



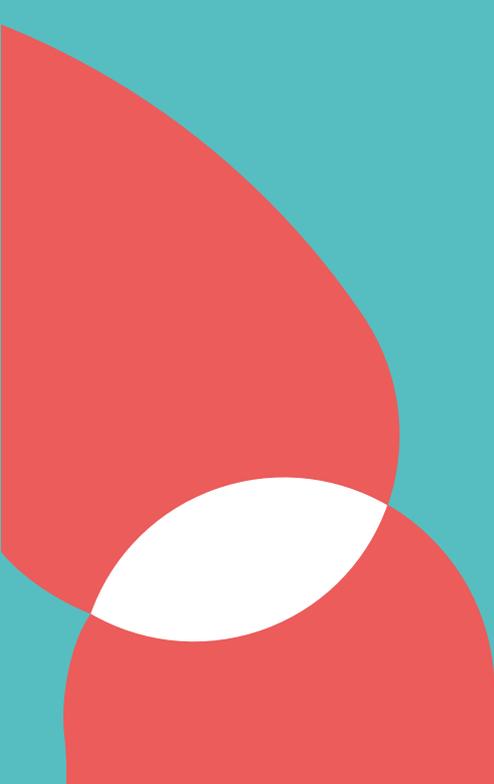
NVAO • THE NETHERLANDS

## EUROPEAN JOINT MASTER'S IN STRATEGIC BORDER MANAGEMENT (EJMSBM)

Netherlands Defence Academy/Faculty of Military Sciences, Estonian Academy of Security Sciences, Rezekne Higher Education Institution, Mykolas Romeris University, National University for Distance-Learning Education, University of Salamanca

### PANEL REPORT

*18 DECEMBER 2020*>



NVAO • THE NETHERLANDS

## EUROPEAN JOINT MASTER'S IN STRATEGIC BORDER MANAGEMENT (EJMSBM)

NETHERLANDS DEFENCE ACADEMY/FACULTY OF MILITARY SCIENCES, ESTONIAN  
ACADEMY OF SECURITY SCIENCES, REZEKNE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION,  
MYKOLAS ROMERIS UNIVERSITY, NATIONAL UNIVERSITY FOR DISTANCE-LEARNING  
EDUCATION, UNIVERSITY OF SALAMANCA

NVAO RE-ACCREDITATION ACCORDING TO THE EUROPEAN  
APPROACH FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE OF JOINT PROGRAMMES

*18 DECEMBER 2020*



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# 1 Executive summary

This report is issued by the panel appointed by the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO) and assesses the conditions for re-accreditation of the academic international joint master programme 'European Joint Master's in Strategic Border Management' (EJMSBM) as submitted by the Netherlands Defence Academy, Faculty of Military Science (Breda, the Netherlands) on behalf of the EJMSBM consortium which also features the Estonian Academy of Security Sciences (Tallinn, Estonia), the Rezekne Academy of Technologies (Rezekne, Latvia), the Mykolas Romeris University (Vilnius, Lithuania), the National University for Distance-Learning Education (Madrid, Spain) and the University of Salamanca (Salamanca, Spain).

The application concerns a joint English-language master's degree of 90 European Credits (EC), which is offered as a full-time 1.5 year integrated multi-university programme in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands and Spain. Given these specific features, the panel based its assessment on the standards of the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes in the European Higher Education Area of October 2014, approved by the EHEA ministers in May 2015, which in turn are based on the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance.

The application documentation, programme materials and discussions with delegations from all consortium partners have provided the panel with a comprehensive view of the programme. As a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic, the site-visit was organised online. It became clear to the panel that the programme is implemented by a group of highly motivated consortium partners with a shared ambition to create a core of border guard professionals and leaders in management, who can deal with the urgent and important challenges they face on a more academic, reflective and research-based footing. Based on the documentation presented, the site visit and the additional information provided on 2 and 3 November 2020, the panel concludes that the EJMSBM programme meets each standard of the assessment framework. Consequently, the panel's overall assessment of the quality of the EJMSBM programme is positive.

EJMSBM is a programme featuring intensive cooperation between six higher education institutions in five countries, whose national frameworks enable the institutions to participate in the programme. The involved partners are recognised public institutions with joint responsibility for the design and implementation of the programme. The panel applauds the strong and dedicated cooperation between the partners. The explicit coordination mechanisms are a strong point of the programme. The consortium agreement covers all the required components.

The EJMSBM programme aims to educate students as strategic thinkers and future leaders, able to comprehend and cope with challenges and controversies in border and coast guard (BCG) management in the light of EU policy and societal contexts. The intended learning outcomes are described in terms of knowledge, skills and competencies and are explicitly linked to international and sectoral qualification frameworks. The documentation shows how the intended learning outcomes are aligned with the Dublin Descriptors at master's level. The panel considers the combination of academic knowledge and its application to real life problems in the students' professional practice as a strong and convincing feature of the programme. The main challenge, but also added value, of the programme is in increasing the academic and scientific level of the students. The panel considers the module assessments and the dissertation adequate methods to demonstrate that the intended learning outcomes are achieved. The sample of dissertations studied by the panel proves that the graduates have indeed achieved these learning outcomes. Students, alumni and sending organisations appreciate the value of the programme because students can take their newly acquired knowledge and skills back to their work. Sending organisations should be encouraged to translate their appreciation of this added value into a more rapid career path.

The curriculum structure and contents are appropriate for an academic master's programme. The EJMSBM programme is a full-time programme of 90 EC, characterised by international mobility, and consists of two semesters of taught modules and one semester for the dissertation. The programme has put in place strong mechanisms to guarantee coherence between the modules. Students' employers sign an agreement that they will enable the students to combine the EJMSBM programme with their

regular duties. All involved agree that the work load is heavy, but doable, but also that employers could do more to provide students with sufficient time too, also at the research stage of the masters.

The panel considers that the requirements, both as to academic achievements and experience in practice, are clearly stated and are manifestly appropriate for the programme. The admission system is appropriate and there is a very clear idea of who should enroll in the programme. The recognition of previous qualifications and prior learning is adequately provided for. The panel agrees that, given the nature of the programme, there are few courses for which an exemption is likely to be appropriate.

The programme design clearly corresponds with the intended learning outcomes; it also takes account of the 'sandwich' nature of the programme and the fact that students will still be in their jobs. Students spend 60% on independent study and 40% on contact weeks and communication. The programme design is student-centred, stimulating students to actively and regularly participate. Multiple tools, including online tools, are used to support learning. The participation of several experts in distance learning is evident. The way the programme adapted to the COVID-19-restrictions on face to face teaching is commendable. The assessment of the learning outcomes in module tests and the dissertation corresponds with the intended learning outcomes. Appropriate examination rules and regulations are in place. The Board of Examiners and the independent External Examiners ensure consistency of application among the partner institutions, even if better consultation and coordination with the external thesis examiners could be recommended, especially as to their role during the defence.

EJMSBM students get the necessary support whenever needed on academic, practical, mobility and technical/IT issues. This starts at the Opening Ceremony and continues throughout the programme. Students approach peers, alumni, teachers and convenors when they need support. The panel appreciates the strong network between students and alumni, which was mentioned by students throughout the interviews. As the alumni are the "ambassadors" of the programme in the sending organizations, these informal ties could be further developed and utilised. The panel agrees that the programme should also facilitate learning for students with special needs. The mentor network could be very valuable, also by connecting different cohorts, but seems to be underused right now. The electronic learning environment Moodle is constantly updated. The students were provided with the necessary digital environment to continue their studies during the COVID-19-crisis. The panel agrees that the programme could be successfully run if the COVID-19 crisis carries on for a long period.

Both the academic and practice-based teaching staff are well-qualified: a high percentage of lecturers has a PhD and many also have highly relevant specific expertise on border management. The panel commends the programme for achieving consistency and coordination between modules with so many people involved: the single-minded purpose and positive integration and interaction of staff are evident. Serious account is taken of feedback in evaluating performance. Teachers have shown themselves to be flexible, both in handling larger student numbers and in switching to online teaching. Students are satisfied with the programme's facilities, such as libraries and IT. Continued attention to coordination, also between different lecturers, of course remains of central importance.

