

JOINT OPINION BY THE EXPERT GROUP ON THE RE-ASSESSMENT OF A STUDY
PROGRAMME

Internal security and civil protection

**JOINT SECOND CYCLE (ACADEMIC MASTER'S) STUDY
PROGRAMME "STRATEGIC BORDER MANAGEMENT"
(code 45861)**

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Summary of the Re-Assessment of the Study Programme

The joint second-cycle (academic master's) study programme "Strategic Border Management", code 45861 (joint second-cycle SP "Strategic Border Management") is implemented by Riga Technical University (RTU) in RTU Rezekne Academy which is a strategic education and research centre for both the Latgale region and Latvia as a whole, and its position has been significantly strengthened following its integration into RTU. This consolidation has brought additional capacity for research and infrastructure development, while allowing students to obtain a highly reputed RTU diploma and ensuring a stable institutional framework for the implementation of international joint study programmes. In this context, the RTU Rezekne Academy plays a particularly critical role in supporting the security of Latvia's eastern border and, by extension, the security of the European Union as a whole by educating highly qualified internal security professionals. The on-site visit clearly confirmed this role: national authorities, institutional leadership and joint study programme stakeholders consistently emphasised the importance of RTU Rezekne Academy as a regional and national hub for border security-related higher education and training.

The joint second-cycle (academic master's) study programme "Strategic Border Management", code 45861 (joint second-cycle SP "Strategic Border Management"), is a unique European initiative, implemented in cooperation with Frontex and a consortium of higher education institutions from five countries: RTU Rezekne Academy (Latvia), Mikolas Romeris University (Lithuania), Dutch Defence Academy (Netherlands), University of Salamanca (Spain) and Estonian Academy of Security Sciences (Estonia). Its core strength lies in the combination of academic excellence and high-level professional experience: around 70% of the teaching staff hold doctoral degrees, while the remaining share consists of senior practitioners, including brigadier generals and experts from EU agencies. The joint study programme is directly aligned with the concept of European Integrated Border Management, emphasising interoperability, harmonised professional standards, and the protection of fundamental rights, and equipping graduates with strategic-level competences in high demand, as reflected in a graduate employment rate of 90–95%. During the on-site discussions, representatives of employers and international partners stressed that graduates of this joint study programme are already making a tangible contribution to national and EU-level border management.

The expert group notes with appreciation that no substantial weaknesses were identified in the academic design or delivery of the joint study programme, and that its governance and quality assurance arrangements are fully in line with European standards for joint study programmes. The site visit provided strong evidence of close collaboration at both national and international levels: institutional leadership, academic staff, students, alumni and employers demonstrated a shared ownership of the joint study programme and a clear commitment to its further development. The main long-term development need does not concern academic quality but rather the establishment of a more stable and predictable funding model that would gradually reduce dependence on external grants and ensure sustainable cohort sizes. Such a model would make it possible to increase the volume of on-site teaching, which students and employers consistently value for its indispensable contribution to direct interaction, peer learning and the exchange of operational experience.

Overall, the expert group was deeply impressed by the level and impact of the joint study programme and by the professionalism and motivation of all stakeholders met during the on-site visit. The joint study programme offers an excellent platform not only for advanced academic study, but also for building a lifelong professional network among border

management leaders across the EU and Schengen-associated countries. In the current internal security context, characterised by hybrid threats and complex cross-border challenges, such a transnational community of trust and cooperation is of critical importance and constitutes an essential contribution to the security of Europe's external borders.

I. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS RECEIVED DURING THE PREVIOUS ASSESSMENT PROCEDURES

Criterion:

In the previous evaluation of the study field the recommendations made by the expert group during the evaluation of the study field and the recommendations made by the Study Quality Commission (if applicable) that are directly relevant to the study programme under evaluation are / have not been fully or partially implemented. The contribution of the higher education institution / college to the analysis of recommendations and their application to the specifics of the study programme is evident.

Analysis

The joint second-cycle SP “Strategic Border Management” was licensed on May 25, 2015, and at that time received two recommendations from experts.

1. Recommendation: “Before commencing the implementation of the joint master's study programme “Strategic Border Management”, it would be advisable for Rezekne Academy of Technologies (title before merger with RTU) to place general information about this programme and references to binding internet resources FRONTEX, partner academies, etc.) on its website.”

Implemented activities: According to the SAR (Annex “Report on the implementation of the recommendations”) and the site visit, this recommendation has been fulfilled, and information about the study programme is now publicly available on the RTU website (Report on the implementation of the recommendations, available at <https://www.rtu.lv/lv/studijas/visas-studiju-programmas/atvert/JMV?department=OR000&type=A>).

2. Recommendation: “Taking into account that this study programme is an international level programme and with a limited number of students from Latvia to be admitted (the programme is intended only for middle and higher level managers of the State Border Guard), I would recommend that Rezekne Academy of Technologies in cooperation with the Ministry of the Interior of Latvia evaluate the possibility of creating a national master's level study programme for the leading officials of Latvian law enforcement institutions in the perspective.”

Implemented activities: Based on the SAR (Annex “Report on the implementation of the recommendations”) and information gathered during the site visit, the appropriate follow-up actions have been taken. First, an analysis of the feasibility of establishing a new study programme was conducted, including a meeting with representatives of the Ministry of the Interior and the State Border Guard to discuss the idea, an assessment of academic staff capacity, and an analysis of opportunities to attract potential students. As a concrete outcome, since 2021, an accredited academic master’s study programme “Management Science” has been offered, providing a progression route for graduates of the bachelor’s study programme “Border Guarding”; this study programme is completed annually by 3–5 graduates (SAR Annex: Report on the implementation of the recommendations).

Conclusions on this set of criteria, by specifying strengths and weaknesses

The expert group concludes that both recommendations from the 2015 licensing of the joint second-cycle academic master's study programme "Strategic Border Management" have been adequately addressed. General information about the study programme and relevant external links is now publicly available on the RTU website, and the institution, in cooperation with stakeholders, has analysed the feasibility of a national master's study programme, resulting in the launch of the accredited academic master's study programme "Management Science" as a progression route for "Border Guarding" graduates.

Strengths:

1. RTU Rezekne Academy has good experience in creating master's study programmes, so there is an opportunity, together with other departments of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (such as firefighters, prison authorities, state police) to jointly create a Master's study programme of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, which will train all senior managers of structural units of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

Weaknesses: No significant weaknesses found.

II. ASSESSMENT OF THE STUDY PROGRAMME "Strategic Border Management"

2.1. Indicators Describing the Study Programme

Criteria:

- 2.1.1. Compliance of the study programme with the study field.
- 2.1.2. The title, code, degree to be obtained, professional qualification or degree and professional qualification of the study programme, aims, objectives, learning outcomes, which are compliant with the respective LQF/EQF level, and admission requirements are interrelated. The duration and scope of the study programme implementation (including different study programme implementation options), as well as the implementation language, are reasonable and justified.
- 2.1.3. The corrections made to the study programme's parameters within the assessment of the study field are analyzed, justified and would be supported.
- 2.1.4. Economic and / or social justification of the study programme, dynamics of the number of students and employment indicators of the graduates of the study programme.
- 2.1.5. The development and implementation of the joint study programme is justified and ensures a quality study process (if applicable).

Analysis

2.1.1 According to the SAR (p. 3), the Joint Second-Cycle SP "Strategic Border Management" (code 45861) is implemented within the study field "Internal Security and Civil Protection" at RTU Rezekne Academy. The SAR notes that, by decision of the Study Quality Commission (19.03.2025), the study programme has been included in the RTU study field "Internal Security and Civil Protection".

The study programme's focus - strategic border management, EU internal security, risk/threat management, inter-institutional cooperation, fundamental rights and ethics is presented as fully consistent with the study field and its development priorities.

The study programme is compliant with the study field and is clearly positioned within the "Internal Security and Civil Protection" field in terms of content and intended competences.

During the site visit, stakeholders consistently positioned the joint second-cycle SP "Strategic Border Management" as a study programme aimed at developing strategic-level competence for experienced professionals aiming for high-level positions, with a clear link to EU-level integrated border management needs.

2.1.2 According to the SAR (p. 3), the study programme is a joint second-cycle (academic master's) study programme implemented in English, with a volume of 90 CP, duration of 1 year and 6 months, a full-time format, and implementation place at RTU Rēzekne Academy.

The study programme is implemented at RTU Rēzekne Academy (Latvia) as the national implementation place, and in the joint partner institutions within the consortium through module-based mobility and joint delivery (SAR, p. 15; site visit). The implementation places include:

- Latvia - RTU Rēzekne Academy (Rēzekne);
- Lithuania - Mykolas Romeris University (MRU);
- Estonia - Estonian Academy of Security Sciences (EASS);
Netherlands - Netherlands Defence Academy / Faculty of Military Sciences (NLDA-FMS);
- Spain - University of Salamanca (USAL);
- Poland - Frontex (Warsaw) for consortium-level intake/orientation events and coordination (site visit);
- Remote/online delivery (part of the modules is delivered online in the joint format) (SAR, p. 11; site visit).

