



Maribor, 15 November 2016

Subject: PROGRESS REPORT, FOLLOWING THE INTERNATIONAL EVALUATION

Following a 4 day institutional and programme evaluation, carried out by the Center for Quality Assessment in Higher Education from Lithuania, AMEU received a full report, including recommendations for 3 study programmes and the institutional evaluation on 30 March 2015.

Below is the progress report for individual areas according to the required fields.

1) STUDY PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT – BACHELOR

The following recommendations were given by SKVC:

1. Benchmarking— benchmarking analysis was performed by the end of May 2015 with the outcome of a revised curriculum for the bachelor programme which is now being offered according to the new/updated version and with new subjects
2. The current balance between theory and practice needs to be reviewed – individual study plans were revised and a more practical input was brought in. The institution has also signed several cooperation agreements with companies in order to strengthen the ties with the business environment and enable transfer of practice into theory.
3. Including 'Learning to Learn' (or similar subject title) into the curriculum: this component is partly included in the course called 'Career Development', which is now provided throughout the Bachelor study programmes.
4. Introduction of essential business and management-based subjects into the curriculum is vital for the future success of the programme. The following new subjects were included in the curriculum: Management, Strategic management, Marketing, Introduction to economics. The following elective subjects were added: Business communication, Entrepreneurship. Two subjects, formerly elective, are now compulsory: Career development and Decision-making support systems.
5. The introduction of a healthcare management dimension into the curriculum – this is planned for a revised version of the Health science programme.

6. 'Real-life' student projects from industry: project activities are building up. Several new initiatives have already been addressed in order to strengthen ties with the business environment.
7. Social Entrepreneurship (and associated projects) should form an important part of any proposed syllabus in this area – revised study plan / syllabus for the subject Entrepreneurship
8. Ongoing staff development, with a particular emphasis on research-based publications – the latest AMEU conference saw 70 staff participating with papers, including mentors. Furthermore 500 students participated at the conference (post-graduate students with papers, undergraduate students just had to write a summary of one section.
9. Research Methodology should become a mandatory feature of the curriculum – research methodology is part of the curriculum, carried out in 2 subjects: Project work 1 and Project work 2, that have as result a written task.
10. All documentation, for whatever purpose and whichever reader, relating to this Bachelor degree should contain consistently presented, identical – revised versions of all syllabi are available.
11. The designation of a programme leader and an associated programme committee (as distinct from the recommended Social Partners Forum) – programme leaders or coordinators are designated in case the study programme supersedes a certain number of students. Otherwise, there is the study dean who also performs the function of the programme leader.
12. The name of this Bachelor degree could be reviewed – name change into Bachelor of Management
13. The Commission formed to examine the students' theses might be reconstituted to include external representation from the world of business and commerce – many teachers come from business and commerce; they are always included in the commission to examine the student's theses.
14. A refreshed programme, along the lines proposed above, could revitalise student demand and provide a stronger foundation for graduates – a revised version is offered since October 2015, now going into the 2nd year of its implementation.