The panel considers that the transparency and documentation are exemplary. Documentation is available in the different digital platforms.

The system of quality assessment is well developed. The joint internal quality assurance process is applied properly and external feedback is also considered as an instrument for improvement. Students are represented in all boards and committees. Their feedback is considered and the following amendments are communicated back to them, which encourages students to participate fully in their studying processes. EJMSBM shows an openness to improvements and a clear will to tackle the challenges that obviously arise in a large collaboration. The panel observes that feedback is the norm in all aspects of the programme.

The panel concludes that it is convinced of the quality of the European Joint Master's in Strategic Border Management. The panel advises NVAO to take a positive decision regarding the quality of the academic European Joint Master's in Strategic Border Management at Netherlands Defence Academy, Faculty of Military Science (Breda, the Netherlands), Estonian Academy of Security Sciences (Tallinn, Estonia),

Rezekne Academy of Technologies (Rezekne, Latvia), Mykolas Romeris University (Vilnius, Lithuania), National University for Distance-Learning Education (Madrid, Spain) and University of Salamanca (Salamanca, Spain).

The Hague, 18 December 2020

On behalf of the Accreditation panel convened to assess the academic European Joint Master's in Strategic Border Management at the Netherlands Defence Academy, Faculty of Military Science,

Prof. Dr. Laurence W. Gormley  
(Chair)

Dr. Marianne van der Weiden  
(Secretary)

## 2 Introduction

On 30 April 2020 the NVAO received a request for an accreditation procedure regarding the master programme of academic orientation (wo-master) European Joint Master's in Strategic Border Management (EJMSBM). As this concerns a joint programme issued by six higher education institutions in the Netherlands, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Spain, this request was submitted on behalf of the EJMSBM Consortium by the Netherlands Defence Academy, Faculty of Military Science.

Given the particular features of this application, the NVAO convened an international panel of experts consisting of:

- Prof. Dr. Laurence W. Gormley, *chair*, Emeritus Professor of European Law at Groningen, Chair Accreditation Panel European Master in Law and Economics;
- Dr. Armin Cuyvers (NL), Faculty director of Masters Programmes/Associate professor of EU Law at Leiden Law School;
- Dr. Mark Foley (IRL), inspector An Garda Siochana;
- Dr. Saule Maciukaite-Zviniene (LTU), head for Entrepreneurship and Innovation, Vilnius University Lithuania. President National Council of Education and senior advisor to the President of the Republic of Lithuania (2014-2019);
- Mary Hayrapetyan MSc, *student member*, graduated from the Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degree in International Development Studies (GLODEP), currently Consultant in the Office of the Deputy Director General, Development Sector, World Intellectual Property Organisation, Switzerland.

The composition of the panel reflects the expertise deemed necessary by NVAO for this accreditation exercise. The panel composition is also in line with the procedural requirements in the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes (C.2. Review Panel). On behalf of NVAO, ir. Lineke van Bruggen was responsible for the coordination of the assessment process. The secretary, dr. Marianne van der Weiden, drafted the panel report in close cooperation with all panel members and in agreement with the chair. All panel members and the secretary signed a statement of independence and confidentiality.

The panel based its assessment on the Standards for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), issued in October 2014 and approved by the EHEA ministers in May 2015. This European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes should be applied for quality assurance of international joint programmes if some of the cooperating higher education institutions require external quality assurance at programme level. The standards to be assessed are based on the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the EHEA (ESG). This procedure allows the possibility that only one procedure can lead to accreditation in several countries.

The panel members studied the application documentation of the programme and reported their preliminary findings before the site visit to the secretary. The secretary collected them and processed them for the preparatory meeting on 12 October 2020. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the restrictions on physical meetings, it was decided to organise both the preparatory meeting and the site-visit as online meetings. At the preparatory meeting, the panel discussed the preliminary findings, identified the most important issues for discussion and prepared the sessions with the delegations.

The online site visit took place on 2-3 November 2020. The panel discussed with delegations of the management of the consortium and the programme, as well as with lecturers, members of the examination board, students, graduates and the professional field. The schedule of the site visit is presented in annex 2. Annex 3 lists the materials made available by the programme before and during the site visit.

Immediately after the discussions with the delegations, the panel discussed the findings and formulated its considerations and preliminary conclusions separately for each standard. These are based on observations during the site visit and on the assessment of the programme documents. At the end of the site visit, the chair presented the panel's preliminary conclusions to the representatives of the programme.

Based on the findings, considerations and conclusions, the secretary wrote a draft advisory report that was first presented to the panel members. After the panel members had commented on the draft report, the chair endorsed the report.

On 3 December 2020, the advisory report was sent to the institution, which was given the opportunity to respond to any factual inaccuracies in the report. The institution replied on 17 December 2020. Subsequently, the final report was endorsed by the panel chair. The panel composed its advice fully independently and offered it to NVAO on 18 December 2020.

## 3 Description of the programme

### 3.1 General

Countries	The Netherlands, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Spain
Institutions	Netherlands Defence Academy, Faculty of Military Science (Breda, the Netherlands) Estonian Academy of Security Sciences (Tallinn, Estonia), Rezekne Academy of Technologies (Rezekne, Latvia), Mykolas Romeris University (Vilnius, Lithuania), National University for Distance-Learning Education (Madrid, Spain) University of Salamanca (Salamanca, Spain).
Programme Level	European Joint Master's in Strategic Border Management master
Orientation	academic (wo)
Specialisation	Strategic Border Management
Degree	European Joint Master's in Strategic Border Management
Locations	Breda and Amsterdam-Schiphol (the Netherlands), Tallinn (Estonia), Rezekne (Latvia), Vilnius (Lithuania), Madrid, Aranjuez, Salamanca and Avilla (Spain)
Study Load	90 EC
Field of Study	Security Sciences (ISCED Field 86) and Social and Behavioural Science (ISCED Field 31)

### 3.2 Profile of the consortium

The application is filed by a consortium of six higher education institutions in five countries: (1) Netherlands Defence Academy, Faculty of Military Science in Breda, the Netherlands, (2) Estonian Academy of Security Sciences in Tallinn, Estonia, (3) Rezekne Academy of Technologies in Rezekne, Latvia, (4) Mykolas Romeris University in Vilnius, Lithuania, (5) National University for Distance-Learning Education in Madrid, Spain and (6) University of Salamanca in Salamanca, Spain. The partners signed a consortium agreement in 2015.

The degree is awarded by these six academic and degree awarding partners. The European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) has been a coordinating and funding partner from the beginning. In addition, the academic partners have cooperation agreements in place with complementary entities to ensure relevant Border and Coast Guard (BCG) expertise in the programme: the Royal Marechaussee, The Netherlands, Guardia Civil, Spain, Police National, Spain, Estonian Police and Border Guard, Estonia, and State Border Guard, Latvia.

The European Joint Master in Strategic Border Management (EJMSBM) had its first iteration in 2015, followed by a second iteration in 2017 and is currently in its third iteration. The number of students has grown from 26 in the first and second iteration to 34 students in the third.

The Netherlands Defence Academy (NLDA) organises the military training, personal development and academic education for the Dutch Ministry of Defence. In addition, the NLDA is the only military-scientific knowledge and research institute in the Netherlands. The NLDA's scientific research is mainly Defence-oriented, with scientific experts in the area of defence contributing to improvements in military operations. The accredited academic bachelor and master degree programmes and the associated research activities are the responsibility of the Faculty of Military Science. Students in the academic bachelor programmes are (candidate) officers in the Netherlands military forces.

The Estonian Academy of Security Sciences (EASS) is a state institution, providing professional education for civil servants belonging in the area of government under the Estonian Ministry of the Interior. The Academy was established in 1992 after Estonia regained its independence. The objective of the EASS is, through internal security related academic education, research and development activities, and also through the training of honest and competent public servants, to create a secure state and conditions for stable development across the state of Estonia and therewith contribute to the security of the entire European Union (EU). Until 2020 EASS was an associate (non-degree awarding) academic partner, from 2020 it has become a full degree awarding partner.