The Admission requirements are explicitly aligned with the target group of high-level experienced professionals. Eligibility is limited to EU/Schengen citizens serving as officers, nominated by their national authorities or by Frontex. (SAR, pp. 8-9; Annex P05). Candidates must possess a first-cycle education of at least 180 ECTS in a relevant field (e.g., law, security, or administration) and demonstrate at least 3 years of management or command experience in operational border guard work (SAR, p. 9; Annex P05). Additionally, English proficiency at the B2 level and a valid EU RESTRICTED security clearance are mandatory to engage with the study programme's sensitive strategic content (SAR, p. 9; Annex P05).

These admission requirements are further justified by a specific national legal framework. According to the Law on Implementation of the Joint Master's Study Programme 'Strategic Border Management' (and its amendments), a Master's degree is awarded upon the completion of this 90 ECTS study programme, provided the student's total combined educational volume of first-cycle (Bachelor's) and second-cycle (Master's) studies reaches at least 270 ECTS (SAR Annex P07-1). This validates the requirement of a 180 ECTS first-cycle degree as sufficient for entry, resulting in a total educational duration of 4.5 years, which is legally recognised as appropriate for this specific strategic-level qualification in Latvia (SAR, p. 13; Annex P07-1).

The requirement for at least three years of management or command experience in operational border guarding is a statutory necessity under the same law, ensuring that the academic EQF Level 7 outcomes are integrated with high-level professional expertise (SAR, p. 13, Annex P07-1). This synergy is reinforced by mandatory recommendations from national authorities or Frontex, which ensure that the student cohort comprises pre-selected, high-potential leaders for the European Border and Coast Guard (SAR, pp. 8, 14; Annex P05). The inclusion of a mandatory security clearance (EU RESTRICTED) further aligns the admission process with the sensitive operational realities of strategic border management (SAR Annex P05; Annex P01).

The joint study programme's aims and objectives are fully aligned with the LQF/EQF level 7 descriptors, emphasising strategic planning, leadership, risk-analysis-driven decision-making, and inter-institutional cooperation, as well as research competence culminating in the master's thesis (SAR, pp. 8-11). This academic progression is designed to develop research competence that culminates in the 30-ECTS Master's Thesis, where students apply theoretical frameworks to solve complex, real-life problems within the border security sector (SAR, pp 11, 22-23; Annex P07; Annex P09).

The study programme structure comprises 10 modules (60 CP) and a final thesis (30 CP) (SAR, p. 11; Annex P07) and is implemented in a full-time blended/hybrid mode combining on-site intensive sessions and remote studies (SAR, p. 11; site visit). It was noted during the site visit that, following a reorganisation after the COVID-19 pandemic, the delivery consists of 5 onsite intensive modules hosted in different partner countries and 5 online modules (Modules 2, 3, 4, 7, and 8) (SAR, pp. 10-11, 38; Annex P16). Online studies account for 35 ECTS (39% of the total volume), a format justified by the needs of working professionals (SAR, p. 10). During the site visit, leadership noted that while time-zone coordination is a challenge for an international cohort, quality is maintained through strict attendance rules, including a 20% limit on absences from onsite classes.

Finally, the expert group identified an inconsistency in how the degree to be obtained is designated across the documentation, which may cause confusion for stakeholders. The consortium agreement and the diploma supplement model consistently refer to the degree as "European Joint Master's in Strategic Border Management", which is also the formulation used in the SAR parameter table (SAR p. 3), whereas the narrative sections of the SAR (e.g. pp. 8) employ the wording "Master's Degree in Strategic Border Management"; in the Latvian national context, the study plan and legal-compliance documents describe it as a master's degree in strategic border management within the study field "Internal Security and Civil Protection" (SAR, pp. 3, 8; Annex P01; Annex P05). During the on-site visit, it was further clarified that, since the joint study programme is coordinated in accordance with Lithuanian legislation, the degree may be referred to nationally as "Master of Public Security", while the partners' agreement specifies "European Joint Master's in Strategic Border Management" as the title appearing on the joint diploma. In the expert group's view, the correct and official designation to be used consistently across all study programme documents is "European Joint Master's in Strategic Border Management", as defined in the formal consortium agreement and applied to the joint diploma awarded to graduates.

Overall, the study programme's title, target group, admission requirements, learning outcomes and structure appear coherent and aligned with a Master's-level (EQF/LQF 7) profile. The implementation language (English) and blended delivery model are reasonable and well-justified for the targeted professional audience. The wording of the degree to be obtained should be harmonised across the official issuing documents to avoid ambiguity.

2.1.3 The Joint Second-Cycle SP “Strategic Border Management” (code 45861) has undergone several significant structural and regulatory adjustments since its previous accreditation, all of which are comprehensively analysed and justified. The primary correction stems from the institutional reorganisation of the Rezekne Academy of Technologies and its subsequent integration into Riga Technical University as RTU Rezekne Academy. This transition facilitated the programme’s formal inclusion into the RTU study field “Internal Security and Civil Protection” by the decision of the Study Quality Commission on March 19, 2025, terminology change from “second level” to “second cycle” due to legislative amendments, and a credit point system transition resulting in volume change from 60 CP to 90 CP (SAR, pp. 3-4).

A critical parameter correction involves the transition of the study programme’s volume from 60 Latvian credit points (CP) to 90 ECTS (SAR, p. 4). As detailed in Annex P07-1, this change is a direct consequence of the 15.09.2022 amendments to the Law on Higher Education Institutions (in force as of 11.10.2022) (Annex P07-1, p. 2). The formal statutory interpretation confirms that 60 CP in the previous national system corresponds precisely to 90 ECTS credits, ensuring that the study programme’s scope remains consistent with European standards while fulfilling national requirements (Annex P07-1).

During the site visit, the institution emphasised that while the consolidation process presented administrative and adaptation challenges, it has been substantively beneficial. The integration into RTU has provided enhanced access to resources and systems and strengthened the study programme’s institutional profile. Stakeholders specifically highlighted the added value of the RTU diploma for graduates as a significant positive outcome of these corrections.

It could be concluded that the corrections made to the study programme’s parameters are clearly identified, legally grounded, and substantively justified by regulatory shifts and institutional reorganisation.

2.1.4 The SAR provides a social and economic justification by linking the study programme to EU border security needs, modernisation through data-driven risk analysis and digital solutions, and the development of strategic leadership competence (SAR, p. 12). The SAR describes graduate profiles and typical employment positions in national and EU-level structures (SAR, p. 12). The SAR also reports a graduate employment indicator of over 90–95% employed within one year after graduation (SAR, p. 12).

The SAR points to Annex P06 for statistics (SAR, p. 14). Annex P06 shows cohort dynamics: 22 students (2015–2017), 24 (2017–2019), 34 (2019–2021) with graduates closely matching intake and low drop-out; a period with no admissions (2021/2022–2023/2024); and renewed intakes 25 (Spring 2024/2025) and 23 (Winter 2025/2026) (Annex P06, p. 1–2).

Overall, the joint study programme has a clear EU/public-sector justification (SAR, p. 12) and presents transparent student cohort dynamics (SAR, p. 14; Annex P06), as well as strong graduate employment outcomes (SAR, p. 12).

2.1.5 According to the SAR (pp. 14–16), the joint second-cycle SP “Strategic Border Management” is justified by EU-level needs and implemented through a consortium model with partner universities (MRU, NLDA-FMS, USAL, EASS, RTU Rezekne Academy). All partners operate within a common Frontex-coordinated academic network, which supports a shared quality-assurance framework, a common learning-outcome structure, and a uniform site logic for the joint study programme.

The joint study programme is implemented modularly in a combined way (site face-to-face and e-studies) over a 1.5-year cycle (SAR, p. 15). Annex P07-1 additionally confirms the joint study programme's conformity with the specific Latvian law on the implementation of the joint master's study programme, including the requirement of at least 3 years of operational border-guarding experience and the EQF level 7 positioning (SAR Annex P07-1).

According to the consortium arrangements, the roles of partners in implementing the joint study programme are distributed as follows: MRU acts as the consortium coordinator and ensures overall coordination of the study programme's organisation and joint processes, while the partner institutions (RTU Rezekne Academy, EASS, NLDA-FMS and USAL) contribute through their designated module responsibilities and staff provision (SAR Annex P05; Annex P07-2). During each module, each partner higher education institution is responsible for delivering specific modules within the joint curriculum, providing the teaching staff, and ensuring module-level organisation and assessment in line with the consortium-agreed learning outcomes and quality requirements. Joint governance and quality assurance are ensured through consortium-level bodies and procedures (including joint decision-making and common assessment principles), while practical student support and communication are, as mentioned previously, facilitated through module coordinators, handbooks and intake/orientation arrangements described during the site visit (Annex P05; Annex P07-2).

During the site visit, the joint study programme leadership described the joint implementation process in practice:

- an opening ceremony for each intake (2 days) where participants are introduced to the joint study programme concept, structure and procedures;
- a system of module coordinators and handbooks for informing participants about study organisation and complaint/appeal pathways;
- module-level surveys (lecturer evaluation and module evaluation), which are not mandatory;
- examples of improvements triggered by feedback (e.g., updating outdated learning resources).

