

## GENERAL INFORMATION

**The Estonian Academy of Security Sciences (EASS)** <https://sisekaitse.ee/en/estonian-academy-security-sciences> is an institution of professional higher education in the area of government of the Ministry of the Interior providing education and Master's studies in the area of internal Security. The Academy prepares civil servants in four Colleges under the following specialties: police and border guard, rescue, **prison service**, taxation and customs. Studies are implemented on the levels of vocational training, professional higher education and Master's studies as in both forms of daily- and distance studies. The academic structures of the academy include four colleges, the Internal Security Institute and the Language Centre.

The Academy of the Security Sciences has created excellent opportunities for successful academic work, conducting applied research, professional self-development and cooperation with organizations for its lecturers and students in Estonia and in foreign countries. The EASS publishes research papers and other internal security and public service-related educational resources.

**Prison Service College** provides instruction on both professional higher education level (EQF level 6) and vocational education level (EQF level 4) to students who hold a secondary school diploma and are interested in law, justice and safety of society. Prison Service College of the Estonian Academy of Security Sciences (EASS) works in close cooperation with the Ministry of Justice. The Prison Service College also plays a part in analyzing, developing, and shaping the work of prisons. The work of prisons is coordinated by the Prisons Department of the Ministry of Justice, which is managed by the Deputy Secretary General for prisons, who is also the chairman of the Council of the Prison Service College. <https://sisekaitse.ee/en/college-of-justice>

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## THE INFORMATION FOR THE DISCUSSION

### FROM TRAINING ROOM TO PRISON FLOOR: CENTERING WELL-BEING AND REAL-WORLD READINESS

### WORKPLACE-BASED LEARNING MODEL FOR PRISON OFFICERS IN ESTONIA

#### Background information

One of the strategic goals of the Estonian Prison Service is to be an attractive and employee-friendly organisation that places a high value on staff satisfaction – including in the area of training. The need to train prison officers in a more flexible, efficient, and supportive manner became increasingly evident, particularly as the traditional nine-month, school-based curriculum was often criticized for its limited adaptability, questionable relevance, and insufficient alignment with the practical needs of the employer. In response, the Prison Service College of the Estonian Academy of Security Sciences, in collaboration with the employer, initiated the development of a workplace-based prison

guard training programme at the end of 2022. The curriculum was piloted in the spring of 2023, and, building on the insights gathered during the pilot phase, a revised curriculum was officially implemented in the 2024/2025 academic year. This new model not only aligns with real-world job requirements and the learning preferences of adult students, but also promotes trainee well-being by offering greater flexibility, reducing the need for relocation, and enabling a healthier balance between work, study, and personal life.

## **OVERVIEW OF THE PRISON GUARD CURRICULUM**

**Scope:** 30 ECVET (European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training), EQF 4

The updated prison guard curriculum is designed with a clear structure and logical progression, reflecting a coordinated effort among multiple partners. Rooted in the principles of workplace-based learning, the curriculum supports the gradual development of knowledge, practical skills, and professional attitudes—from foundational to more advanced levels.

At the core of the curriculum are six compulsory modules that seamlessly integrate theoretical instruction with practical application. The updated approach embeds hands-on learning directly. This allows students to apply their knowledge in real working life environment, enhancing engagement, deepening understanding, and supporting long-term retention of key competencies.

Each module is designed to address critical aspects of the prison officer's role, including communication, legal awareness, surveillance activities, and security tactics.

To further support flexible and self-directed learning, extensive electronic materials have been developed for each module. These resources provide continuous access to relevant content and enable independent study alongside workplace activities.

The principle of complex tasks has been used throughout the curriculum to assess the achievement of learning outcomes – learning outcomes are assessed together. A non-differentiated (pass/fail) grading system is used throughout. The final examination consists of selective observation of the student's performance during actual workdays, allowing for an authentic evaluation of readiness and professional capability.

The new curriculum represents a modern, integrated approach to correctional training—aligning learning with workplace realities and providing a strong foundation for both professional competence and long-term staff development. The training lasts four months and can be launched up to four times a year based on institutional needs.

### **Learning environment**

The collaborative efforts of the Prison Service College, the Prisons Department of the Ministry of Justice, correctional institutions, and the students themselves have fostered a cohesive and supportive learning environment that promotes the development of essential job-related competencies. Training is delivered through a blended model across four complementary formats: in-class sessions led by college lecturers, workplace learning under the supervision of experienced prison mentors, online instruction, and guided independent study. This multifaceted approach not only enhances the relevance and effectiveness of the training but also allows each student to shape a learning style that suits their personal needs and abilities. By enabling a flexible balance between professional duties, academic progress, and personal life, the programme reflects a modern and humane vision of correctional officer education.