Rezekne Academy of Technologies (RTA) is a state founded university type higher education institution with unlimited international accreditation. Its roots go back to 1925. The aim of RTA is to provide academic and professional higher education in compliance with the science development level and cultural traditions of Latvia being competitive in the European education space, developing studies and research in 14 study fields. There are three faculties at RTA: Faculty of Economics and Management, Faculty of Engineering, and Faculty of Education, Languages, and Design offering more than 50 bachelor's, master's, and doctoral study programmes in Latvian and 14 programmes in English.

Mykolas Romeris University (MRU) is an international university located in Vilnius and Kaunas, Lithuania. It is the leading university in social sciences and interdisciplinary research in Lithuania. The university offers doctoral, master's and bachelor's degree study programmes. Over 80% of them have international accreditation. MRU comprises the Faculty of Economics and Business, the School of Law, the Faculty of Public Governance, the Academy of Public Security, Institute of Communication, Institute of Humanities, Institute of Educational Sciences and Social Work and the Institute of Psychology. Research and innovation are implemented at the Social Innovations Laboratory Network MRU LAB that includes 16 laboratories and the Research and Innovation Support Centre.

The National Distance Education University (UNED) has as its mission the public service of higher education through the modality of distance education. Since 1972, UNED has sought to translate into action the principle of equal opportunity in access to higher education through a methodology based on the principles of distance learning and focused on the needs of the student. UNED is the leader in the implementation of cutting-edge technologies applied to learning, with the largest offer of virtual courses in Spain. It offers 27 bachelor's degrees, 76 official university master's degrees and 19 doctoral programmes, all adapted to the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

Founded in 1218 by King Alfonso IX, Salamanca University is the oldest institution of higher learning in Spain. The university comprises 9 teaching and administrative campuses in Ávila, Zamora, Béjar and Salamanca. Therefore, it is characterised by its widely dispersed geography. In the city of Salamanca, the educational centres are grouped into six campuses. Today, Salamanca University consists of the colleges of Law, Liberal Arts, and Science and Medicine, as well as possessing numerous highly regarded academic units such as its Spanish language institute. The university enjoys an annual population of 30,000 students participating in upwards of 250 academic programmes.

### 3.3 Profile of the programme

EJMSBM offers a common multidisciplinary curriculum for mid-to-high level officers of agencies responsible for border security in the European Union (EU). Learning and knowledge development are geared towards practices in EU and Schengen Associated Countries BCG organisations, the ultimate beneficiaries. Scientific and practice-based knowledge is integrated by involving both academic and professional partners in programme design and delivery. This way, students draw from both practice and academic based knowledge and expertise across the EU. EJMSBM aims to promote a common EU BCG culture and harmonise learning and professional standards, whilst respecting diversity.

The programme is a three-semester full-time study programme and amounts to 90 European Credits (EC). Throughout the programme, the language of instruction is English. The programme consists of three stages of 30 EC each. In the first two stages, modules are offered, while the third stage is devoted to the dissertation. In each module, three learning phases are distinguished: independent learning, contact learning and experiential learning. In each module, students come together during a contact week at one of the partner institutes, for which they prepare through independent learning. This

independent learning is continued throughout the module. After the contact phase, students apply the knowledge in their operational context during the experiential learning phase. The dissertation requires students to synthesise the depth of learning from the programme.

Semester 1		Semester 2		Semester 3	
Module	EC	Module	EC		EC
M1 Strategy, Planning and Evaluation in Border Guarding	5	M7 Global Context of European Border Security	5	Individual Research Proposal Writing Research Circles Oral Dissertation Examination - Defence	30
M2 Fundamental Rights and Ethics in European Border Security Management	5	M8 Strategic Risk and Threat Management for European Border Security	5		
M3 Leadership and Organisational Development in Border Management	5	M9 Cooperation in Strategic Border Management	10		
M4 EU Border Policies and Strategies	5	M10 Researching Integrated Practices in Border Management	10		
M5 Innovation and Technology in Border Security	5				
M6 Researching Management Practices in Border Security	5				

## 4 Assessment per standard

In this chapter the panel assesses the EJMSBM programme according to the standards of the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes in the EHEA. The criteria for each standard are mentioned. Per standard the panel presents a brief outline of its findings, as well as the considerations that led the panel to a concluding judgement on a three-point scale: the programme either meets, partially meets or does not meet the standard. At the end of this chapter and based on its judgements on the individual standards, the panel issues an overall conclusion on the quality of the entire programme. This conclusion can be either positive, conditionally positive or negative.

### 4.1 Standard 1: Eligibility

#### 4.1.1 Status

*The institutions that offer a joint programme should be recognised as higher education institutions by the relevant authorities of their countries. Their respective national legal frameworks should enable them to participate in the joint programme and, if applicable, to award a joint degree. The institutions awarding the degree(s) should ensure that the degree(s) belong to the higher education degree systems of the countries in which they are based.*

##### *Outline of findings*

All academic partners are legally recognised as universities or Higher Education Institutes allowed by their respective national legislation to participate in the delivery of the joint programme as well as to award the joint degree to students who successfully complete all requirements. For the first two iterations of the EJMSBM programme, EASS was a non-awarding associate partner. The Estonian Higher Education Act, effective since 1 September 2019, now enables full partnership in the EJMSBM consortium.

To ensure relevant BCG expertise in the programme, the academic partners have cooperation agreements in place with the national law enforcement, BCG, police or military academies. These contribute to the delivery of the programme with expertise or logistical and administrative support, but the academic partners bear full responsibility for the quality of the programme and the level of the degree.

##### *Considerations*

The panel considers that the partners who offer the EJMSBM programme are entitled to do so and that completing the programme will lead to a recognised and accredited master's degree of academic orientation.

##### *Conclusion*

The panel assesses that the EJMSBM programme **meets** standard 1.1, status.

#### 4.1.2 Joint design and delivery

*The joint programme should be offered jointly, involving all cooperating institutions in the design and delivery of the programme.*

##### *Outline of findings*

The EJMSBM programme is offered jointly. Table 3 in the Self Evaluation Report (SER) shows the activity of the partner institutions in the curriculum: each module is assigned to one institution as the convenor/main deliverer, while it also has a back-up/alternate deliverer at another partner institution. During the site visit, the Governing Board explained that all partners share the best knowledge they have and that modules fit each partner's strengths and expertise. Main convenor and back-up institution work together in a coherent manner to make sure that, in case of an emergency, the back-up institution is able to provide support and students always get the best of what is available.

In its meeting with the panel, the Programme Board (PB) emphasized the efforts to ensure coherence between the various modules, avoiding both gaps and overlaps. Modules are not developed in isolation, but convenors have discussed from the beginning how modules build on and complement each other. After each semester, the PB organises three-day sessions with the convenors to discuss the programme's coherence and the need to review specific items. The convenors then share their information with the teachers. In addition, external examiners look horizontally across modules and institutions and see to it that everybody teaches at the same level, despite cultural differences. Finally, student feedback is taken into account when reviewing the modules and the programme as a whole.

Memberships and chairs of all boards (Governing Board, Programme Board, Board of Examiners and module boards) and committees (Quality Assurance Committee and admissions panel) are shared amongst the partner institutions. From the discussions during the site visit, the commitment of all partners involved was evident.

#### *Considerations*

The panel considers that all partners are effectively involved, both at the level of governance, organization of the programme and the actual teaching. All modules have at least two partners participating. It could be seen throughout the discussions held during the site visit that there is a dedicated team behind the programme to design, create, deliver and update the programme, also taking into account developments in the field. They know each other and collaborate effectively. Regular sessions take place to update the programme and to evaluate. The consortium has a strong joint management team, all members declare their engagement.

#### *Conclusion*

The panel assesses that the EJMSBM programme **meets** standard 1.2, joint design and delivery.