Stakeholders also highlighted ongoing ambitions to further enhance the joint implementation, in particular a gradual increase in on-site delivery where feasible, to strengthen mobility, networking and shared learning across partner countries. In discussions with the current cohort of students, meeting participants expressed overall satisfaction with the joint study programme and its international, practice-oriented profile, while suggesting that even more emphasis on self-development and reflective leadership/personal growth dimensions would further enrich the learning experience.

Conclusions on this set of criteria, by specifying strengths and weaknesses

The joint second-cycle SP "Strategic Border Management" is aligned with the study field "Internal Security and Civil Protection", and the study programme content corresponds to the scope and standards of the study field. The title, code, EQF/NQF level, aims, learning outcomes, and admission requirements are generally interrelated and justified, and the study programme is designed for experienced professionals with at least 3 years of management/command experience in operational border guard work and English proficiency at B2 level. The joint study programme parameter corrections have been analysed and justified, including institutional reorganisation and the credit-point conversion from 60 CP to

90 CP under the updated legal/credit framework. The joint study programme has clear EU/public-sector social and economic justification, demonstrates transparent cohort dynamics, and reports strong graduate employment outcomes. The joint consortium model is justified and practically implemented through module-based delivery across partner institutions, coordinated governance and quality assurance mechanisms, and structured student support arrangements; further enhancement is envisioned through increased on-site delivery where feasible and additional emphasis on self-development. The areas for improvement are relatively minor and more technical in nature; for example, the concern about the consistent use of the official degree title.

Strengths:

1. Admission requirements and the target group profile (experienced professionals with operational border guard management/command background) are well aligned with the study programme's strategic aims and Master 's-level learning outcomes;
2. The joint study programme model is well justified and supported by practical organisational mechanisms described during the site visit (opening event, handbooks, module coordinators, feedback-based improvements).

Weaknesses:

1. Degree title is presented in different forms in the documentation and should be harmonised to avoid ambiguity for external stakeholders and students.

2.2. The Content of Studies and Implementation Thereof

Criteria:

2.2.1. The content of the study programme is topical, the content of the study courses / modules is interconnected and complementary, corresponds to the objectives of the programme and ensures the achievement of learning outcomes, as well as meets the needs of the industry, labor market and scientific trends. Complies with the respective LQF/EQF level, state education standard, profession (occupational) standard or professional qualification requirements (if applicable)).

2.2.2. In the case of a master's or doctoral study programme, the awarding of a degree is based on the achievements and findings of the relevant field of science or artistic creation.

2.2.3. The study implementation methods contribute to the achievement of the aims and learning outcomes of the study courses and the study programme. Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment principles are considered.

(In case of a joint study programme, or in case the study programme is implemented in a foreign language or in the form of distance-learning, analyze in detail the methods used for the implementation of such a study programme).

2.2.4. If an internship is foreseen during the study programme, the opportunities and provision of internship offered to students, as well as the organization of work are effective. The tasks of the internship are related to the learning outcomes achievable. The internship complies with the requirements of regulatory enactments.

If the study programme is implemented in a foreign language, provide an assessment of the provision of internship in a foreign language, including for foreign students.

2.2.5. In the case of a doctoral study programme, students have clearly defined promotion (doctoral theses defense) opportunities (if applicable).

2.2.6. The topics of students' final theses are relevant to the field and correspond to the study programme.

Analysis

2.2.1 The content and structure of the joint second-cycle SP “Strategic Border Management” fully comply with the requirements of the LQF/EQF level 7, the “Internal Security and Civil Protection” study field, and the applicable national regulations for second-cycle joint study programmes. (SAR, pp. 8–12, 18–26; Annex P07-2) The joint study programme is organised into ten interlinked modules and a 30-ECTS master’s thesis, together covering strategic planning, EU border policies, leadership and organisational development, fundamental rights and ethics, innovation and technology, risk and threat management, international cooperation and research methodology in border security (SAR, pp. 8–12, 18–26; Annex P08; Annex P10). Within this joint framework, RTU Rezekne Academy is specifically responsible for delivering Module 3: Leadership and Organisational Development in Border Management (SAR, p. 19; Annex P08; Annex P11).

The remaining modules are implemented by the consortium partners according to their specialized fields of competence: EASS is responsible for Modules 1 (Strategy and Planning), 5 (Innovation and Technology), and 7 (Global Context) (SAR, pp. 18, 20; Annex P08); NLDA delivers Modules 2 (Fundamental Rights and Ethics), 6 (Quantitative Research), and 10 (Qualitative Research) (SAR, pp. 19, 20–21; Annex P08); USAL provides Modules 4 (EU Border Policies), 9 (Cooperation), and 10 (Qualitative Research) (SAR, pp. 19, 20–21; Annex P08); and MRU manages Module 8 (Strategic Risk Management), shares responsibility for Module 7, and coordinates the Master's Thesis phase (SAR, p. 20; Annex P08). The master’s thesis is supervised by academic staff from all partner universities, ensuring an integrated and international research approach (SAR, p. 22; Annex P08; Annex P11)

The mapping of joint study programme learning outcomes to module outcomes is systematic and transparent, ensuring constructive alignment between aims, content, teaching-learning methods and assessment at EQF level 7, including higher-order analysis, critical judgement and independent research competences (SAR, pp. 8–12; Annex P10).

From the perspective of topicality, the joint study programme closely follows current EU and international policy and practice in integrated border management, including Frontex’s Sectoral Qualifications Framework, Common Core Curriculum and IBM concept, as well as contemporary challenges such as migration crises, hybrid threats, technological developments in border surveillance and data-driven risk analysis (SAR, pp. 6–7, 18–21; Annex P18). The inclusion of modules on EU border policies and strategies, fundamental rights, ethics and vulnerable groups ensures that the study programme reflects key normative and legal developments at the EU level, while modules on innovation and technology and strategic risk management address emerging technological and security trends (SAR, pp. 18–21, 27–29; Annex P10). The 30-ECTS master’s thesis deepens students’ research skills and links teaching to applied and scientific inquiry, often in cooperation with border guard institutions and EU agencies, thereby supporting knowledge creation and evidence-based practice in the sector (SAR, pp. 21–23, 30–32; Annex P10; Annex P14).

The content of the joint study programme is interconnected and complementary: modules are designed so that strategic, legal, ethical, managerial and technological perspectives build upon each other across the three stages of studies, with explicit cross-referencing of learning

outcomes and progressive development from operational experience to strategic analysis and leadership (SAR, pp. 18–23; Annex P10). This integrated design supports the achievement of study programme-level outcomes in knowledge, skills and competences, including strategic management, cross-border cooperation, communication in multicultural environments and the integration of fundamental rights in all aspects of border management (Annex P05, Part Four; Annex P10). During the site visit, staff and students confirmed that they experience the curriculum as coherent and cumulative: earlier modules provide the conceptual and legal basis, while later modules focus more on strategic leadership, innovation and research, and the thesis allows students to apply this integrated knowledge to complex real-life problems.

Industry and labour-market relevance are ensured through systematic involvement of Frontex and national border guard, police and customs authorities in curriculum development, teaching and master's thesis topics, as well as through regular feedback mechanisms and the role of external examiners with high-level professional expertise (SAR, pp. 12–13, 27–29; Annex P05; Annex P16). The site visit confirmed that graduates are selected and nominated by their national authorities for positions requiring strategic and managerial competencies, and that the joint study programme is perceived as unique and career-critical within the European border-guard community. Alumni and employers provided concrete examples during the site visit of how study results and thesis work (e.g., on risk analysis or integrated border management) have been used in practice at the national and EU levels, which confirms the alignment of content with labour-market needs and professional qualification requirements.

The second-cycle SP “Strategic Border Management” is a unique and much-needed European-level initiative that could serve as a model for similar joint study programmes in other internal-security areas (SAR, pp. 6–7, 18–21; Annex P18). In this context, there are relatively few substantial improvement needs to highlight. In terms of the study field, civil-protection aspects are already well integrated across several modules (for example, in risk and threat management, cooperation and resource management), so the absence of a stand-alone civil-protection module does not, in the expert group's view, require major corrective action; if desired, the civil-protection dimension could be made somewhat more visible in study-programme documents and communication (SAR, pp. 10, 18–23; Annex P10). If any enhancement area is to be mentioned, then, based on the SAR (SAR, pp. 21, 27–29; Annex P10; Annex P14) and confirmed by the site visit discussions, it would be the further strengthening of content on advanced data analytics, emerging surveillance technologies and the pedagogical use of digital tools, in order to keep pace with rapidly evolving technological and scientific trends in border management. Overall, the expert group concludes that the content of the joint study programme is topical, coherent, and very well aligned with labour-market and scientific needs at the European level, with only limited, clearly defined potential areas for further fine-tuning.