2) STUDY PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT – MASTER

1. The aims and learning outcomes of the programme and of the subjects contained in the curriculum should be stated clearly, linked directly, and written at the level appropriate for a postgraduate study programme. The programme and the competences were revised and the level was raised.
2. The relevant internal and public documents should be reviewed and checked for consistency of information: The programme was revised, including the marketing/promotion materials that now state a difference between the bachelor and master programme.
3. It is essential that the curriculum contains a much stronger coverage of topics related to entrepreneurship and innovation. A new programme is currently in preparation, planned as a double degree with a french university, with a stronger management and entrepreneurship note.
4. In any review for the purpose of introducing quality improvements, the benchmarking of the programme against similar, and well-established postgraduate studies, both nationally and internationally, is strongly advisable. A new programme is currently in preparation, planned as a double degree with a French university, with a stronger management and entrepreneurship note.
5. The overemphasis on descriptive syllabus content at the expense of a more analytical and evaluative approach: Revised study plans with a more analytical approach.
6. The quality of learning would be enhanced by providing substantially more direct student contact hours : in case of smaller groups of students, the contact hours are decreased and the focus on individual study increases. Students are offered blended learning possibilities with materials in the e-environment. A meeting was called with the faculty (of all programmes) to plan the teaching and individual study hours with more care – adjust to the number of ECTS points, as required by Bologna standards.
7. The absence of full-time academic staff for programme delivery is impacting on the overall effectiveness of the teaching and learning in place, as well as representing a potential militating factor against the institution's stated ambition to achieve full University status. More full-time staff has been employed in the last 1.5 years; the focus includes teaching and research. The first successes were visible at the international conference in March 2016 that saw 200 papers, presented by 270 delegates + 500 AMEU students who actively participated at the conference. The list of participating faculty of AMEU included 76 teachers (full and part-time). The Full university studies has been applied for, pending decision of the responsible accreditation institution (National Agency for Quality in Higher Education).

8. A further helpful initiative would be the establishment of bodies such as a programme committee, a research committee, and a social partnership forum to assist the management team in helping to establish and maintain the currency and relevance of this Master's degree. A research & project coordinator (full professor) was employed in June 2015 on a full-time basis to cover this aspect of management programmes (not only the three evaluated ones, but also two others at Master and PhD level). This research committee includes one more full-time staff who is now responsible for working with students at post-graduate level in the area of Research, methodology (quantitative and qualitative) and pre-dissertation seminar. We have also intensively approached companies from the region re: practical work / internships / joint projects.

9. The role and level of involvement of all stakeholders in programme revision and renewal needs to be defined and clarified for the benefit of all concerned. Of particular importance in this regard is the participation of all members of teaching staff, not only in updating their own subjects but also in contributing to overall quality improvements.
Several programmes have been revised in the past year and a half; starting with Bachelor in Management (including 4 new subjects and renew the existing syllabi), Master in Management and the European Business studies. A complete renovation is still pending decision of the national agency regarding the renews of the post-graduate study programme Environmental studies (up for reaccreditation in 2017). more to follow in Health sciences where we introduced a new module (elective subjects) that will have an interdisciplinary approach (management in health sciences / management of health institutions). The latter also includes the electives in the case of Social gerontology – Master programme.

10. Academic staff involvement in research related to the focus of the programme needs to be strengthened and complemented by student engagement in research projects designed to develop their competencies and enrich their learning. The output from such research work could be result in publications in peer-reviewed journals, as well as presentations at national and international conferences and seminars. As a minimum prerequisite for the promotion and development of students' skills in this area, a research methodology-based subject (similar to that contained within the curriculum of the Master's in European Business Studies programme) should become mandatory within the curriculum. As already stated under point 8 of this sub-chapter: A research & project coordinator (full professor) was employed in June 2015 on a full-time basis to cover this aspect of management programmes (not only the three evaluated ones, but also two others at Master and PhD level). This research committee includes one more full-time staff who is now responsible for working with students at post-graduate level in the area of Research, methodology (quantitative and qualitative) and pre-dissertation seminar. We have also intensively approached companies from the region re: practical work / internships / joint projects. AMEU is currently involved in 5 journals; we are trying to raise their level and get them included in European journal database.

11. Formal guidelines and regulations should be introduced to support the institution's stated commitment to eliminating any student attempts at cheating and academic dishonesty. The formal documentation of all aspects of an anti-plagiarism policy, including the implications for offending students, is required.

The institution has obtained a plagiarism detection software (turnitin). This lead to a more systematic approach in checking the diploma theses at all Bologna levels. A couple of students have been expelled for plagiarism issues and complete controls are carried out at the submission of papers.