### 4.1.3 Cooperation Agreement

*The terms and conditions of the joint programme should be laid down in a cooperation agreement. The agreement should in particular cover the following issues:*

- *Denomination of the degree(s) awarded in the programme*
- *Coordination and responsibilities of the partners involved regarding management and financial organisation (including funding, sharing of costs and income etc.)*
- *Admission and selection procedures for students*
- *Mobility of students and teachers*
- *Examination regulations, student assessment methods, recognition of credits and degree awarding procedures in the consortium.*

#### *Outline of findings*

The panel has taken note of the Consortium Agreement, which runs for six years, from the start of the first iteration in 2015 until the finalisation of the third iteration in 2021. Subject to the continued support of the partners and an evaluation, the agreement may be continued. This will be decided approximately one year before the expiry of the agreement. The agreement consists of five parts; (1) general arrangements, (2) management and quality standards, including the composition and tasks of the boards and committees, (3) financial arrangements, (4) degree programme and academic standards and (5) programme policies. The degree is denominated as a master's degree; national legislation determines whether it is designated as an MSc or an MA, depending on the ISCED field of study per country.

The panel establishes that co-ordination and responsibilities are well-established and that admission and selection procedures are clearly laid down. The mobility of students and teachers is facilitated. As an effect of the current COVID-19 pandemic and ensuing traveling constraints, exchange now takes place through online teaching and discussion groups. Examination regulations, methods of assessment, recognition of credits and the procedures for awarding degrees are clearly laid down, as are the role and procedures of the Board of Examiners (BoE) and external examiners.

### *Considerations*

The panel considers the consortium agreement a comprehensive document, in which the terms and conditions of the joint programme as well as each partner's responsibilities are clearly laid down. All relevant points are covered.

### *Conclusion*

The panel assesses that the EJMSBM programme **meets** standard 1.3, cooperation agreement.

## 4.2 Standard 2: Learning Outcomes

### 4.2.1 Level {ESG 1.2}

*The intended learning outcomes should align with the corresponding level in the Framework for Qualifications in the European Higher Education Area (FQ-EHEA), as well as the applicable national qualifications framework(s).*

### *Outline of findings*

The intended learning outcomes at master's level (level 7 of the European Qualifications Framework) are described in terms of knowledge, skills and competencies in the Sectoral Qualification Framework (SQF), developed for the border guard professional sector in 2012 and aligned with the European Qualifications Framework. Learning outcomes have been formulated for the programme as a whole and for each of the three programme stages. Graduates of the EJMSBM programme therefore indeed develop skills, leadership, critical thinking, strategic planning and situational judgement required for BCG management at higher levels.

With its multidisciplinary nature, EJMSBM aims to convey the idea that *the* solution will not often be found in a single discipline or theory. Students are asked to use and combine theoretical insights to discern patterns and develop understanding in order to give meaning to controversies and challenges in their professional domain and to reflect on possible problem-solving strategies. Research and communication skills are enhanced by prescribing texts and setting assignments that stimulate critical reading and analysis as well as by exercises in presenting and academic writing. Two modules focus on research methods and are integrated with practice-based field visits. These modules specifically enable students to deepen their professional understanding as an academic professional by applying academic methods and tools to study the BCG environment. In their dissertation, students work on a research project, investigating a question in the domain of strategic border management.

### *Considerations*

The panel considers that the learning outcomes have been adequately translated into educational objectives of (components of) the curriculum. The learning objectives are clearly set out and connected with the different Qualification Frameworks and are, therefore, of the appropriate master's level.

Initially, the panel had some concerns connected to the research aspect of the programme and wondered if the programme would be able to harmonize the professional backgrounds of different students, some of whom may have had their initial academic studies a while ago. However, based on the dissertations read (see paragraph 4.2.3) the panel was reassured.

The panel suggests that special attention may be needed for some learning outcomes in the time of COVID-19 restrictions: how to ensure peer learning, interaction, critical discussion, et cetera, when physical meetings are not possible? Especially considering the importance of peer-learning and creating a strong bond within and between cohorts for the aims of the programme, this is an important point for consideration.

### *Conclusion*

The panel assesses that the EJMSBM programme **meets** standard 2.1, level.

#### 4.2.2 Disciplinary Field

*The intended learning outcomes should comprise knowledge, skills and competencies in the respective disciplinary field(s).*

##### *Outline of findings*

The consortium aims to educate students as strategic thinkers and future leaders, able to comprehend and cope with challenges and controversies in BCG management in the light of EU policy and societal contexts. The fields covered in the programme are related to the contemporary and emerging challenges and encompass migration policies, environmental challenge, governance frameworks, cultural diversities, individual rights and concerns, identity related problems, economics of border control and physical and virtual borders. The learning outcomes have been related to the Dublin descriptors at master's level and are listed in an overview. They reflect the values of the national and European BCG organisations and the aim to educate reflective practitioners through the integration of scientific and practice-based knowledge. The ability to reflect beyond monodisciplinary boundaries on relations between theoretical constructs and real-life problems is considered important, because this enables students to find out how (combinations of) insights can help to deal with contemporary and emerging strategic issues.

##### *Considerations*

The panel considers that the learning outcomes cover the required knowledge, skills and competencies in relevant disciplinary fields and that the programme's link with the professional practice is convincing and strong. The main challenge, but also added value, of the programme is in increasing the academic and scientific level of the students and developing an academic/reflective approach when confronting real-life challenges. The panel values the explicit attention to innovation and technology and recommends increasing rather than decreasing this aspect in the future.

##### *Conclusion*

The panel assesses that the EJMSBM programme **meets** standard 2.2, disciplinary field.

#### 4.2.3 Achievement [ESG 1.2]

*The programme should be able to demonstrate that the intended learning outcomes are achieved.*

##### *Outline of findings*

The module handbooks show that all learning outcomes are addressed in the ten modules. Although the dissertation, in itself, does not cover all learning outcomes, the PB views the dissertation, along with assignments, as a yardstick to measure the achievement of the intended master's level. Students are expected to independently collect and analyse data, using appropriate research methods, in order to generate or build on knowledge to understand or solve questions in the BCG field. To provide for independent assessments, dissertation committees are formed, chaired by external academic experts and external examiners. These external experts assess the dissertations according to EJMSBM assessment criteria. In September 2019, a periodic external review was conducted, including a validation of part of the dissertations and an interview with alumni on the dissertation process.

Before the site visit, the panel studied a sample of fifteen dissertations, with a representative distribution of grades. The panel generally agreed with the grades awarded. All dissertations are well-structured and follow the same framework. Topics can be brought in by students, but are also gathered from the working field by the programme management and administration. The panel notes that some students try to address a very broad question on the basis of a quite limited set of data. There also is a predominance of qualitative research methods, often consisting of a combination of desk research and semi-structured interviews. Overall, the panel is quite satisfied with the grades. Some of the dissertations with the highest grades were outstanding. The assessments were fair. Feedback on the dissertations with lower grades is sufficiently detailed, but rather thin for the best dissertations.

The achievement of the learning outcomes is corroborated by the fact that alumni continue their activities on the BCG labour market. A number of alumni have been promoted within their own organisation or have successfully acquired jobs in related EU organisations and even have been admitted to PhD research in the BCG domain. In their meeting with the panel, the alumni expressed

their appreciation of the EJMSBM programme. Some of them continue their relationship with the programme as support of the teaching staff. All of them value the network they have been able to build through the EJMSBM programme. According to the students whom the panel met, their employers are generally enthusiastic and positive about the value of the programme because the learning objectives fit the needs of the organisation, although not all sending organisations explicitly recognise the added value of EJMSBM graduates for their organisation in terms of further career opportunities.

#### *Considerations*

The panel considers that the programme produces good results. The dissertations show that the learning outcomes are based on academic requirements, with a good balance between the practical, professional and academic elements of the programme. This is where the strength of the programme lies. The dissertations convincingly show that these learning outcomes are achieved. The panel advises stimulating the use of a wider range of research methods. The panel also feels that detailed feedback should be given to all students, also to the good ones, and advises paying more attention to this.

The panel notes that students, alumni and sending organisations appreciate the value of the programme because students can take their newly acquired knowledge and skills back to their work and apply it. The panel feels that sending organisations should be encouraged to translate their appreciation of this added value into better possibilities for the combination of work and study (see also paragraph 4.3.3) and a more rapid career path.

#### *Conclusion*

The panel assesses that the EJMSBM programme **meets** standard 2.3, achievement.

### 4.2.4 Regulated Profession

*If relevant for the specific joint programme, the minimum agreed training conditions specified in the European Union Directive 2005/36/EC, or relevant common trainings frameworks established under the Directive, should be taken into account*

#### *Outline of findings*

This standard is not relevant for the assessment of the EJMSBM programme.