2.2.2 The awarding of the master's degree in the second-cycle SP “Strategic Border Management” is firmly grounded in contemporary academic achievements and empirical findings in the social sciences and internal security at LQF/EQF level 7. The joint study programme systematically integrates key European and international research and policy frameworks, including the EU Integrated Border Management (IBM) concept, the Frontex Sectoral Qualifications Framework (SQF), the Common Core Curriculum (CCC) and current EU border and migration law, complemented by up-to-date strategic approaches to risk analysis, leadership and organisational development in security institutions (SAR, pp. 6–7, 18–23; Annex P10; Annex P18). The 30-ECTS master's thesis is central in ensuring that the degree is awarded on the basis of independent research and critical engagement with scientific

literature, policy documents and empirical data: students are required to design and implement appropriate research strategies, including quantitative and mixed-method approaches, to analyse practical management and policy problems in border security and to present and defend their results in a scientifically sound format (SAR, pp. 21–23, 30–32; Annex P10). Academic staff involved in teaching and supervision are research-active, with publications and projects in internal security, border management, EU law and related domains, which anchors the joint study programme in current scientific achievements; links between ongoing staff research and master’s theses are strong, particularly through cooperation with Frontex and national border authorities, enabling students to work on real-life, research-informed topics (SAR, pp. 12–13, 21–23, 30–32; Annex P14; Annex P15; Annex P16).

2.2.3 The study implementation methods in the joint second-cycle SP “Strategic Border Management” are well aligned with the aims and learning outcomes of the study courses and the study programme as a whole, and student-centred learning, teaching and assessment principles are demonstrably applied. The joint study programme is implemented in English in a modular hybrid format, combining intensive face-to-face sessions at different partner institutions with extensive online learning via a shared learning-management system and the Frontex virtual learning environment; this model is particularly suitable for working professionals from EU border authorities and supports both flexibility and continuity of professional practice (SAR, pp. 18–19, 21–23; Annex P05; Annex P10). Teaching and learning methods are explicitly linked to module learning outcomes and study programme competences and include problem-based learning, case studies based on real Frontex and Member State data, simulations and role-play (especially in leadership, cooperation and ethics modules), research-based learning (notably in Modules 6 and 10), reflective practice and international collaborative group work (SAR, pp. 18–21, 21–23; Annex P10).

Student-centred principles are embedded through clear formulation and communication of learning outcomes and assessment criteria, iterative feedback (formative tasks, reflective journals, group presentations), and opportunities for students to relate assignments to their own organisational context and professional experience, thereby co-constructing individual learning pathways within the joint framework (SAR, pp. 18–23; Annex P05; Annex P10). The study programme utilises a shared online platform and virtual collaboration tools to support flexibility and accommodate its international student body (SAR, p. 29). To foster a common European professional culture, students are formally required to complete modules in at least two different partner countries; in practice, this mobility is already embedded in the joint study programme design, as module locations are predefined and students do not choose the host countries themselves (SAR, pp. 11, 23). Nevertheless, since this cross-country mobility is already guaranteed by the existing design, the added value of formulating it as a separate formal requirement remains somewhat unclear. At the same time, this is primarily a formal issue: in substantive terms, the underlying idea is highly valued and clearly contributes to achieving the intended learning outcomes of the joint study programme. During the site visit, the students strongly emphasised that on-site mobility is crucial for building inter-institutional trust, developing a shared European professional identity, and creating long-term professional networks, and that it offers benefits that go beyond the immediate study-programme outcomes.

Assessment strategies are varied and aligned with higher-order learning outcomes at EQF level 7, including analytical essays, policy briefs, case-study reports, group projects, simulations, research proposals and the master’s thesis; consortium-level assessment regulations emphasise validity, fairness, transparency and the use of common criteria and external examiners, in line with the ESG and the European Approach for Joint Programmes

(SAR, pp. 21–23; Annex P05; Annex P10). Students confirmed during the site visit that assessment expectations are clearly explained in advance and that feedback is generally timely and constructive, though in some online modules, they would welcome even more individual feedback on complex assignments. In the joint and remote-learning context, the expert group notes as particular strengths the clearly defined division of responsibilities between partners, the single e-learning platform operated by the coordinating institution, coordinated module descriptors and independent-learning plans, and regular collection of student feedback at module and study programme level, which has led, for example, to updating teaching materials and adjusting the balance between synchronous and asynchronous activities (SAR, pp. 21–23, 27–29; Annex P10). At the same time, the expert group encourages further enhancement of digital and simulation-based methods (e.g. more advanced use of virtual scenarios, data-driven exercises and online collaborative tools) and continued attention to workload balance in the intensive modular format, so that all student groups can fully benefit from the student-centred, practice-oriented design.

2.2.4 The joint second-cycle SP “Strategic Border Management” is designed for already employed mid- and senior-level officials in border, police, customs and related services, and therefore does not include a separate formal internship component in the sense of a supervised placement required for initial professional qualification (SAR, pp. 3–4, 18–19). Instead, the joint study programme systematically builds on students’ ongoing professional work and integrates work-based tasks, case studies and research projects that are directly linked to the learning outcomes at the study programme and module level, thus functionally replacing a traditional internship with structured, practice-oriented learning activities (SAR, pp. 18–23; Annex P10). Many assignments explicitly require students to analyse their own organisations, operational practices and strategic challenges, which ensures that the “practical” component is strongly connected to real-life border management and to the intended learning outcomes in strategy, leadership, cooperation and risk management (SAR, pp. 18–23; Annex P10).

From the perspective of regulatory compliance, this model is compatible with the Latvian framework for second-cycle academic study programmes, where a dedicated internship is not mandatory and where the study programme is clearly positioned as a research-based master’s degree for experienced professionals, rather than as an initial professional training study programme (SAR, pp. 3–4; Annex P07-2). The consortium agreement and national licences or accreditation decisions do not impose additional internship obligations beyond the integration of professional practice into teaching, which is ensured through the target group (serving officers) and the practice-based design of study courses or modules (SAR, Annex P05; Annex P18). As the joint study programme is implemented entirely in English, all taught modules, assessments and master’s theses are carried out in English, and practice-related tasks linked to students’ employment are also formulated, supported and evaluated in English; this applies equally to foreign students, who complete their analytical and research tasks in English within their respective national services (SAR, pp. 3–4, 18–19; Annex P05). On this basis, the expert group considers that, although there is no separate internship in the strict sense, the organisation and quality of work-based learning and practice-related tasks are effective, clearly related to the intended learning outcomes, and compliant with the applicable regulatory requirements for an academic master’s study programme in a foreign language for experienced professionals.

2.2.5 Not applicable.

2.2.6 The joint study programme ensures a robust development of research skills through a structured sequence of modules that deliberately bridge academic theory and operational practice. This begins with Module 6 (held by NLDA), which focuses on quantitative research

methods, including data validation, questionnaire design and the use of empirical data from border-management contexts (SAR Annex P09: 10_RES-1.pdf). This is subsequently complemented by Module 10 (held by NLDA), the capstone module, which shifts the emphasis to qualitative inquiry, scientific writing, and the holistic integration of previous learning outcomes, such as leadership, innovation, and fundamental rights (SAR, pp. 14-15; 22-23). A key feature here is a five-day structured research visit in Module 10, during which students conduct fieldwork at a partner border-guarding institution, collect qualitative data and observe operational practices first-hand (SAR, Annex P09: 10_RES-1.pdf).

This methodological progression culminates in the 30-ECTS master's thesis (by all partners), which typically addresses high-level strategic themes such as the integration of fundamental-rights safeguards in joint operations, strategic risk and threat analysis, or organisational change in multi-agency environments (SAR, pp. 22-23). An illustrative example is the thesis "EU Border Security - the Drivers and Barriers of Border Guarding Authorities' Motivation in Technological Innovation: Case of Latvia", which examines innovation dynamics in a national border-guard service (SAR, Annex P01, p. 4 | 17). During the on-site visit, employers and alumni highlighted that recommendations and models developed in such theses have been taken up in practice, for instance by informing risk-analysis procedures, updating operational guidelines or supporting the introduction of new technological solutions in national services and EU-level activities, thereby demonstrating a clear feedback loop from research to practice.

Conclusions on this set of criteria, by specifying strengths and weaknesses

The expert group concludes that criteria 2.2.1–2.2.6 are fully met and, in some aspects, exceeded. The joint second-cycle SP "Strategic Border Management" has a coherent, topical and research-based curriculum at EQF level 7, with ten interlinked modules and a substantial master's thesis that together cover all key dimensions of strategic border management and are clearly aligned with labour-market and scientific needs.

Teaching, learning and assessment methods are student-centred and well-suited to experienced professionals, combining a modular hybrid format, active learning and robust consortium-level assessment arrangements. Work-based learning effectively replaces a formal internship, and research-methods training leads to theses whose results are demonstrably used in practice. The study programme stands out as a unique and much-needed European example in its field; the main remaining areas for improvement are relatively minor, for example, the visibility (rather than substance) of civil-protection aspects, and further strengthening of digital, simulation-based, and data analytics components.

Strengths:

1. Content closely reflects EU and Frontex frameworks, current border-security challenges and scientific trends, ensuring strong labour-market and sector relevance.
2. Study implementation is clearly student-centred, using an effective modular hybrid format, active methods and consortium-level assessment arrangements suited to working professionals.
3. Work-based learning is deeply embedded and effectively replaces a formal internship, tightly linking studies to real service tasks and responsibilities.
4. Research-methods training is well structured and leads to master's theses that demonstrably inform practice in national and EU-level border-management contexts.

5. The study programme is a unique and much-needed European model for strategic-level internal-security education, with high added value for professional networks and careers.