3) STUDY PROGRAMME EUROPEAN BUSINESS STUDIES – MASTER

1. An important decision needs to be made regarding whether the European Business Studies programme will continue as a three-specialization pathway degree or as one focusing on Project Management alone. The European business studies programme will continue as a one path programme, focusing solely on the project management.
2. The aims, objectives and learning outcomes (LOs) of the programme should conform to requirements for 2nd level postgraduate studies, according to European and Slovenian Qualifications Frameworks. In tandem with meeting this requirement, the content of the programme must reflect the academic rigour expected at postgraduate level by providing the appropriate depth and breadth of knowledge and developing high-level skills of analysis, evaluation, and synthesis based on the conceptual framework and solid problem-solving and decision-making foundations. Learning outcomes have been revised and a new structure prepared. The content of the programme has been reviewed and the institution has in the meantime applied for two international accreditations (one American and one European one), as we want to offer the post-graduate management programmes to international public and entirely in English. The academic profile has been improved and some new teachers asked for cooperation (also on a part-employment basis). Renewal of the curriculum: new modules are planned that could replace the old ones. One already in submission, pending confirmation of the National agency NAKVIS.
3. The programme level aims and learning outcomes should be cross-linked with subject learning outcomes, which must be reviewed and subsequently expressed explicitly in a manner which allows for the measurement and assessment of their attainment. This may also lead to an adjustment of assessment methods, depending on the newly defined learning outcomes for particular subjects. We are redesigning the learning outcomes and the measurement approaches.
4. The syllabi must be updated to reflect what should be and is currently taught, as well as including the most relevant and up-to-date bibliography (both national and international publications). A clear description of the assessment process and the introduction of revised grading criteria to reflect a more rational and equitable set of bands or categories are also highly desirable. Syllabi have been renewed and a few new subject added to the curriculum. Renewals are especially visible in selected literature, needed for individual courses.
5. All programme-related documents, internal or public, in any form, written or electronic, should be reviewed and checked for consistency of information. Documents have been checked for the consistency of information prior to applying for the two international accreditations.

6. The study process could be enhanced by providing more contact hours and, in particular, by the systematic structuring of self-study work for the students. The formal introduction of additional appropriate tasks and assignments related to each subject would serve to enhance the learning process and strengthen the justification for the ECTS credits assigned to each subject. The number of contact hours has increased by 10% and an improvement was meant as to the individual work of students in order to meet the ECTS requirements.
7. More active involvement of academic staff, students, and other stakeholders in formal programme review processes would create a team spirit and a sense of programme ownership amongst all stakeholders, while also leading to the development of quality enhancement plans at department, programme and individual subject levels. AMEU employed additional faculty on a more permanent basis. Regular collegium meetings are now in place; weekly meetings of study deans are organised in order to transfer the information to all departments and increase the quality of work. Benchmarking was conducted in order to suggest new subjects and update the existing ones. A new module will start in spring of 2017 as the result of the action. Also pending is accreditation of a new international (joint) degree with a French university.
8. Programme management should also consider the involvement of employer stakeholders in ways that could add value to the programme for the benefit of students. AMEU is working on improvements of the career center and alumni club that would enable these activities. In the last year, several new cooperations were concluded with businesses and more is planned as we progress.

4) INSTITUTIONAL EVALUATION

The following is a summary of the review panel's recommendations:

1. Strategic Planning and Management

It is recommended that:

- 1) In order to avoid any unnecessary risks to its overall strategy and reputation, that AMEU take full account of any potential vulnerability to the legislative and regulatory frameworks in the different national jurisdictions in which AMEU operates or in which it has academic or strategic partnerships, by the development of a risk management and contingency plan in which all potential risks, and the degree of possible impact, can be assessed in a transparent manner.
- 2) During the review process in preparation for a new strategic plan, the range of measurable KPIs should be extended to reflect, more comprehensively, the full range of AMEU's activities and core business.
- 3) To support its overall strategy and vision, the Institution should develop a set of five supporting strategies which clearly identify the priorities that are important to the future of AMEU, i.e. in research; learning and teaching; quality assurance; regional impact; and internationalisation and that each should be led by a senior academic with a clearly defined set of responsibilities.
- 4) AMEU should take the opportunity provided by the imminent publication of a revised *European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ESG)* to complete a mapping exercise against each element of guidance for higher education institutions ensuring that this defines the future development of academic quality assurance at AMEU.
- 5) AMEU reflects on the use made of student evaluation surveys with a view to ensuring that a mechanism is put in place to inform all students of actions taken to "close the loop" in response to their concerns and the feedback they provide.
- 6) AMEU should consider adjusting the balance between full-time academic staff and those engaged on a part-time basis as adjunct faculty by creating more full-time academic positions.
- 7) A comprehensive code of conduct for academic ethics should be developed, covering all activities relating to staff and students.