#### *Conclusion*

The panel issues no conclusion as standard 2.4, regulated professions, is not applicable.

## 4.3 Standard 3: Study programme [ESG 1.2]

### 4.3.1 Curriculum

*The structure and content of the curriculum should be fit to enable the students to achieve the intended learning outcomes.*

#### *Outline of findings*

The EJMSBM programme is a full-time programme of 90 EC, characterised by international mobility, and is delivered over three stages. Each stage represents one semester of 30 EC. The first two stages consist of taught modules, six in stage 1 and four in stage 2, while stage 3 comprises the dissertation writing period (see paragraph 3.3 for an overview).

In each module, three learning phases are distinguished: independent learning, contact learning and experiential learning. Students are presented with evidence-based and academic knowledge and learn to apply this through problem solving in their professional context. At the beginning of a module, students are requested to read preparatory materials. During the contact weeks, students integrate the scientific- and practice-based knowledge through various learning methodologies: working in small groups on scenario-based problems, discussion and debate of key concepts and BCG management issues, simulation exercises, team problem-solving activities and assignments during field visits. Upon returning to their workplace, students apply and share their knowledge in the operational context, so

colleagues also benefit from this period of experiential learning and provide input for additional questions. Assessment takes place in the final week of a module.

Module convenors are asked by the PB and external examiners to explain how they address research and the methodologies that underpin their module and to share this information with the module's teaching staff. Students receive an overview per taught module, including literature and methods, to understand how individual courses fit in the overall curriculum. At the Opening Ceremony, they are informed about the importance of a knowledge base for BCG and how they can actively contribute to this. Two modules are specifically devoted to research methods: module 6 on quantitative methods (5 EC) and module 10 on qualitative methods (10 EC).

In the dissertation stage, students synthesise what they have learned in a research project. The Dissertation Guidelines describe the process and what is required from students and supervisors during this stage. Before starting to collect data, students need an approval of their proposal by the BoE. Research circles are organised around thematically similar topics to facilitate peer learning. Students defend their dissertation in an oral examination. The final grade is based on an assessment of the written work and the defence.

Modules are adapted on the basis of periodic evaluations by students and alumni, external examiners and reviewers. Convenors exchange experiences and discuss the coherence between modules. During the contactweeks of a module, all teachers are present and while one gives sessions, others are invited to listen, so they know better during the week what happens and can refer to it. The PB explained how feedback helps to increase coherence and avoid overlaps, and provided the example of module 7: after analysing the feedback on the first iteration, it was decided to review one topic (risk analysis) and move it to module 8.

#### *Considerations*

The panel appreciates that the curriculum has been designed by all partners and meets the aims of the programme, in line with the expertise of the partners involved and the learning objectives. The panel considers this is very professionally done: the overarching design helps to bring together the broad group of organising teams. It is valuable that there are regular coordination meetings between partners about the structure and content of the curriculum (see also paragraph 4.1.2) and that the programme is adapted in response to feedback and developments in the field. Continuous quality assurance through relevant board meetings on a yearly basis with input from teachers and students achieves this aim

Research has an appropriate position in the curriculum, in line with the importance of this aspect in the learning outcomes and the academic level and ambitions of the programme. It prepares students not only to write a dissertation that is up to academic standards but also to become reflective professionals in their later careers. The panel notes that the focus seems to be on qualitative rather than quantitative research methods and wonders if the learning objectives should focus more on understanding quantitative issues and applying quantitative tools, and specifically on effectiveness issues, or vice versa, if the focus is on qualitative method, this should be reflected in the curriculum. The panel also considers that in the future the evaluation form for a dissertation could be reviewed referring to more evident academic arguments for scoring.

#### *Conclusion*

The panel assesses that the EJMSBM programme **meets** standard 3.1, curriculum.

### 4.3.2 Credits

*The European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) should be applied properly and the distribution of credits should be clear.*

#### *Outline of findings*

The EJMSBM curriculum consists of three semesters of 30 EC each. The number of EC per module is agreed upon by all partners and is clearly set out in the documentation. Timelines for all three stages provide details per week, regarding contact sessions, independent learning and assessment. These timelines are made available to students on the electronic learning environment Moodle.

Module handbooks provide information on the main components of a module, including learning outcomes, learning strategy and assessment strategy. The handbooks also pay attention to the responsibilities of both students and teachers. The average workload per EC is 28 hours.

#### *Considerations*

The panel considers that the EJMSBM programme applies the ECTS properly with regard to the overall programme and the respective programme components.

#### *Conclusion*

The panel assesses that the EJMSBM programme **meets** standard 3.2, credits.

### 4.3.3 Workload

*A joint bachelor programme will typically amount to a total student workload of 180-240 ECTS-credits; a joint master programme will typically amount to 90-120 ECTS-credits and should not be less than 60 ECTS-credits at second cycle level (credit ranges according to the FQ-EHEA); for joint doctorates there is no credit range specified. The workload and the average time to complete the programme should be monitored.*

#### *Outline of findings*

Most students combine their studies for the EJMSBM programme with their regular job. Occasionally, a student is granted a study leave. Employers are informed that EJMSBM is a fulltime programme and that they are accountable for the students' ability to participate in it effectively. They are asked to consent to their student's application and sign an agreement to this effect. The intention of this agreement is that employers will take their employee's study into account when assigning duties. Feedback from students, alumni and programme staff makes it clear that, in practice, this is not always the case. Especially in the dissertation period, when students don't have to attend regular contact weeks, employers tend to forget their employee's study load. Students and alumni told the panel that personal circumstances (e.g. the birth of a baby) can sometimes increase the pressure even further. However, they all considered the workload doable and felt that both peer support and programme support were helpful. For every module, there is a single point of contact, so teaching staff can respond fast, if needed. If a student cannot cope or submit on time, an extension can be granted, e.g. to submit an assignment at a later moment. The programme staff supports students' requests for study leave, which are possible in some countries. The students also mentioned that even though it is hard, they think it is worthwhile that they can work and study at the same time. It gives them a unique opportunity to apply knowledge in practice and understand the academic perspective of their daily practical work. They also indicated this aspect helps in developing time management and other personal effectiveness skills.

#### *Considerations*

The panel considers that the workload of the programme is intensive but meets the standards. The workload is well-monitored by the programme's bodies, as are the average completion time and completion rates. The main challenge is that all participants do the EJMSBM programme in addition to their 'day jobs' which makes the total working load high, especially when private life is also taken into account. The suggestion, therefore, is to increase the current tools to guarantee that students get sufficient time from their employers to do the master's programme. For example, the commitment form signed by employers might be made more concrete and detailed about how much time and when students should get, also for the dissertation. Since the dissertations often concern highly relevant topics, this would also increase the long term benefit for all involved.

#### *Conclusion*

The panel assesses that the EJMSBM programme **meets** standard 3.3, workload.

## 4.4 Standard 4: Admission and Recognition [ESG 1.4]

### 4.4.1 Admission

*The admission requirements and selection procedures should be appropriate in light of the programme's level and discipline.*

#### *Outline of findings*

Applicants for the EJMSBM programme must be nominated by their national BCG agency, the sending organisation. They must meet a number of requirements: (1) a bachelor's or equivalent degree in a domain related to the subject of the degree, (2) at least three years' managerial and/or command experience in an operational border guard function, (3) English proficiency at B2 level, (4) security clearance complying with EU standards, and (5) citizenship of an EU member state or Schengen Associated Country.

Representatives of the sending organisations told the panel that they ask interested employees to write a motivation letter about what the EJMSBM programme is going to contribute to their development. They also speak with an applicant's supervisor, to find out what a supervisor's plans are with the applicant, and look at the wider organisational picture from the perspective of personnel policy and career development. The application files of nominees are then sent to Frontex, the programme administrator.

The number of admissions is set between 16 and 40 per iteration. For the third iteration, 34 students were admitted, compared to 26 for the first two iterations. The PB described this as a challenge, especially for modules with a relatively small group of teachers. For group work, more groups had to be created and it is more difficult to provide timely feedback. They also explained, however, that in this case the COVID-19 adaptations, with online instead of offline teaching, proved beneficial. Groups could be organised in parallel and teachers could listen in to them. Overall, the PB feels that they were able to handle the larger number of students.