Weaknesses:

1. Digital, simulation-based, and advanced data analytics components could be further strengthened, especially in the remote part of the study programme.
2. Remote delivery across multiple time zones can create participation and workload challenges, and some students would welcome even more individual feedback in certain remote modules.

Assessment of the requirement [1] (applicable only to master's or doctoral study programmes)

No.	Requirement	Fully compliant	Partially compliant	Non compliant	Justification
R1	The study programme for obtaining a master's or doctoral degree is based on the achievements and findings of the respective field of science or field of artistic creation	X			The study programme is clearly grounded in current scientific knowledge and EU policy in social sciences and internal security at EQF 7, and the 30-ECTS thesis ensures the degree is awarded on the basis of independent, methodologically sound research.

2.3. Resources and Provision of the Study Programme

Criteria:

- 2.3.1. The study provision, scientific provision (if applicable), informative provision (including library), material and technical provision and financial provision comply with specific features and the conditions for the implementation of the study programme and its sub-programmes (if applicable), create prerequisites for the achievement of the learning outcomes and indicate the possibility to ensure a highquality study process.
- 2.3.2. In the case of a doctoral study programme, the study and science provision, including resources provided within the framework of cooperation with other scientific institutions and higher education institutions, meets the conditions for the implementation of the doctoral study programme, creates preconditions for achieving learning and research outcomes.
- 2.3.3. The funding available to the study programme and its sub-programme (if applicable), funding sources and the use of funding ensures full implementation of the study process, the study programme and its sub-programme (if applicable) has the minimum

number of students to ensure the profitability of the study programme (by separately indicating the different implementation options of the study programme) and facilitates the development of the study programme.

Analysis

2.3.1 The study provision, scientific provision, informative provision (including library), material and technical provision and financial provision of the Joint second-cycle SP “Strategic Border Management” fully comply with the specific features and conditions for the implementation of the joint study programme and create clear prerequisites for the achievement of the intended learning outcomes at EQF/NQF level 7, ensuring a high-quality and research-based international study process (SAR, pp. 24–27).

Study and scientific provision are ensured by a consortium of five specialised higher education institutions (Mykolas Romeris University, Estonian Academy of Security Sciences, Riga Technical University Rezekne Academy, Netherlands Defence Academy, University of Salamanca), each responsible for specific modules and research directions in EU border policy, strategic management, risk analysis, technology, human rights and research methodology (SAR, pp. 15–19, 24–26; Annex P14). Students are integrated into ongoing research projects and scientific activities in internal security and border management (e.g. RTU RA “Security and Defence” platform, Frontex-related projects, the international conference and journal “Border Security and Management”), which directly support research-based teaching and the development of master’s theses (SAR, pp. 24–26; P14).

Informative provision is based on unified access to the libraries and e-resources of all consortium partners, including major international databases (EBSCOhost, ProQuest, ScienceDirect, Springer Link, JSTOR, HeinOnline, EU law databases, Frontex Library Portal, OECD iLibrary) and institutional repositories (MRU eLABa, RTU DSpace, EASS digital repository), which fully meet the needs of master’s-level research in the field of border management and security (SAR, pp. 24–25). The University of Salamanca European Documentation Centre, the NLDA military research library, and security-focused collections at EASS and MRU provide specialised legal, policy, and security literature necessary for the implementation of the programme’s learning outcomes (SAR, pp. 15–16, 24–25).

Material and technical provision is adequate and modern: studies are implemented in a blended format using well-equipped auditoriums, conference rooms, computer classes and hybrid audiovisual systems at partner universities, as well as a common Moodle-based e-learning platform and the Frontex Virtual Learning Environment for synchronous and asynchronous online learning (SAR, pp. 21–22, 24–25; Annex P05_Consortium Agreement, Art. 5.1–5.3). Practical simulations and exercises are conducted at the EASS Training Centre and other specialised infrastructures that support crisis-management, border-check and cooperation scenarios in line with the Frontex Common Core Curriculum (SAR, pp. 24–25).

Financial provision is ensured through a Frontex grant administered by the consortium coordinator, complemented by EU funds (e.g. Erasmus, Internal Security Fund) and partners’ co-financing for premises, IT infrastructure and library access (SAR, pp. 26–27; Annex P05_Consortium Agreement, Art. 34.1–34.3). The funding model follows a cost-sharing approach and covers five main cost categories (academic staff, mobility, IT infrastructure and digital resources, administration and quality assurance, development of new modules and e-learning resources); the average cost per student over 90 ECTS is estimated at 18,000–20,000 EUR, with economic sustainability ensured from a minimum cohort size of 20 students (SAR, pp. 26–27, Table 3.3.3.1, 3.3.3).

Overall, the integrated study, scientific, informative, material-technical and financial resources of the consortium form a coherent environment that enables students to achieve the

learning outcomes in terms of strategic analysis, evidence-based decision-making, research competence and international/inter-institutional cooperation, in line with the Sectoral Qualifications Framework for Border Guarding and ESG/European Approach standards for joint programmes (SAR, pp. 6–7, 18–22, 35–36; Annex P05_Consortium Agreement, Arts. 3, 5, 19, 33, 35–37).

2.3.2 Not Applicable

2.3.3 The funding available to the Joint Second-Cycle SP “Strategic Border Management”, its sources and allocation ensure the implementation of the study process, support the sustainable delivery of all modules in the blended full-time format (intensive on-site stages and online stages in partner universities) and facilitate the continuous development of the study programme (SAR, pp. 26–27). The joint study programme is implemented as a non-commercial model for the participants; students do not pay tuition fees personally, as the study programme is designed for professionals nominated by their national authorities or Frontex (SAR, p. 13; Annex P05, Art. 38.2). These positions function as funded "budget places," where the participation costs are covered by the grant awarded by the European Border and Coast Guard Agency Frontex (SAR, pp. 26–27).

The main funding source is the grant awarded by the European Border and Coast Guard Agency Frontex under a multi-annual Framework Partnership Agreement and Specific Grant Agreements, complemented by partners’ own contributions in the form of premises, infrastructure, academic staff time, administrative support and access to libraries and e-resources (SAR, pp. 26–27; Annex P05_Consortium Agreement, Art. 3.1, 5.1–5.4, 34.1–34.3). This grant serves as a comprehensive scholarship scheme for the students, specifically covering travel and mobility costs for mandatory on-site stages in partner countries (SAR Annex P05, Art. 21.3). The funding is planned and executed using a cost-sharing model that covers five key cost categories: (1) remuneration, mobility and training of academic staff and experts; (2) student mobility and scholarships; (3) IT and e-learning infrastructure, including the shared Moodle platform and virtual learning environments; (4) administrative and quality-assurance costs linked to the joint governance structure; and (5) development and updating of modules, teaching materials and digital content, thus directly supporting the qualitative development of the programme (SAR, pp. 24–27, Table 3.3.3.1; Annex P05_Consortium Agreement, Art. 19, 21–23, 33–35). The economic model of the study programme is based on cohorts of approximately 30 students per iteration, which exceeds the calculated minimum of 20 students needed to ensure the study programme’s financial viability and enables efficient use of resources in the blended full-time implementation option (SAR, pp. 13, 26–27, Table 3.1.4.1, Table 3.3.3.1). This stable funding basis and sufficient cohort size guarantee full implementation of the joint study process in all partner institutions and provide space for innovation, including the introduction of new digital learning solutions, the strengthening of research components and the expansion of international cooperation within the consortium and the wider Frontex training network (SAR, pp. 18–22, 26–27; Annex P05_Consortium Agreement, Art. 3, 19, 21, 33–35).

During the site visit, it was underlined that the study programme was originally designed and implemented as a fully on-site model, and that both students and teaching staff would still regard a predominantly on-site format as didactically preferable, particularly in terms of interaction, group work and networking. However, it was also clearly stated that the shift to a mixed site/online model after COVID19 was driven primarily by budgetary and grant-framework constraints rather than pedagogical choice, and that current funding levels, while sufficient to ensure a high-quality blended delivery, do not permit a full return to an all on-site model across all modules. Within these parameters, the existing funding structure nevertheless provides a stable basis for the joint study process in all partner institutions and

room for targeted innovation, including digital learning tools and strengthened research components.

Conclusions on this set of criteria, by specifying strengths and weaknesses

The expert group concludes that criteria 2.3.1–2.3.3 are fully met. The consortium provides strong academic, research, library, material-technical and financial resources, creating a coherent, international learning environment that fully supports the achievement of EQF/NQF level 7 learning outcomes. The funding model, anchored in Frontex grants and partner co-financing, is stable and sufficient for the current high-quality blended format, even though a fully on-site model would be pedagogically preferred but is not currently feasible within existing budget constraints.