## **Stakeholders**

The Prison Service College plays a leading role in managing the training process, ensuring its consistency, quality, and alignment with the professional needs of the prison service. Its core function includes overseeing the smooth coordination of learning across three formats—classroom-based, workplace-based, and online—and facilitating effective collaboration among the key partners: the college, correctional institutions, and the students.

The College is responsible for maintaining academic standards and ensuring that the learning outcomes defined in the curriculum are consistently achieved. This involves the careful preparation of course content by academic staff, as well as the development and distribution of teaching materials and practical teaching guidance to prison mentors who deliver on-site instruction. In addition, College staff monitor the overall evaluation process to verify that learning objectives are met.

The role of the employer – the prison – has also evolved under the workplace-based model. Beyond traditional responsibilities, correctional institutions now contribute directly to training delivery. Prison training specialists and experienced officers, acting as mentors, support the professional development of students. To equip them for this role, the College provides andragogical training, ensuring that prison mentors are prepared to guide and assess students effectively.

From the learner's perspective, the workplace-based approach is regarded as relevant and appropriate, particularly because completing the preparatory service is a prerequisite for continued employment. It allows students to connect learning with real job demands while accommodating individual needs and learning styles.

To support continuous improvement and successful implementation of the curriculum, the College systematically collects regular feedback from students and prison mentors through surveys and group interviews. This reflective practice ensures that the training remains responsive, effective, and aligned with the evolving needs of both students and institutions.

## **Key Strengths**

The updated training model offers increased flexibility, enabling trainees to better balance work, study, and personal life. It places strong emphasis on practical skills through workplace-based learning, while maintaining an integrated approach that combines theory and practice. A shortened training period allows for quicker workforce integration, and the model is strengthened by effective collaboration between the college, correctional institutions, and students. Altogether, these features contribute to a supportive learning environment that prioritizes trainee well-being and readiness for real work duties.

## **Lessons Learned**

Implementing the new curriculum revealed important insights. A key challenge is balancing the immediate operational needs of prisons with long-term educational goals. Clarifying the role of prison mentors and ensuring transparent coordination across learning environments proved essential. The importance of consistent learner support, a well-managed mix of theoretical and practical content, and the continuous use of structured regular feedback to refine the programme were also highlighted as critical factors for success.

## **PERSPECTIVE**

The workplace-centered training model demonstrates how vocational education can be effectively aligned with the real-world demands of the labor market. Its success underscores the value of a flexible, skills-oriented curriculum built on collaborative partnerships, continuous regular feedback, and a strong emphasis on learner well-being. By allowing trainees to balance study, work, and personal life, the model supports both professional competence and personal resilience. Looking ahead, the development and implementation of an advanced training programme—targeting the role of Senior Prison Guard in Shift Supervisor duties—will further support career progression and reinforce a culture of lifelong learning within the correctional system. A thorough evaluation of training effectiveness will also be integral to future efforts, ensuring the model remains relevant, inclusive, and responsive to the evolving needs of both institutions and students.

## **TRANSFORMING LEARNING: INNOVATIVE ELEMENTS OF THE PRISON OFFICER CURRICULUM**

### **Curriculum Redesign Based on Real-World Needs**

The shift from a traditional, centralized, school-based model to a workplace-centered approach reflects a fundamental innovation. The redesign aligns training content with the practical realities of prison work, focusing on the competencies needed in daily tasks and supporting adult learners' preferences for experiential, job-embedded learning.

### **Integration of Theory and Practice**

Innovation is evident in how the new curriculum embeds theoretical learning directly into workplace activities. Rather than separating classroom instruction from real-life application, trainees acquire knowledge and immediately apply it in their work environment—boosting retention, relevance, and motivation.

### **Flexible, Multi-Modal Delivery**

The curriculum introduces a blended learning format – combining in-person teaching, online modules, workplace mentoring, and independent study. This flexible structure respects the work-life balance of adult trainees and allows learning to adapt to institutional needs, including multiple entry points throughout the year.

### **Collaborative and Reflective Implementation**

A continuous feedback loop involving learners, mentors, academic staff, and institutional leaders supports ongoing curriculum refinement. The collaborative development process, including pilot testing and mentor training in andragogy, ensures that the programme evolves based on real-time experiences and remains responsive to both learner well-being and institutional priorities.

