

Estonian Aviation Academy aims to become region's leading centre of excellence

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“Our vision for 2025 is to be a highly valued training and development partner to our interest groups, but since aviation is an international field by its very nature, the academy will also need to internationalise more in terms of both its academic staff and its activities,” said Estonian Aviation Academy rector Koit Kaskel in presenting the academy's strategy to members of the Aviation Cluster.

Clear focal points have been set for the implementation of the vision. “Our emphasis over the next five years will be on five things: **cooperation**, which is to say proactive communication; **flexibility**, which is to say diverse learning opportunities; **innovation**, which is to say new technology; **internationalisation**, which is to say English-language studies and academic mobility; and **exports**,” Kaskel explained. The rector says that the plan is to focus on new forms of technology linked to smart specialisation, especially in the fields of unmanned flight and integrated air traffic control, which in and of themselves involve much greater knowledge and are closely linked to digitalisation. As a result, the academy should become the leading centre of excellence in the local region.

Aviation Cluster director Kristo Reinsalu emphasised that the support and cooperation of everyone in the cluster are of critical importance in implementing the vision. “The only way we'll become an aviation nation that other countries take seriously is by **working together**,” he said.

Kaskel added that the academy must be the first place companies turn to if they need new services to be developed or require training.

The Estonian Aviation Academy's strategy also outlines the **introduction of lifelong learning in aviation**. This is important to both students and companies and means creating opportunities to learn new skills and knowledge in standard-determining, in-service and retraining studies one module at a time, with each module being limited in size but logically linked to all other modules. Kaskel added that in order not only to maintain but to boost the quality of the education offered by the academy, **studies need to be significantly diversified**. “Alongside the lecture-based and predominantly Estonian-language higher education it currently provides, there are plans to institute a range of alternatives,” he explained.

Reinsalu said that the main advantage of aviation as a branch of industry is that it is international in nature and that **Estonian aviation training services are very competitive**. “In September, the aviation school that forms part of the Patria Group in the Nordic countries announced that it will be training 250 pilots for Qatar Airways over the next five years,” he said. “Why couldn't our academy win the same sort of contract?” He added that if the academy is to become the region's leading exporter of aviation education services, its focus must be on new technology. Unmanned flight (also known by the acronym UAS or ‘Unmanned Aircraft Systems’), technology for unmanned air traffic control (or UTM, ‘Unmanned Traffic Management’) and the digitalisation of air traffic organisation are the areas in which the academy, in cooperation with members of the cluster, could **transform Estonia into Europe's most innovative airspace**.

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