Strengths:

1. The study programme is implemented by a specialised international consortium (MRU, EASS, RTU Rezekne Academy, NLDA-FMS, USAL), which pools academic, scientific and practical expertise in border management and internal security, creating a rich interdisciplinary learning and research environment.
2. Scientific provision is strong: students are embedded in active research ecosystems (RTU RA “Security and Defence” platform, Frontex-related projects, international conference and journal *Border Security and Management*), which directly feed into modules, master’s theses and evidence-based teaching.
3. Informative provision (libraries and databases) is extensive; access to major international databases and partner repositories fully supports master’s-level research and aligns with the study programme’s strategic, legal and operational focus.
4. Material and technical resources, including modern premises, blended-learning infrastructure, joint Moodle platform and virtual learning environments, as well as specialised simulation facilities, are adequate and well aligned with the study programme’s blended, work-compatible delivery model.
5. Funding is stable and diversified: Frontex grants, EU funds and partner co-financing, combined with a cost-sharing model and economically justified cohort size (about 30 students, above the viability threshold), ensure the full implementation of the study process and enable continuous study programme development.

Weaknesses:

1. Strong dependence on external EU/Agency funding (Frontex grants and specific EU instruments) creates a potential vulnerability if strategic priorities or funding rules change; long-term sustainability would benefit from a clearer back-up model using more institutional or national funding.
2. While stakeholders would pedagogically prefer a fully on-site model, current funding constraints restrict the study programme to a blended format, limiting the scope to further expand on-site components.
3. The minimum economically viable cohort (around 20 students) is just below the typical planned intake, so substantial fluctuations in nominations from Member States or changes in Frontex allocation policies could affect profitability and pressure the cost-sharing balance between partners.

Assessment of the requirement [2]

No.	Requirement	Fully compliant	Partially compliant	Non compliant	Justification
R2	Compliance of the study provision, science provision (if applicable), informative provision (including library), material and technical provision and financial provision with the conditions for the implementation of the study programme and ensuring the achievement of learning outcomes	X			The consortium provides adequate and well-integrated academic, research, library, material-technical, and financial resources that reliably support the blended implementation of the study programme and enable students to achieve the intended EQF-level learning outcomes.

2.4. Teaching Staff

Criteria:

- 2.4.1. The qualification of the teaching staff members involved in the implementation of the study programme complies with the requirements for the implementation of the study programme and the requirements set forth in the regulatory enactments, and it enables the achievement of the aims and learning outcomes of the study programme and the relevant study courses.
- 2.4.2. The higher education institution / college purposefully takes measures so that changes in the composition of the teaching staff do not negatively affect the quality of the implementation of the study programme and the compliance of the study programme with the requirements specified in regulatory enactments.
- 2.4.3. The scientific publications and the involvement in research- related projects of the academic staff involved in the implementation of the doctoral study programmes contribute to the implementation of a high-quality doctoral study programme (if applicable).
- 2.4.4. Each member of the academic staff in the last six years has published in peer-reviewed editions, including international editions (if the staff member has worked for a shorter period, the number of publications should be indicated in proportion to the period worked) or artistic achievements (for example, exhibitions, films, theater performances and concerts) or five years of practical experience (except for experience in the implementation of the study programme) in accordance with the Law on Higher Education Institutions.
- 2.4.5. A mechanism for mutual cooperation of the teaching staff in the implementation of the study programme has been established, it ensures the achievement of the aims of the study programme and the interconnection of study courses within the study programme.

Analysis

2.4.1 The qualifications and profiles of the teaching staff involved in implementing the joint second-cycle SP “Strategic Border Management” fully comply with regulatory requirements and are well-suited to achieving the aims and learning outcomes of the study programme and its modules. Academically and professionally highly qualified staff from five European higher education institutions (MRU, EASS, RTU Rezekne Academy, NLDA-FMS, USAL) jointly cover all key thematic areas of the study programme, including border security, governance and strategy, human rights, risk analysis and research (SAR, p. 30). Each module is delivered by one or more lecturers from partner universities (professors, associate professors, leading researchers and senior experts) who hold a doctoral degree in a relevant discipline and possess substantial practical experience in border management and security, ensuring a strong link between academic theory and professional practice (SAR, p. 30; Table 3.4.1.1). In accordance with the Consortium’s quality standards, all practitioners contributing to the study programme without a doctoral degree must have at least 10 years of practical industry experience, significantly exceeding statutory requirements (SAR, Annex P16).

In total 65 people in teaching staff and experts participate in the implementation of the joint study programme, 6 from RTU (SAR, Annex 11) of whom approximately 70% hold a doctorate (Ph.D., Dr.sc.adm., Dr.iur., Dr.soc., Dr.mil.), while about 30% are recognised high-level practitioners (such as brigadier generals, border-guard officers and senior EU-agency officials) who contribute as guest lecturers and practice mentors (SAR, p. 30). Twenty-one professors and associate professors are involved overall, including five from RTU Rezekne Academy, which ensures strong academic leadership in modules related to leadership, organisation and analytical methods (SAR, p. 30). Each partner institution provides lecturers according to its field of competence and module responsibility - for example, EASS for security and crisis management, NLDA-FMS for fundamental rights, ethics and research, USAL for EU law and policy, MRU for risk analysis and security policy, and RTU Rezekne Academy for leadership and organisational development - so that the collective expertise of the teaching staff fully covers the study programme’s intended knowledge, skills and competences (SAR, pp. 30–31; Table 3.4.1.1). This qualification base is explicitly mapped to the joint study programme's three groups of study results: PhD holders provide the theoretical basis (knowledge), while those with international project and senior management experience foster strategic planning skills and the competence to make complex decisions in international security contexts (SAR, p. 31; Table 3.4.1.2).

The teaching staff regularly participate in joint lectures, visiting professorships and academic exchanges between partner universities, and block modules are implemented each semester with a rotating composition of lecturers. This provides students with a broad, comparative view of security and governance issues, exposure to different national approaches to border management, and systematic exchange of experience between academic and professional sectors, in line with European joint-degree and ESG expectations for an international teaching environment (SAR, pp. 30–31, 32). To further enable the achievement of learning outcomes, the joint study programme implements a dual-mentorship model in which each student is provided with both an academic mentor from a university and a professional mentor from a border guard authority or Frontex, ensuring ongoing support for the integration of theory and practice (SAR, p. 37).

During the site visit, students, graduates and employers confirmed that the composition and expertise of the teaching staff are experienced as a major strength of the study programme. They particularly valued the combination of senior practitioners and research-active academics, noting that this mix ensures close alignment with current operational realities while simultaneously developing leadership, analytical and strategic competences. Graduates also

highlighted the value of participating in international conferences, such as "Masters around Europe," where they present and publish their research alongside the academic staff, fostering a shared European professional and research culture. At the same time, academic staff pointed out that, because many teach part-time in a small and specialised field, it can be challenging to build long-term academic careers and critical mass, which underlines the importance of continued consortium-level support for staff development and international teaching teams.

2.4.2 The composition of the teaching staff in the joint second-cycle SP "Strategic Border Management" has remained stable and of high quality during the reference period (2021–2024), and changes have been managed in a way that supports, rather than jeopardises, the quality of the joint study programme.

The total number of academic staff has fluctuated moderately between 28 and 33 lecturers, with around 70% holding a PhD and about 30% serving as high-level guest experts from border-guard, defence and legal sectors (SAR, p. 30). Staff changes have mainly resulted from the international rotation model of the joint study programme, planned academic succession and the targeted involvement of new experts from Frontex and Member State security authorities, rather than from staff reductions (SAR, p. 30; Table 3.4.2.1). This rotation is governed at consortium level and used deliberately to broaden competences (e.g. in risk management, innovation and digitalisation), to update module content in line with new EU policies and Frontex strategies, and to strengthen the methodological supervision of master's theses, with no negative impact on study quality or compliance with regulatory requirements identified in the reporting period (SAR, p. 30; Table 3.4.2.1).

2.4.3 Not applicable.

2.4.4 The academic staff of the joint study programme demonstrates full compliance with the requirements of the Law on Higher Education Institutions, ensuring a robust balance between scientific excellence and high-level practical expertise. According to the Self-Assessment Report (SAR, pp. 27-29), approximately 70% of the teaching staff hold a doctoral degree (PhD, Dr.sc.adm., Dr.iur., etc.), and the Consortium's quality standards mandate that all such academic members must be active authors of scientific publications (Annex P16). Each academic member has actively published in peer-reviewed international editions over the last six years (Annex P14; Annex P15). Specifically, academic staff members from RTU Rezekne Academy maintain extensive publication records in high-ranking databases such as Scopus and Web of Science; for example, one professor has published 21 Scopus-indexed papers within the last six years (SAR, Annex P15; Annex P17).

Furthermore, the remaining 30% of the faculty comprises recognised practitioners and guest lecturers who occupy senior management positions within border-guarding or security authorities, including brigadier generals and experts from EU agencies such as Frontex (SAR, pp. 27-29; Annex P14). To ensure quality, the joint study programme requires practitioners without a doctoral degree to have at least 10 years of practical industry experience, which significantly exceeds the statutory five-year requirement (SAR, Annex P16). The expert group noted that while some module-specific lists (e.g., for Module 3 in Annex P16) highlight a smaller group of regularly publishing lecturers, the comprehensive consortium-wide data in Annex P14 confirms that all academic members across the ten modules meet the publication criteria, with many cited for having "more than 10 publications" each (Annex P14, pp. 3–20).