**TABLE 1. COMPARISON OF SCHOOL-BASED AND WORKPLACE-BASED CURRICULA FOR PRISON GUARD IN ESTONIA**

SIMILARITIES		
ASPECT		SIMILARITY
Objective		Both curricula aim to prepare prison guard for practical work in prisons.
Professional focus		Both focus on acquiring job-specific knowledge and skills necessary for guards.
Role of the College		The Prison Service College of the Estonian Academy of Security Sciences continues to lead and organize training.
Target group		New employees, including those with secondary education and career changers.
Need for assessment		Both curricula involve evaluation of learning outcomes.
Theory-practice connection		Both formats include theoretical and practical components.
Institutional cooperation		Cooperation between the college and prisons is present in both models.
DIFFERENCES		
ASPECT	SCHOOL-BASED CURRICULUM	WORKPLACE-BASED CURRICULUM
Duration of training	9 months	4 months
Learning environment	School-based in Tallinn	In school, online, and in prison (workplace)
Start frequency	Up to 2 times a year (depending on group formation)	Up to 4 times a year based on need
Volume (ECTS)	60 ECTS	30 ECTS (basic training), planned advanced training +30 ECTS
Form of learning	Full-time school-based training	Workplace-based, integrated learning
Role of educators/participants	Lecturers and specialists from the Prison Service College	Lecturers and specialists from the Prison Service College Prison mentors and specialists from prisons
Curriculum structure	One comprehensive curriculum	Modular, integrated practice within modules
Assessment of learning outcomes	Traditional assessment	Complex tasks, non-differentiated assessment

**FIGURE 1**

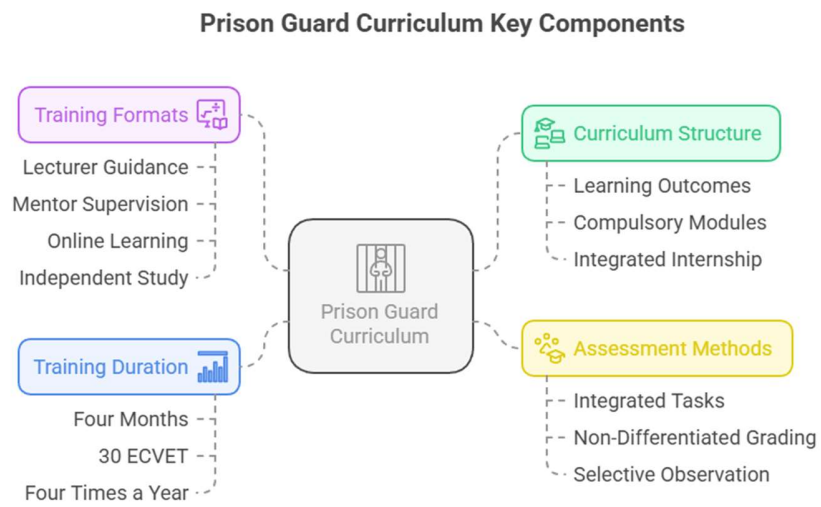


**FIGURE 2**

## **BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES OF THE PRISON GUARD CURRICULUM IN ESTONIA**





**FIGURE 3**





**FIGURE 4**

### Comparison of Traditional vs. Workplace-Based Prison Guard Training

	 Traditional Training	 Workplace- Based Training
<b>Flexibility</b>	Limited	Increased
<b>Relevance</b>	Questionable	High
<b>Location</b>	School-based	Workplace-based
<b>Learning</b>	Theoretical	Practical
<b>Duration</b>	Longer	Shorter
<b>Collaboration</b>	Limited	Strong
<b>Well-being</b>	Lower	Higher
<b>Feedback</b>	Less frequent	Regular

**FIGURE 5**



## SCHOOL CURRICULUM

Curriculum group:		Protection of Property and Persons				
Name of the curriculum:		Vanglaametnik				
		Prison Guard				
		Тюремный чиновник				
Curriculum code on EHIS		254662				
This curriculum shall be applied for the students admitted since the academic year of 2024/2025.						
BASIC TRAINING CURRICULUM			CONTINUING TRAINING CURRICULUM			
EQF 2	EQF 3	EQF 4	EQF 4	EQF 5	EQF 4	EQF 5
		vocational secondary education				
			x			
Volume of the curriculum (ECVET)		30 ECVET				
Basis for drawing up the curriculum		Regulation No. 130 of the Government of the Republic of Estonia “Vocational Education Standard“, dated 26.08.2013, the requirements for class II prison guards set in section 113 <sup>1</sup> of the Imprisonment Act, the curriculum statute of the Estonian Academy of Security Sciences, the grant letter of the Prison Service.				
Learning outcomes of the curriculum		Upon completing the curriculum, the student: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• performs the duties on the professional level of class II prison guards;</li><li>• is tolerant towards the diversity of attitudes and values;</li><li>• demonstrates preparedness for life-long learning.</li></ul>				
Implementation of the curriculum: school-based daytime learning						
Requirements for commencing the studies						
The person applying for the curriculum must meet the following requirements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• hold a diploma of secondary education – provided in §2 subsection 1 of the regulation No. 114 of the Government of the Republic “Requirements for the education, work experience and foreign language skills of officials;</li><li>• hold the Estonian citizenship;</li><li>• meet the requirements set in regulation No 26 of the Minister of Justice, dated 23.07.2013, “Requirements for prison officers, conformity assessment and the procedure and choice of a prison director”.</li></ul> The requirements set for commencing one’s studies on the curriculum are brought in “Admission Requirements and Procedures at the EASS”.						
Requirements for graduation: studies are considered completed when the student has acquired the learning outcomes of the curriculum on the threshold level. The studies are concluded with a final examination.						
After completing the studies, one acquires:						
professional qualification:		-				
optional competency:		the qualification acquired has not been specified with a professional standard.				
partial occupational qualification:		-				