RESPONSES FROM AMEU:

Ad 1) Risks are monitored at several levels, including regular updates among other HEIs. Our secretary general is also part of the Working group at the National Agency for Quality Assurance that deals with appeals. We are therefore informed about all novelties within the legal system.

Ad 2) organisational approach has been adjusted and new staff hired in order to meet the strategic goals of the institution.

Ad 3) 5 supporting strategies:

A RESEARCH: Head of research was appointed in October 2015, who now coordinates all research and project activities.

B LEARNING AND TEACHING: a coordinator of the academic process was appointed as of September 2015, coordinating different departments within the university.

C QUALITY ASSURANCE: the quality committee continues work on evaluations

D REGIONAL IMPACT: as of 2015, we increased cooperation with business from across Slovenia (project partnership, more teaching staff from those companies (as experts in our undergraduate and master programmes), and new companies where our students can do their practical work.

E INTERNATIONALISATION: new staff has been hired in the international department in order to strengthen ties with international institutions and universities. Several new Erasmus agreements have been signed, and we are approaching transnational education contracts with three HEI from Austria, Slovakia and Serbia. Two new international modules were introduced in the field of Humanities, headed by American teachers and including American students. The study of physiotherapy is now also offered in a foreign language due to the high interest of a certain language group.

Ad 4 and 5) We are working on improvement of quality assurance and feedback of students (reports given to the study committees of all study fields).

Ad 6) more full-time staff was added. The number increased from 29 from the time of the evaluation, to 42. Several new were added on a part-time basis, totaling to over 150 faculty.

Ad 7) Code of conduct on academic ethics is in progress. We have introduced the Staff Handbook, too.

2. Academic Studies & Lifelong Learning

It is recommended that:

- 1) Greater use can be made of the principles and practices associated with the Bologna Process, in areas such as student centred learning, and in developing innovative approaches to academic practice.
- 2) Steps should be taken to ensure that for each course/unit/module and each study programme, intended learning outcomes are identified which are: aligned to assessment strategies; are appropriate in type, number and level; can be assessed; and are transparent to all students.
- 3) Appropriate entry standards should be set that facilitate successful student completion of study programmes.
- 4) The Institution reflects on its practices in relation to the oversight of assessment, ensuring the establishment of an examination board and any other necessary arrangements for the oversight of all assessment processes, outcomes and for the conferring of academic awards.
- 5) Heads of Study Programmes/ Heads of Academic Departments should be required to take responsibility for ensuring that all teaching staff engage fully with the task of implementing best practice in learning and teaching, as outlined in the *European Standards and Guidelines*, and in the wider context of the Bologna Process.

- 6) A procedure should be adopted that enables all teaching staff to benefit from peer evaluation of teaching, thus enabling the sharing and exchange of good practice.
- 7) If AMEU wishes to continue to make progress in internationalisation, including mobility and the internationalisation of the curriculum, steps should be taken to make more courses available in languages such as English, but that this should be supported by language testing for students and staff using internationally recognised standards and procedures.
- 8) AMEU explore with local and regional employers and other stakeholders, the opportunities for providing CPD and advanced training programmes, and professional updating through short courses tailored to local needs.
- 9) A review is undertaken of the information on the AMEU website to ensure it includes information for each study programme and each course, such as entry requirements (including language proficiency in each relevant language) assessment requirements, learning and teaching methods, and intended learning outcomes and employment opportunities, NFQ and EQF levels.