During the site visit, it was highlighted that the performance of the academic staff is now systematically monitored through a new KPI-based evaluation system introduced following the integration into RTU. This system requires staff members to complete regular self-assessments of their professional and research development. This continuous academic and

professional engagement ensures that the joint study programme remains aligned with Level 7 of the EQF and the evolving operational needs of the European Border and Coast Guard (SAR, pp 29-31; Annex P10).

From the List of publications of the teaching staff of the joint master's study programme "Strategic Border Management" (45861) (module 3), it can be seen that only eight lecturers publish regularly, and there is a lack of comprehensive information about the scientific work of the other lecturers involved (SAR, Annex 15).

2.4.5 The mechanism for mutual cooperation among the teaching staff in the joint SP "Strategic Border Management" is systematic and clearly aligned with the study programme's aims and internal coherence. It is described in the SAR under Section 3.4.5, "Cooperation between academic staff," and related sections on joint study programme governance and quality assurance. A layered structure of bodies and practices ensures that individual modules and teaching activities are not developed in isolation but are continuously coordinated across partners and levels (Joint Management Board, Academic Coordination Team, Joint Teaching Teams, shared digital tools and peer review).

At the governance level, the Joint Management Board provides strategic oversight by approving module content, staff rotation and assessment approaches, thus safeguarding consistency of academic standards and learning outcomes across all implementation places (SAR, Section 3.2; Annex P05_Consortium Agreement, Arts. 19, 33–35). At the operational level, the Academic Coordination Team (module leaders) regularly aligns content, methods and sequencing so that each module builds on the previous one, using shared digital environments (joint Moodle/Teams) to maintain transparency and up-to-date documentation (SAR, pp. 21–22, 30–31). International Joint Teaching Teams and the shared digital repository then translate this coordination into everyday practice, enabling lecturers from several partner universities to integrate legal, strategic and operational perspectives within the same modules and to reuse and update common cases, materials and assessment criteria (SAR, pp. 18–22, 30–31; Annex P05, Arts. 5.1–5.3).

Quality and coherence are further strengthened by peer review of modules and assessment tools before implementation, which helps to prevent duplication, close gaps and ensure that tasks are pitched at EQF 7 rather than mainly at the operational level (SAR, pp. 20–22, 30–31). Annual joint workshops and staff weeks provide a structured space for reflective practice, where teachers jointly analyse student feedback, experiment with new methods (including digital tools and simulations) and adjust modules accordingly (SAR, pp. 21–22, 30–31; Annex P14 Scientific activities). During the on-site visit, academic staff and management emphasised that this cooperative structure, including frequent informal communication between teachers across institutions, is experienced as a key strength: it supports a genuinely joint study programme identity, promotes pedagogical growth, and helps maintain a consistent student experience despite the blended format and rotating international teams.

Conclusions on this set of criteria, by indicating strengths and weaknesses

The expert group concludes that criteria 2.4.1–2.4.5 are fully met. The joint second-cycle SP "Strategic Border Management" is implemented by a highly qualified, research-active and practice-experienced international teaching staff whose composition, renewal and cooperation mechanisms are systematically managed at the consortium level, ensuring sustained compliance with regulatory requirements and consistent achievement of EQF-level learning outcomes.

Strengths:

1. The teaching staff profile is very strong, combining a high proportion of doctoral-level, research-active academics with senior practitioners from border-guard and security authorities, which ensures both scientific depth and direct relevance to current EU border-management practice.
2. The consortium structure allows each partner to contribute in its field of excellence, so that all key thematic areas (law and human rights, strategy and leadership, technology, risk analysis, cooperation and research) are covered by genuine experts and taught in an international, comparative format.
3. Staff renewal and rotation are managed strategically at the consortium level, broadening competences (e.g. in innovation and digitalisation) while keeping staff numbers stable; this supports continuity of quality and up-to-date module content rather than creating gaps.
4. Clear mechanisms for cooperation (Joint Management Board, Academic Coordination Team, Joint Teaching Teams, shared digital tools, peer review, staff weeks) underpin a genuinely joint teaching culture, helping to align content, methods and assessment across partners and ensuring a coherent student experience.

Weaknesses: No significant weaknesses found.

Assessment of the requirement [3]

No.	Requirement	Fully compliant	Partially compliant	No# compliant	Justification
R3	Compliance of the qualification of the academic staff and visiting professors, visiting associate professors, visiting docents, visiting lecturers and visiting assistants with the conditions for the implementation of the study programme and the requirements set out in the respective regulatory enactments.	X			The consortium's academic and visiting staff meet all regulatory qualification requirements and fully support the study programme's aims and learning outcomes.

2.5. Assessment of the Compliance of the Study Programme "Strategic Border Management"

No.	Points	Fully compliant	Partially compliant	No# compliant	Justification

1.	The study programme complies with the State Academic Education Standard or the Professional Higher Education Standard, including the minimum requirements for the content of the mandatory course in civil protection and the training of employees in civil protection issues whilst implementing the study programme.	X			The compliance is evidenced in SAR Annex P07, which maps the joint second-cycle SP “Strategic Border Management” (45861) against Cabinet Regulation No. 240 (State Academic Education Standard) and confirms the required structural elements (study programme volume 90 CP, master’s thesis 30 CP, and at least 30% contact hours in full-time studies) (SAR, Annex P07, p. 1). SAR Annex P07 also addresses the environmental/civil protection requirement by showing that the relevant content is integrated and specifically covered across multiple modules (e.g., contingency planning, crisis preparedness, disaster monitoring, inter-institutional cooperation in crises, EU civil protection mechanisms).
2.	The study programme/subprogramme (if applicable) complies with a valid professional standard or the requirements for the professional qualification, if the completion of the study programme leads to a professional qualification (if applicable)				Not applicable.
3.	The descriptions of the study courses and the study materials have been prepared in all languages in which the study programme is implemented, and they comply with the requirements set forth in Section 56 ¹ , Paragraph two and Section 56 ¹ , Paragraph two of the Law on Higher Education Institutions.	X			The joint second-cycle SP “Strategic Border Management” is implemented in English (SAR, p. 3). The SAR describes the Course Descriptors and Module Descriptors for all 10 modules, including learning outcomes, assessment strategies, interdependencies, and

¹ Law “Amendments to the Law on Higher Education Institutions” adopted on 14.07.2022., in force from 11.08.2022. Published: *Latvijas Vēstnesis*, 144, 28.07.2022.

				<p>accompanying independent/experiential learning plans (SAR, p. 19). The SAR also refers to Annex 9 (P09) - module/course descriptions (SAR, p. 20).</p> <p>The study programme is implemented in English (SAR, p.3) The full set of course and module descriptions is provided in the implementation language, which includes all mandatory elements required by the Law (Section 56¹(2)), i.e., prerequisites, aim and learning outcomes, content (including calendar and literature/sources), independent work organisation, and assessment criteria. In addition, given the programme's border-guard/internal security domain, study content and assessment/exam requirements are regulated through the institution's/consortium's internal rules and are reflected in the module/course descriptions and assessment arrangements, which corresponds to the requirement of Section 56(2).</p>
4.	The sample of the diploma to be issued for the acquisition of the study programme complies with the procedure according to which state recognised documents of higher education are issued.	X		The SAR states that Annex 1 (P01) provides the model of the diploma to be awarded, along with its annexes (SAR, p. 11). The SAR also confirms that, within the consortium model, a joint diploma is issued for the acquisition of the master's

					<p>degree in the joint programme (SAR, p. 15). The expert group observed differing degree title wording across documents (e.g., “European Joint Master’s in Strategic Border Management” vs “Master’s Degree in Strategic Border Management” and national wording mentioned during the site visit). It is recommended to ensure that the degree title is presented consistently across all study programme documentation and aligned with the wording used in the diploma sample and consortium arrangements (SAR, p. 3; p. 8; p. 15; site visit).</p>
5.	<p>The academic staff of the academic study programme complies with the requirements set forth in Section 55, Paragraph one, Clause 3 of the Law on Higher Education Institutions.</p>	X			<p>The SAR provides evidence of staff capacity and qualification profiles, including that around 70% of academic staff hold a PhD, and the study programme involves both core lecturers and guest lecturers/practitioners, ensuring academic and professional capacity (SAR, pp. 29-30). The SAR also references Annex 11 (P11) - information on teaching staff and Annex 12 (P12) - teaching staff biographies (SAR, p. 29).</p>
6.	Removed ²				

7.	<p>At least five teaching staff members with a science doctoral degree are among the academic staff of an academic doctoral study programme, at least three of which are experts approved by the Latvian Science Council in the respective field of science (if applicable, for period till August 1, 2024)</p> <p>At least five teaching staff members with a doctoral degree are among the academic staff of a professional doctoral study programme in arts (if applicable).</p>				Not applicable
8.	<p>The teaching staff members involved in the implementation of the study programme are proficient in the official language in accordance with the regulations on the level of the official language knowledge and the procedures for testing official language proficiency for performing professional duties and office duties.</p>				Not Applicable
9.	<p>The teaching staff members to be involved in the implementation of the study programme have at least B2-level knowledge of a related foreign language, if the study programme or any part thereof is to be implemented in a foreign language (if applicable).</p>	X			<p>The study programme is implemented in English (SAR, p. 3). The teaching staff work in an international teaching environment and deliver modules in English within the joint study programme (SAR, p. 29). The study programme is implemented in English (SAR, p. 3). The higher education institution has provided confirmation in Annex 13 (P13) that the teaching staff involved in the implementation of the study programme meet the required foreign language proficiency threshold (at least B2 level) for teaching in the study programme's implementation language</p>