Inclusive education and the admission of students with special needs are no explicit discussion topics in the admission procedure. The panel asked about this in a number of interviews. Most interviewees emphasised that BCG employees must be physically fit and that the issue has not come up before. Special support is available (see paragraph 4.7.2), but was not mentioned.

#### *Considerations*

The panel considers that the requirements, both as to academic achievements and experience in practice, are clearly stated and are manifestly appropriate for the programme. The admission system is appropriate and there is a very clear idea of who should enroll in the programme. Nomination decisions are taken at the national level. A suggestion for improvement is to think about the transparency and objective criteria used for the selection at the national level.

The programme is also encouraged to reflect on the question if a (much) larger number of students will interfere with the quality and intensity of the experience and supervision, and if this increase should not be matched by additional resources to avoid this. In the future, consideration should be given to prioritising the variety of the student cohort and including students with special needs. The panel wishes to point out that BCG staff at the managerial level not always reaches that position through the lines, but sometimes comes in from other organisations. The statement that they must necessarily be physically fit is, therefore, not valid. The panel notes that the programme aims to prepare high level professionals in management, where it is assumed special physical preparation is not required; the learning and teaching environment should facilitate the participation of students with special needs.

#### *Conclusion*

The panel assesses that the EJMSBM programme **meets** standard 4.1, admission.

#### 4.4.2 Recognition

*Recognition of qualifications and of periods of studies (including recognition of prior learning) should be applied in line with the Lisbon Recognition Convention and subsidiary documents.*

##### *Outline of findings*

In line with the principles of lifelong learning, the programme wishes to give value to prior learning. Students can ask for an exemption for two modules: M1 (Leadership and Organisational Development in Border Management) and M7 (Global Context in European Border Security). The BoE examines the requests and decides whether to grant the exemption. The SER explains that, due to Spanish national legislation, a maximum of 15% of a programme's EC can be recognised as prior learning, which determines the EJMSBM limit to 10 EC (multiples of 5). The SER states that students who are granted an exemption, will continue to participate in the module but will not be required to do all the readings or the assessment. This is because the learning environment is built on bringing together the knowledge and experiences of BCG managers across Europe and sharing this in debates. In the interview with the panel, the BoE also mentioned the opposite possibility: a student can be asked to take the assessment without participating in the module.

##### *Considerations*

The panel considers that the recognition of previous qualifications and prior learning is adequately provided for in the EJMSBM programme. The panel agrees that, given the nature of the programme, there are few courses in respect of which an exemption is likely to be appropriate.

##### *Conclusion*

The panel assesses that the EJMSBM programme **meets** standard 4.2, recognition.

### 4.5 Standard 5: Learning, Teaching and Assessment [ESG 1.3]

#### 4.5.1 Learning and teaching

*The programme should be designed to correspond with the intended learning outcomes, and the learning and teaching approaches applied should be adequate to achieve those. The diversity of students and their needs should be respected and attended to, especially in view of potential different cultural backgrounds of the students.*

##### *Outline of findings*

Part of the rationale for the EJMSBM programme is to contribute to the development of a common culture and common approach to European border security. The role of exchange and discussion in groups of students with mixed national backgrounds is, therefore, an important characteristic of the programme. The programme aims for students to acquire the necessary skills and knowledge at managerial and strategic level as well as an investigative and reflective academic attitude, allowing them to take responsibility for their own learning process. In line with these objectives, the programme design is student-centred, stimulating students to increase their understanding of the multidisciplinary EJMSBM domain, critically reflect on this and apply it in their work situation.

In the first two stages of the programme, students spend 60% of their time on independent study and 40% on contact weeks and communication. Assignments are given at regular intervals, which encourages students to work during the whole period. A variety of assessment methods is used and teachers provide formative and summative feedback. At the end of a module, the final test must be completed as soon as possible, so it will not interfere with the start of the next module. Re-sits are scheduled as soon as possible after the first test. In each iteration, modules are tested and assessed twice (including one re-sit). The SER describes how the student-centred nature of the programme works out in the learning and teaching approaches, such as the focus on active student participation, the coaching and facilitating role of teachers and the role of collaborative and interactive learning.

Current students started the programme in a regular fashion with contact weeks and face to face meetings. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic such physical meetings were no longer possible and the

programme switched to online meetings from module 7 onwards. Overall, both student and staff feedback are positive on how this was handled. All mention that it is a great advantage that students knew each other personally from the first six modules. They doubt if it would work as well when the programme is offered online from the beginning.

#### *Considerations*

The programme design clearly corresponds with the intended learning outcomes; it also takes account of the 'sandwich' nature of the programme and the fact that students will still be in their jobs. The programme design is student-centred, stimulating students to actively and regularly participate.

The programme's student population is inherently very diverse in terms of backgrounds and, in fact, this is part of the value of the programme, as students learn how to work in such an environment and with people with different backgrounds. This has been made an integral part of the programme. The intake differs every year in terms of disciplinary background of the students. A suggestion could, therefore, be to be somewhat flexible in the different modules to see what the specific needs of each iteration are. The panel recognises the respect for cultural diversity and sees that diversity is respected, although there do not so far appear to be instances of students with special needs. The programme does take account of personal circumstances and is flexible with deadlines when this is appropriate.

Multiple tools, including online tools, are used to support learning. The participation of several experts in distance learning can be seen here. The way the programme adapted to the COVID-19 restrictions on face-to-face teaching is commendable. Especially considering the importance of the development of a common culture and common approach, a further suggestion is to improve the functioning of the current mentor system, so as to improve cross-cohort connections. In addition, some of the envisaged ideas to improve teaching interaction could indeed be put into practice, even in these COVID-19 times.

#### *Conclusion*

The panel assesses that the EJMSBM programme **meets** standard 5.1, learning and teaching.

### 4.5.2 Assessment of Students

*The examination regulations and the assessment of the achieved learning outcomes should correspond with the intended learning outcomes. They should be applied consistently among partner institutions.*

#### *Outline of findings*

The Teaching and Examination Regulations contain the relevant assessment regulations. Ways of assessment are related to the learning objectives and are set out in the study guides and module descriptors. Assessments must be valid, reliable, transparent, suitable and comparable. Skills are assessed in the form of a product, e.g. a dissertation, paper, or presentation. The role of examiners and supervisors is made clear and a policy to deal with academic misconduct and cheating is in place. Students receive information on how to avoid plagiarism.

Teachers remain responsible for the assessment, also when peer assessment is used in group work. In such cases, the peer assessment serves a diagnostic purpose or is part of the learning process. In the interviews, the panel asked about the risk of freeriding in group work. Both the PB and the BoE explained how they try to find a balance between the importance of group work and the risk of freeriding: teachers have students work together and at the end fill in a form about their individual contribution. Online teaching in the COVID-19 period brought as an advantage that teaching staff can listen in to group work. This makes it more difficult for students to hide if they would like to. On the other hand, they insist that, as a programme, you have to have some trust as well. They added that the performance in group work is never the only assessment in a module.

Students are awarded a letter grade for their work. The minimum pass mark is E. Students need to have passed all modules of a stage before they are allowed to progress to the next stage. In case of a fail, there is one opportunity for re-submission and thus re-assessment. Grades are not published unless the BoE has approved them. The BoE has the right to correct the grades.

Students receive feedback on their assignments and tests. Feedback on the dissertations varies from extensive to rather thin, the panel noted when reading a sample of dissertations: the weaker dissertations usually received more extensive and more useful feedback than the good ones (see also paragraph 4.2.3). Regarding feedback practices, both the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) and the BoE mentioned their wish to increase the amount of formative feedback.

The SER describes that mechanisms to guarantee and improve the quality of assessment are found in the quality of teaching staff, consultations among them when designing tests, and the role of the BoE and external examiners. Every stage, QAC, PB and BoE jointly organise a review session with all module convenors, discussing not only the (content of the) modules, but also the tests, test results and possible changes in the way of testing. This meeting also aims to create a shared vision on the desired level and standards of modules and tests.

