution systematically develops the organisation of RDC activities and support services, providing its members with opportunities to develop their RDC competencies and support for making career choices.

Evidence and analysis

List of evidence used by the Panel in its analysis: The panel's analysis is based on the **EASS SAR**, strategic and internal regulatory documentation, intranet support materials, human resources and career development documents, site visit observations, and interviews with management, research staff and early-career academic personnel.

- The panel finds that the Academy has established a **solid, increasingly structured and strategically aligned support system for research, development and creative (RDC) activities**, with particular attention to applied research and the development of early-career researchers. The support framework is clearly aligned with the institution's mission and its strategic objective of strengthening the research and development ecosystem in the field of internal security, creating favourable conditions for the sustainable development of research capacity.
- A clear institutional strength is the availability of **modern research infrastructure**, including laboratories, testing environments, simulation facilities and training grounds, which provide a strong basis for conducting applied research, piloting innovative solutions and supporting evidence-based development in the internal security sector. These resources significantly strengthen both the **quality and practical relevance** of RDC activities and are well aligned with the Academy's applied research profile.
- The panel notes particularly positively the establishment, since **2025**, of a **dedicated research support unit**, which represents an important step in the institutionalisation and professionalisation of RDC support services. This unit provides structured assistance in **project preparation, identification of funding opportunities, use of research information systems, reporting requirements and research communication**.
- **Centralised support** has improved access to information, reduced the administrative burden on researchers and strengthened the institution's capacity to prepare more competitive national and international project applications.
- The availability of the **Science Portal** on the intranet further strengthens the systematic nature of research support. The portal functions as a central information platform offering guidelines, planning tools, procedural information and support materials, thereby improving transparency and facilitating more efficient navigation of research processes, particularly for less experienced researchers and doctoral candidates.
- Researcher development is further supported through **regular training and capacity-building activities**, including workshops on research communication, academic ethics, project management, proposal writing and dedicated writing camps. The panel considers these initiatives particularly valuable for **early-career researchers and doctoral candidates**, as they contribute directly to the development of research competences, publication capacity and project readiness. Feedback gathered during interviews confirms that these support measures are positively perceived by staff and are considered practically useful.
- The development of research competences and career pathways is supported through multiple institutional mechanisms. Research responsibilities are **formally embedded in employee contracts**, reinforcing a research-oriented institutional culture and ensuring that RDC forms an explicit part of academic duties. Staff are provided with regular opportunities for professional development, while **flexible work arrangements** support engagement in

doctoral studies alongside teaching and professional responsibilities. Research coordinators and designated support staff contribute to **career planning, attestation preparation and long-term professional progression**.

- The panel also notes positively that **student involvement in research is actively encouraged** through curriculum-based activities, thematic events, research-related extracurricular initiatives and networking opportunities with practitioners and researchers. These arrangements contribute positively to the development of a future research pipeline and strengthen the transition from studies to research engagement.
- Further support for career development and research visibility is provided through **access to library databases, financial support for participation in international conferences, and opportunities to present research findings at institutional and external events, colloquia and expert forums**.
- The panel also notes positively the existence of **scholarships and incentives aimed at strengthening the future research pipeline**, encouraging students and graduates to remain engaged in internal security studies and research-related activities.
- The panel identifies several areas where further systematisation would strengthen the overall coherence of career support. The **absence of a fully formalised mentoring framework** remains an important challenge. While effective informal support mechanisms exist, the panel considers that a structured mentoring system for early-career researchers and doctoral candidates would significantly strengthen career development, research quality and staff retention.
- A further challenge concerns the need for a **clearer and more explicit student-to-researcher pathway**. The Academy would benefit from a more structured progression model that supports talented students in moving from degree studies into doctoral studies and subsequently into research careers within the institution.
- The panel also notes that **support for doctoral students and early-career researchers is not yet fully formalised at institutional level**. While flexible arrangements, access to training and informal mentoring opportunities are available, the institution does not operate its own doctoral programmes, and supervision arrangements rely primarily on external university partnerships. In addition, there is limited evidence of institution-wide supervision standards, formal monitoring mechanisms or systematic feedback collection on supervision quality. This constrains the institution's ability to ensure consistency and continuous improvement in doctoral and early-career research support.
- The panel considers that the **assessment of the effectiveness of research support services should become more systematic**, particularly about the newly established research support unit. Regular evaluation through measurable indicators, staff satisfaction data and evidence of outcomes such as successful applications, publications and career progression would further strengthen institutional quality assurance in this area.

The panel concludes that the organisational arrangements for RDC support and career development are **well developed, strategically aligned and increasingly professionalised**, providing meaningful support for researchers at different career stages and contributing positively to the long-term sustainability of institutional research capacity.

Conclusion

Based on the analysis, the panel concludes that **the quality criterion is substantially fulfilled**.

The institution demonstrates a coherent, well-structured and progressively developing approach to the organisation and support of RDC activities, supported by strong applied research infrastructure, improved centralised support services and a positive institutional culture towards research and professional development. The establishment of the dedicated research support unit, the development of targeted training activities and the availability of modern research

environments provide a solid basis for strengthening RDC competences and supporting early-career researchers.