## STRUCTURE OF THE CURRICULUM

Modules of basic studies	
<b>Basic studies</b>	<b>5 ECVET, (incl. 3 ECVET of internship)</b>
It is aimed that the student understands the role of a prison officer and the prison service in the state and the fundamentals of its functioning	
Upon completing the module, the student: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>understands the role of a prison officer in the prison service and society at large;</li> <li>is guided by the principles and foundations of the operation of the prison service;</li> <li>guides their behaviour pursuant to the principles of maintaining mental health in a prison environment;</li> <li>compiles documents according to the requirements of legal acts and practice of the organisation using the appropriate databases;</li> <li>Internship: knows the work arrangement in the prison and the work tasks of class II prison guards.</li> </ul>	
<b>Dynamic Security</b>	<b>4 ECVET</b>
It is aimed that the student duly copes with the main daily activities in keeping with the core values of the prison service.	
Upon completing the module, the student: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>understands the maintenance of static, dynamic and organisational security on various levels;</li> <li>duly carries out the main daily activities of the prison pursuant to the principles of dynamic security;</li> <li>communicates in a supportive and humane manner in keeping with the socially accepted norms of politeness;</li> <li>implements various control measures and special equipment, understanding the partly invasive nature of the measures.</li> </ul>	
<b>Conducting Surveillance Activities</b>	<b>7 ECVET, (incl. 2 ECVET of internship)</b>
It is aimed that the student can duly carry out the daily surveillance activities in prison, and if necessary, expresses themselves in Russian.	
Upon completing the module, the student: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>purposefully implements different ways of communication preventing conflicts;</li> <li>implements the Imprisonment Act and other legal provisions regulating the implementation of imprisonment in the scope of the professional tasks of the class II prison guards;</li> <li>conducts daily surveillance activities in prison;</li> <li>gives simple orders in Russian and explains the performance of scheduled activities in prison;</li> <li>Internship: conducts the service tasks of the class II prison guards.</li> </ul>	
<b>Emergency Situations in Prison</b>	<b>9 ECVET, (incl. 2 ECVET of internship)</b>
It is aimed that the student reacts duly and safely to an emergency situation and provides first aid, if necessary.	
Upon completing the module, the student: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>acts as a first responder to emergency situations and solves emergency situations;</li> <li>communicates purposefully in a conflict situation implementing appropriate means for solving the conflict;</li> <li>lawfully and safely uses means of coercion in an emergency situation;</li> <li>can act duly in case of a fire;</li> <li>gives life-saving first aid, if necessary;</li> <li>Internship: performs extraordinary tasks in prison in case of an emergency situation</li> </ul>	
<b>The Resocialisation of Inmates</b>	<b>4 ECVET, (incl. 1 ECVET of internship)</b>
It is aimed that the student copes with supporting the resocialisation of inmates	
Upon completing the module, the student: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>understands the basics of prison psychology;</li> </ul>	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• understands the principles of the resocialisation of inmates;</li> <li>• communicates with an inmate using the principles of motivational interviewing;</li> <li>• Internship: the student supports resocialisation in the service tasks of the class II prison guard.</li> </ul>	
<b>Final Examination</b>	<b>1 ECVET</b>
The student's implementation of professional knowledge and skills in work situations is assessed.	
Upon taking the final examination, the student:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• independently fulfils the service tasks of the class II prison guards.</li> </ul>	

<b>The contact person of the curriculum</b>	
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Comments:	
1. The implementation plan of the modules <a href="https://www.sisekaitse.ee/et/oppekavad">https://www.sisekaitse.ee/et/oppekavad</a>	