In addition to what is mentioned above, the BoE controls the quality of examiners: teachers are only allowed to examine when, in the opinion of the BoE, they are sufficiently skilled to do so. The BoE has the right to check assessments beforehand and ask for improvements if the quality is insufficient. External examiners have the task to look horizontally across modules and institutions and see that everybody teaches at the same level, despite cultural differences and differences in background (theoretical teachers and practitioners). External examiners see to it that modules stay more or less homogeneous and at the right theoretical level. They report to the BoE. Their reports, with the BoE comments, are then sent to the QAC and are made public for staff and students via Moodle.

#### *Considerations*

The panel considers that appropriate examination rules and regulations are in place. The BoE and the external examiners ensure consistency of application among the partner institutions. The assessment of the learning outcomes in module tests and dissertation corresponds with the intended learning outcomes. The panel appreciates that the requirements for the dissertation and how to avoid plagiarism are introduced to the students in advance. The panel's initial concern about students freeriding in group work proved unnecessary: the programme representatives acknowledged the risk, have mechanisms in place to deal with it (individual contribution forms for students, presentations on the evolution of the work where the students get a formative assessment), and the final grade does not only depend on the group work. The panel repeats its recommendation (see paragraph 4.2.3) to provide meaningful feedback on the dissertation to all students, including the (very) good ones.

#### *Conclusion*

The panel assesses that the EJMSBM programme **meets** standard 5.2, assessment of students.

## 4.6 Standard 6: Student Support [ESG 1.6]

*The student support services should contribute to the achievement of the intended learning outcomes. They should take into account specific challenges of mobile students.*

#### *Outline of findings*

Frontex provides the central coordination and administration for the EJMSBM programme. Frontex has signed agreements with the sending authorities concerning financial arrangements and the commitment to facilitate learning. All costs related to the ten mobility periods are covered by Frontex, while a network of partnership academies is in place to facilitate all aspects of mobility. The programme manager, assigned by Frontex, and coordinators in the countries of venue organise transport, lodgings and daily life during contact weeks. Local programme coordinators act as a contact point for organisational and administrative issues. Information on the programme and relevant policies is available online in Moodle. Information in Moodle is regularly updated. Online facilities were extended and made available to students to facilitate online learning when COVID-19 posed restrictions on physical meetings.

The student support process starts at the bi-annual Opening Ceremony at Frontex Headquarters in Warsaw before the start of the programme. The Opening Ceremony includes the so-called Module 0, where students receive information to help create the necessary mind-set for successful and timely

completion of the programme, are introduced to academic skills and get acquainted with one another and the teaching staff. The students emphasised in their interview with the panel that this module 0 was important to help create social cohesion among them.

Students are provided with a mentor, a member of the teaching staff, and are encouraged to contact their mentor for any subject influencing their study progress. From student and alumni evaluations, it appears that the mentoring system is not very well known. When asked about this system by the panel, students said they mostly found peers, alumni, teachers and convenors when they needed support. They also agreed, however, that the mentoring system could be improved.

#### *Considerations*

The panel considers that the support mechanism works well. Both the sessions with the students and the alumni reassured the panel that students get the necessary support whenever needed on academic, practical and technical/IT issues. The panel appreciates the strong network between students and alumni. The Moodle system is constantly updated. The students were provided with the necessary digital environment to continue their studies during the COVID-19 crisis. The panel suggests to improve the mentor network. Whilst it could be very valuable, also by connecting different cohorts, it seems to be underused right now.

#### *Conclusion*

The panel assesses that the EJMSBM programme **meets** standard 6, student support.

## 4.7 Standard 7: Resources [ESG 1.5 & 1.6]

### 4.7.1 Staff

*The staff should be sufficient and adequate (qualifications, professional and international experience) to implement the study programme.*

#### *Outline of findings*

The SER and the CVs of teaching staff show that teachers are experts in their field, are certified at national level, comply with English language standards at level C1, are actively involved in research and hold a PhD. Module evaluations offer students the opportunity to comment on the perceived quality of individual teachers, not only their didactical and academic skills, but also their understanding of the EU strategic border management context. Overall, these evaluations are close to 3.3 out of 5, at a 5-point scale. QAC informed the panel that, if a teacher is evaluated negatively more than once, s/he is not invited again.

In the interview with the panel, the students commented on the difference between academic teachers and lecturers with a professional background: the didactic skills of practitioners were generally less good than those of academic lecturers. They did not consider this a big problem and emphasised that all module convenors are good. They especially commended module 4, with many different teachers. The students added that they all have different backgrounds, so topics were at times interesting for some of them, less for others. When teachers had to switch to online teaching this spring, some felt more comfortable than others, but, overall, the transition took place without major problems. Handling the larger number of students (34 instead of 26 in previous iterations) was in fact made a little easier (see also paragraph 4.4.1).

#### *Considerations*

The panel considers that both the academic and practice-based teaching staff are well-qualified academically and possess highly relevant specific expertise on border management. Both academic and non-academic teachers are experienced people in their fields. The panel commends the programme for achieving consistency and coordination between modules with so many people involved: the single-minded purpose and positive integration and interaction of staff are evident. While some teachers are perceived as being stronger than others, serious account is taken of feedback in evaluating performance. Teachers have shown themselves to be flexible, both in handling larger student numbers and in switching to online teaching. One suggestion might be to assist some experts from the field, who

may not have much didactic experience, with some advice or training on how to lecture effectively, also in an online environment.

#### *Conclusion*

The panel assesses that the EJMSBM programme **meets** standard 7.1, staff.

### 4.7.2 Facilities

*The facilities should be sufficient and adequate in view of the intended learning outcomes.*

#### *Outline of findings*

The SER lists the different types of facilities that are made available to EJMSBM students. All partner institutions use Moodle as the virtual learning environment and communication medium. Frontex ensures that all required reading materials are available electronically in Moodle or the academic partners' virtual libraries. The SER describes the specific specialisations of each partner's library. Written assignments are uploaded in Moodle to be checked for plagiarism by means of *Urkund*. All admitted students are provided an iPad. Frontex provided IT support when teaching had to go online earlier this year because of COVID-19. Upon questioning, students explicitly confirmed that they are satisfied with the programme's facilities.

At all locations appropriate classrooms are available during contact weeks. Access to classrooms and other facilities can be provided to students who require special attention. Students with dyslexia, illness and/or physical limitations are informed on additional services and advised on potential adaptations to the programme, planning and scheduling of assessments. In the interviews, this policy was not mentioned when the panel asked about students with special needs.

#### *Considerations*

The panel considers that the facilities are appropriate and the programme organisers have risen to the challenge posed by the COVID-19 crisis to offer a good online learning environment.

#### *Conclusion*

The panel assesses that the EJMSBM programme **meets** standard 7.2, facilities.

## 4.8 Standard 8: Transparency and Documentation [ESG 1.8]

*Relevant information about the programme like admission requirements and procedures, course catalogue, examination and assessment procedures etc. should be well documented and published by taking into account specific needs of mobile students.*

#### *Outline of findings*

All information about the programme is available in Moodle, accessible via internet and obtainable as hard-copy via the Frontex programme coordinator and administrator. Information is updated regularly. Upon admission, students are informed on specific details and receive contact data from their mentors and the programme management. The module dossiers provide information on the improvements that have been implemented in response to earlier evaluations. Students did not mention any problems with transparency or documentation when they met with the panel.

#### *Considerations*

The panel considers that the transparency and documentation are exemplary. Documentation is available in the different digital platforms. As suggested in paragraph 4.4.1, the admission criteria at the national level could perhaps be made more transparent.

#### *Conclusion*

The panel assesses that the EJMSBM programme **meets** standard 8, transparency and documentation.

## 4.9 Standard 9: Quality Assurance [ESG 1.1 & part 1]

*The cooperating institutions should apply joint internal quality assurance processes in accordance with part one of the ESG.*

### *Outline of findings*

Both at module and at programme level, information is regularly gathered and analysed to monitor and improve the quality. The programme administration collects data on the programme implementation at each stage. Students evaluate each module, students, alumni, teachers, examiners and stakeholders evaluate the programme. Data and management information are collected on recruitment and profiles, progression and achievement, academic misconduct, academic staff, quality management process, management of programme, graduates, and border guard organisations. QAC reviews all feedback, identifies strengths and weaknesses and offers recommendations for follow-up actions to subsequently improve programme delivery. These are discussed at meetings of QAC, BoE, PB and the Governing Board and, when necessary, adjustments are introduced. Examples of actions taken are changing a topic from one module to another (see paragraph 4.3.1) and replacing teachers after negative evaluations (see paragraph 4.7.1).