At the same time, the panel notes that further development is needed in relation to the **formalisation of mentoring and supervision arrangements, the creation of clearer research career pathways, and the systematic evaluation of support measures and knowledge transfer mechanisms**. Addressing these aspects would further strengthen the long-term sustainability and effectiveness of the RDC support system.

Strengths

- **Research responsibilities are institutionally embedded**, with RDC activities formally included in employee contracts, thereby strengthening a research-oriented academic culture and clearly integrating research into core professional duties.
- **Student engagement in research is recognised as a strategic priority**, with the Academy actively promoting participation in applied analytical and research activities through curriculum components and practice-oriented study modules.
- **Innovative initiatives stimulate research interest and professional networking**, as activities such as the *Inspirational Evening* series and the *Science Festival* create valuable opportunities for interaction with recognised experts and encourage research-oriented career pathways.
- **Structured support and development opportunities for early-career researchers are in place**, including dedicated support services, targeted training programmes, writing workshops and participation in international initiatives such as the SPARK Erasmus+ programme.
- **Library and information resources effectively support research activities**, ensuring access to relevant academic databases, research tools and timely dissemination of information through internal communication channels.
- **A positive institutional climate supports research development**, as staff feedback confirms strong motivation to contribute to the Academy's RDC agenda and recognises the significant improvement of support structures in recent years.

Areas of concern and recommendations

- **The absence of a structured pathway for reintegrating doctoral graduates limits the strengthening of internal research capacity**. Create an attractive return pathway for doctoral graduates, through targeted measures that encourage staff and graduates who complete doctoral studies externally to return to the Academy as researchers and academic staff.
- **The transition from training activities to active participation in funded research projects is not yet sufficiently supported**. Support progression from training to funded research activity, enabling early-career researchers to move from competence-building activities into project participation, proposal development and international research cooperation.
- **Monitoring of research support effectiveness is not yet sufficiently systematic or evidence-based**. Improve the monitoring of research support effectiveness, using clear indicators such as project application rates, funding success, participation in RDC activities and researcher satisfaction.
- **The visibility and recognition of research outputs remain limited at institutional and external stakeholder levels**. Enhance the visibility and recognition of research achievements, ensuring stronger internal recognition and more active promotion of research outputs among relevant ministries, partner institutions and external stakeholders.

Opportunities for further improvement

- **Establish a structured mentoring system for early-career researchers**, with a formal framework that clearly defines mentoring roles, development objectives and progression milestones for doctoral candidates and junior researchers.
- **Develop clear and visible student-to-researcher pathways**, including structured opportunities for participation in research groups, assistantships, internships, student conferences and publication activities.
- **Strengthen the transition from studies to research careers**, using master’s programmes more systematically to identify research potential and create stronger links between degree studies, research projects and doctoral pathways.
- The panel recommends continuing and strengthening support for staff undertaking doctoral studies, including **adequate workload arrangements, mentoring and institutional incentives**, to further increase research capacity and academic sustainability.

SUMMARY OF THE ASSESSMENT AREA: RESEARCH, DEVELOPMENT AND/OR OTHER CREATIVE ACTIVITY

ASSESSMENTS BY QUALITY CRITERIA

	Quality criterion is fulfilled	Quality criterion is substantially fulfilled	Quality criterion is partially fulfilled	Quality criterion is not fulfilled	Worthy of recognition
Setting of the goals and quality management in RDC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Effectiveness of RDC and its impact on society	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Support system for RDC and career support for early-career researchers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Conclusion

Based on the analysis of the three criteria within this assessment area, the panel concludes that **the requirements of the assessment area are fulfilled**.

EASS has developed a **clear, strategically aligned and increasingly well-structured RDC system** that is closely connected to its institutional mission, the needs of the internal security sector and broader societal expectations. Research and development activities are increasingly supported by defined quality criteria, stronger governance arrangements, growing research capacity and a more systematic support framework. The panel notes positively the clear applied research profile of the Academy, the strong practical and policy relevance of its outputs, and the visible societal impact of RDC activities in the fields of internal security, crisis resilience and public-sector decision-making.

The panel also finds that the institution has made **substantial progress in strengthening the sustainability and effectiveness of its RDC activities**. This is evidenced by the growing volume of publications and applied studies, the increasing use of RDC results in teaching, policy and professional practice, the establishment of dedicated research structures and support services, and the development of more structured monitoring and quality management processes. The

Academy's journals, analytical reports, educational outputs and expert contributions further support the dissemination and societal visibility of research results.

The panel identified several areas that would benefit from further development: *a stronger international scientific profile, more systematic monitoring of the long-term societal impact of research, clearer thematic concentration of RDC priorities, more formalised mentoring and supervision arrangements for early-career researchers, and more structured research career pathways.* The EASS would also benefit from stronger support for science communication, wider international research participation and more stable conditions for combining research with teaching and other duties.

The above-mentioned challenges do not amount to partial fulfilment and do not undermine the overall positive assessment of the area. The panel therefore concludes that EASS **meets the requirements of the assessment area**, while also having clear potential to further strengthen its national and international research profile in the coming years.