					(Annex P13). Teaching staff information and biographies are provided in Annex 11 (P11) and Annex 12 (P12), supporting the overall staffing evidence base (SAR, p. 29).
10.	The sample of the study agreement complies with the mandatory provisions to be included in the study agreement.	X			The study agreement sample (Annex P02) is prepared in accordance with Cabinet Regulation No. 70 “Studiju līgumā obligāti ietveramie noteikumi” and includes the mandatory elements required for a study agreement (identification of parties and programme, mutual rights/obligations, conditions for continuation/termination, and dispute resolution). The sample also regulates the case of study programme non-accreditation/suspension and the student’s options (Annex P02, Clause 1.5) and includes applicable law and dispute-settlement clauses (Annex P02, Clauses 8.5–8.6).
11.	The higher education institution / college has provided confirmation that students will be provided with opportunities to continue their education in another study programme or another higher education institution or college (agreement with another accredited higher education institution or college) if the implementation of the study programme is terminated.	X			The consortium provides a written assurance on the continuity of the joint study programme in Annex P03 of SAR, stating that the consortium partners are jointly and individually responsible for the continuous implementation of the joint master’s study programme. Annex P03 confirms that, regardless of circumstances, the consortium ensures that all enrolled students who successfully progress will have the opportunity to complete their studies even if a partner withdraws, is excluded, or cannot

					implement the study programme nationally; in such cases other consortium partners assume responsibility for continuation and protection of student interests (SR Annex P03, Clause 5.1; Clause 11.1–11.2; Point 8.15; final paragraph).
12.	The higher education institution / college has provided confirmation that students are guaranteed compensation for losses if the study programme is not accredited or the licensing of the study programme is cancelled due to the actions (actions or omissions) of the higher education institution or college and the student does not wish to continue studies in another study programme.	X			Students are effectively protected by the joint study programme's legal and financial framework. The consortium-level Informative Acknowledgement guarantees that every student can complete studies and obtain a degree even if a partner withdraws, which is the most substantial form of compensation for invested time and career progression (Annex P03; Annex P05). In addition, RTU issues a specific certificate guaranteeing compensation for losses if the joint study programme is not accredited and a student chooses not to continue in another study programme (Annex P04). Since tuition is covered by Frontex grants and students do not pay fees themselves, the risk of personal financial loss is minimal (SAR; Annex P02; Annex P04).
13.	The joint study programmes comply with the requirements prescribed in Section 55 ¹ of the Law on Higher Education Institutions (if applicable)	X			The joint study programme is implemented under a valid consortium agreement between partner higher education institutions and leads to a joint degree, with defined partner responsibilities, common governance and quality assurance arrangements, and unified rules for curriculum, assessment and student

					protection (SAR Annex P07-2, p. 1-3; Annex P05, p. 10-15).
14.	<p>Compliance with the requirements specified in other regulatory enactments that apply to the study programme being assessed (if applicable).</p> <p>For instance, requirements for subprogrammes or foreign language usage in study programme implementation that specified in the Law on Higher Education Institutions .</p>	X			<p>Compliance with the special Latvian law on implementation of the joint master's study programme "Strategic Border Management" is evidenced in Annex P07-1 of SAR (Annex P07-1, p. 1-2), including the requirement of at least three years of operational border guarding experience and the EQF level 7 positioning, as well as the clarified 60 CP to 90 CP credit conversion (Annex P07-1, p. 2). The joint study programme is implemented in a foreign language (English), as indicated in the study programme parameters (SAR, p. 3), and the joint study programme implementation requirements are set out in the consortium agreement and the dedicated compliance annex (Annex P05; Annex P07-2).</p>

Assessment of the requirement [4]

No.	Requirement	Fully compliant	Partially compliant	Non compliant	Justification
R4	Compliance of the study programme with the requirements set forth in the Law on Higher Education Institutions and other regulatory enactments	X			Compliance is demonstrated by a coherent set of annexes confirming: alignment with the State Academic Education Standard, including civil protection/environment aspects (SAR, Annex P07); compliance of the joint study programme, governance and quality assurance under the consortium model (SAR, Annex P05; Annex P07-2); student protection mechanisms covering study

					agreements and programme continuity (SAR, Annex P02; Annex P03); and conformity with the special Latvian SBM implementation law and related credit conversion provisions (SAR, Annex P07-1).
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General conclusions about the study programme, indicating the most important strengths and weaknesses of the study programme.

The expert group concludes that the joint second-cycle SP “Strategic Border Management” (code 45861) fully meets all applicable requirements and is suitable for accreditation for the full period. The study programme represents a distinctive, research-based and internationally relevant European model at EQF/SQF level 7, implemented through a strong consortium, supported by highly qualified academic and practitioner staff, and characterised by excellent labour-market outcomes and systematic integration of research into practice. Existing structural risks, in particular reliance on EU/Frontex funding, challenges of online delivery across time zones and the need to further strengthen advanced digital and data-driven components, are considered manageable within the accreditation period and do not hinder full implementation in the declared English-language, full-time blended format at RTU Rezekne Academy.

The “Excellent” assessment is based on several key strengths. The staff profile combines a high proportion of doctoral-level academics with senior practitioners, ensuring both scientific rigour and direct linkage to operational realities. The international consortium (MRU, EASS, RTU Rezekne Academy, NLDA, USAL, in cooperation with Frontex) provides clear European added value by fostering a shared professional culture and mandatory mobility that develop comparative and strategic perspectives on border management. The 30-ECTS Master’s thesis functions as a genuine instrument for sectoral development, with demonstrable uptake of student research in national and EU-level policies and practice. The study programme shows very strong labour-market relevance, reflected in graduate employment rates of 90–95% and progression to senior strategic roles, while governance and quality-assurance structures are well developed and aligned with the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes. Collectively, these features confirm that the study programme is not only compliant but exemplary in its field and constitutes a critical European platform for strategic-level internal security education and leadership development.

Assessment of the study programme:

<u>Excellent</u>	Good	Average	Unsatisfactory
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2.6. Recommendations for the Study Programme “Strategic Border Management”

Short-term recommendations (within 1-2 years):

1. Review all official documents (diploma supplements, degree orders, website) and align the wording of the degree title so that exactly the same formulation is used everywhere.
2. Adjust the organisation of the blended format by improving timetabling across time zones, offering clearer guidance for remote participation and adding targeted support for students who struggle with the online workload.

Long-term recommendations (within accreditation period):

1. Explore additional income sources and develop a more diversified and formally approved funding plan that gradually increases institutional and/or national co-funding, thereby reducing dependence on EU/Agency grants and strengthening long-term sustainability.
2. Develop and introduce a formal procedure for monitoring and managing annual cohort size, including agreed partner actions for below-target intakes (for example, revising cost-sharing arrangements, adapting teaching loads or, where feasible, combining smaller cohorts).
3. In cooperation with key stakeholders and funders, prepare a medium-term roadmap that specifies under what financial and organisational conditions additional on-site teaching days or modules could be added, to progressively align delivery with stakeholders' pedagogical preferences.

III Assessment of the Requirements for the Study Programme

Assessment of the Requirements for the Study Programme

	Requirements	Fully compliant	Partially compliant	Non-compliant	Justification
R1	<i>The study programme for obtaining a master's or doctoral degree is based on the achievements and findings in the respective field of science or field of artistic creation.</i>	X			The study programme is clearly grounded in current scientific knowledge and EU policy in social sciences and internal security at EQF 7, and the 30-ECTS thesis ensures the degree is awarded on the basis of independent, methodologically sound research.
R2	<i>Compliance of the study provision, science provision (if applicable), informative provision (including library), material and technical provision, and financial provision with the conditions for the implementation of the study programme and ensuring the achievement of learning outcomes.</i>	X			The consortium provides adequate and well-integrated academic, research, library, material-technical, and financial resources that reliably support the blended implementation of the study programme and enable students to achieve the intended EQF-level learning outcomes.
R3	<i>Compliance of the qualification of the academic staff, visiting professors, visiting associate professors, visiting docents, visiting lecturers, and visiting assistants with the conditions for the implementation of the study programme and the requirements set out in the respective regulatory enactments</i>	X			The consortium's academic and visiting staff meet all regulatory qualification requirements and fully support the study programme's aims and learning outcomes.
R4	<i>Compliance of the study programme with the requirements set forth in the Law on Higher Education Institutions and other regulatory enactments</i>	X			Compliance is demonstrated by a coherent set of annexes confirming: alignment with the State Academic Education Standard, including civil protection/environment aspects (SAR, Annex P07);

					<p>compliance of the joint study programme, governance and quality assurance under the consortium model (SAR, Annex P05; Annex P07-2); student protection mechanisms covering study agreements and programme continuity (SAR, Annex P02; Annex P03); and conformity with the special Latvian SBM implementation law and related credit conversion provisions (SAR, Annex P07-1).</p>
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