Students are represented and included in all boards and QAC. QAC explained that student members are nominated at the beginning of module 3, after the first two modules have provided the opportunity to get to know the students. They are appointed by the Governing Board. This system seems to work well.

QAC provided an internal review report on all aspects of quality control and improvement of the programme at the end of both completed iterations. The consortium also undertakes external quality assurance on a cyclical basis. This refers not only to the external examiners who write module and programme reports for the BoE and QAC, but also to external reviewers who are invited to review the programme. This was done in 2019 after the second iteration.

### *Considerations*

The panel considers that the system of quality assessment is well-developed. The joint internal quality assurance process is applied properly and external feedback is also considered as an instrument for improvement. EJMSBM has a very good feedback mechanism. It shows an openness to improvements and a clear will to tackle the challenges that obviously arise in a large collaboration. The panel observes that feedback is the norm in all aspects of the programme.

### *Conclusion*

The panel assesses that the EJMSBM programme **meets** standard 9, quality assurance.

## 4.10 Conclusion

Overall, the panel concludes that EJMSBM is an ambitious programme with a very clear and laudable aim of creating a core of border guard professionals who can deal with the urgent and important challenges they face on a more academic, reflective and research-based footing. To this end, a consortium has been brought together that unites relevant and strong expertise in different areas and demonstrates a strong shared ethos and passion to make this programme work and to contribute to this field collectively. Even if the positive spillovers of this collaboration are not strictly speaking relevant for the assessment of the master itself, it deserves to be noted. Considering the unique nature of the programme, and the very specific aims and nature of the participants, there remains a certain tension with the full scientific and academic ambitions of the programme and the practice-oriented focus. This is exemplified by the dissertation, where people tend to focus on qualitative research and less on quantitative research and data collection as such. Of course, there are improvements possible here and there, but, at the same time, the panel feels it is also wise to set realistic aims and to appreciate the extent to which aims are met and students are trained to an academic level rather than to compare EJMSBM to more purely academic, research-oriented masters. Overall, therefore, the panel wishes to stress its appreciation for the academic contribution made by the master's programme to this important field, and the energy and enthusiasm with which the different consortium members contribute.

## 5 Overview of the assessments

Standard	Assessment
<b>1. Eligibility</b>	
1.1 Status	Meets the standard
1.2 Joint design and delivery	Meets the standard
1.3 Cooperation Agreement	Meets the standard
<b>2. Learning Outcomes</b>	
2.1 Level	Meets the standard
2.2 Disciplinary field	Meets the standard
2.3 Achievement	Meets the standard
2.4 Regulated Professions	Not applicable
<b>3. Study Programme</b>	
3.1 Curriculum	Meets the standard
3.2 Credits	Meets the standard
3.3 Workload	Meets the standard
<b>4. Admission and Recognition</b>	
4.1 Admission	Meets the standard
4.2 Recognition	Meets the standard
<b>5. Admission and Recognition</b>	
5.1 Learning and teaching	Meets the standard
5.2 Assessment of students	Meets the standard
<b>6. Student Support</b>	
	Meets the standard
<b>7. Student Support</b>	
7.1 Staff	Meets the standard
7.2 Facilities	Meets the standard
<b>8. Transparency and Documentation</b>	
	Meets the standard
<b>9. Quality Assurance</b>	
	Meets the standard
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>Positive</b>

## Annex 1: Composition of the panel

- Prof. Dr. Laurence W. Gormley, *chair*, Emeritus Professor of European Law at Groningen, Chair Accreditation Panel European Master in Law and Economics;
- Dr. Armin Cuyvers (NL), Faculty director of Masters Programmes/Associate professor of EU Law at Leiden Law School;
- Dr. Mark Foley (IRL), inspector An Garda Siochana;
- Dr. Saule Maciukaite-Zviniene (LTU), head for Entrepreneurship and Innovation, Vilnius University Lithuania; President National Council of Education and senior advisor to the President of the Republic of Lithuania (2014-2019);
- Mary Hayrapetyan MSc, *student member*, graduated from the Erasmus Mundus Joint Master International Development Studies (GLODEP), currently Consultant in the Office of the Deputy Director General, Development Sector, World Intellectual Property Organisation, Switzerland.

The panel was assisted by ir. Lineke van Bruggen, policy advisor at NVAO, and by dr. Marianne van der Weiden, secretary.

All members and the secretary of the panel completed and signed a declaration of independence and confidentiality.

## Annex 2: Schedule of the site visit

On 2-3 November 2020, the panel organised an online site visit as part of the external assessment procedure of the European Joint Master in Strategic Border Management (EJMSBM). The schedule of the visit was as follows:

### 2 November 2020

13.30 – 14.00	Preparatory panel meeting
14.00 – 14.45	Interview with the representatives of the Governing Board of the EJMSBM Consortium Partners
14.45 – 15.15	Internal panel meeting
15.15 – 16.00	Interview with the representatives of the Sending Organisations (SO) (Border and Coast Guard community) and EJMSBM alumni of the 1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> iteration
16.00 – 16.15	Internal panel meeting
16.15 – 16.45	Interview with the representatives of the Quality Assurance Committee
16.45 – 18.45	Internal panel meeting

### 3 November 2020

10.00 – 10.45	Interview with the representatives of the Board of Examiners, external examiners
10.45 – 11.15	Internal panel meeting
11.15 – 12.30	Interview with the representatives of the Programme Board
12.30 – 13.30	Lunch Break
13.30 – 14.15	Interview with the current EJMSBM students
14.15 – 17.00	Internal panel meeting
17.00 – 17.15	Presentation of preliminary findings and closing remarks by panel chair

## Annex 3: Document reviewed

### *Programme documents presented by the institution*

#### Self Evaluation Report

##### Annexes:

- National Components
- Diploma and Diploma Supplement (sample)
- Dissertation subjects from iterations 2015-2017 and 2017-2019
- List of external experts involved in dissertation committees in 2017 and 2019
- QAC internal review reports (summaries)
- External Review Reports
- Comments on External Reviews by PB and EE
- Alumni Evaluation and Sending Authorities' feedback (1<sup>st</sup> iteration)
- Module Handbooks and Module Descriptors EJMSBM
- Timeline iterations 2015-2021
- Policies and procedures, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, including Quality Assurance Handbook, Student Handbook, Dissertation Guidelines, Teaching and Examination Regulations and Teaching Staff Handbook
- Intakes (anonymous) for all three iterations
- Granted exemptions by the Board of Examiners over three iterations
- EJMSBM Grading System
- Report from External Examiners
- FRONTEx Code of Conduct
- Scientific results of the EJMSBM teaching community

#### Consortium Agreement

CVs teaching staff, QAC, EE and Governing Board members

Table on the relation between the Dublin descriptors and the outcomes of EJMSBM

Module allocation and role of consortium partners

Crossreference between learning outcomes and programme – stages – modules

Overview of experiences with online education since the outbreak of COVID-19

Sample of fifteen dissertations of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> iterations

## Annex 4 : List of abbreviations

BCG	Border and Coast Guard
BoE	Board of Examiners
EASS	Estonian Academy of Security Sciences
EC	European Credit
EER	Education and Examination Regulations
EJMSBM	European Joint Master in Strategic Border Management
ESG	European Standards and Guidelines
EU	European Union
ma	master
MRU	Mykolas Romeris University
NLDA	Netherlands Defence Academy
NVAO	Dutch Flemish Accreditation Body
PB	Programme Board
QAC	Quality Assurance Committee
RTA	Rezekne Academy of Technologies
SER	Self Evaluation Report
SQF	Sectoral Qualification Framework
UNED	National Distance Education University
wo	wetenschappelijk onderwijs (academically oriented higher education)

The panel report has been ordered by NVAO for the re-accreditation of the European Joint Master's in Strategic Border Management of Netherlands Defence Academy, Faculty of Military Sciences.

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