RESPONSES OF AMEU

Ad 1) Faculty is constantly invited to seminars and workshops, addressing new and innovative approaches to academic practice. The major emphasis is placed on working with e-classrooms.

Ad 2) we are working on the Learning outcomes (in our cases: competences, as required by the National agency for Quality Assurance). Teachers were asked to revise their course syllabi with these new suggestions before the beginning of the new academic year. Furthermore, some study programmes were submitted for renewal and change of certain modules, respecting

Ad 3) Entry standards were revised and correspond the national requirements.

Ad 4) Each study programme has a separate Study committee, consisting of habilitated teachers. They in their sessions also assign the official examiners for each study field.

Ad 5) Study deans now meet in regular (weekly) sessions in order to address such issues, adjust the curricula, discuss open issues with the coordinator of the academic affairs, etc.

Ad 6) Peer evaluation has not been put in place. The faculty has a chance to watch their peers while teaching through the online system, since all lectures are taped. Peer review of teaching practices is otherwise only used when habilitation must be confirmed, or in case two teachers carry out the course together.

Ad 7) as of October 2016, several study programmes are offered in foreign languages:

- Physiotherapy in Italian language (and selected subjects in English for incoming Erasmus students)
- European Business Studies – English only
- Humanities – PhD – English only
- Humanities – Master: half of the subjects in English, taught by the American faculty

- Environmental studies: 2 subjects will be carried out partly in English (for the international staff and students week).

More is planned, while new study programmes are accredited. We initiated one at master level as joint degree (accreditation pending at the national level); while two more are planned, one of them within a newly established CEEPUS network (application in 2017)

Ad 8) Several shortcourses (5) were prepared (in the form of a 1-year specialisation study) – with the focus on health studies. Currently awaiting accreditation at the national level.

Ad 9) We are working on the update of information on the school's webpage. As some novelations are still pending confirmation of the national agency, the final update should be available on the webpage by the end of the winter semester 2016/2017.

3. Research Activities

It is recommended that:

- 1)** In considering research and consultancy in the broadest sense, including the Third Mission responsibilities of AMEU, attention should be paid to identifying potential opportunities for new types of income-generating, knowledge transfer and consultancy activities, and applied research links, with regional enterprises, the municipality, NGOs, and civil society more broadly.
- 2)** In light of current arrangements and capacity for the supervision of doctoral students a review should be undertaken at the earliest opportunity of this area to ensure that the supervision load for each principal supervisor is set at a level that does not put at risk the quality of supervision for each individual doctoral student, and that appointed supervisors meet acceptable standards for appointment.
- 3)** Current doctoral research practices are benchmarked against best practice in the European Research Area.

RESPONSES OF AMEU

Ad 1) Project office started working at full-speed in the fall of 2015. Two people are currently involved with projects, plus an external agency supporting us with application calls. We have obtained 3 Slovene projects and are in the pipeline for one cross-border initiative (OP SI-AT) and 2 Horizon 2020 ideas are currently developed. We have approached municipalities, but without any luck.

Ad 2 and 3) The supervision load of PhD mentors/supervisors has been adjusted. The upper limit is now 5 mentorships per professor. Doctoral research practices have been benchmarked with the European research areas and we have invited three more experts to teach these subjects (one of them responsible for all research methodology classes in all post-graduate programmes).

4. Regional

It is recommended that:

- 1) AMEU documents evidence of the outputs from external stakeholder engagement.
- 2) Impact measures should be developed to enable a transparent institutional assessment to be made of AMEU's contribution regionally and nationally.
- 3) Full use should be made of such indicators and measures to involve external partners and stakeholders in the process of monitoring progress (including at study programme level), perhaps by establishing an advisory board drawn from local and regional stakeholders.

RESPONSES OF AMEU

Regional involvement of AMEU: a few new cooperation agreements have been signed, a list of companies, cooperating with AMEU, has increased. We are involving the experts from the industry into our curriculum and invite them to different boards/committees/groups. However, as already stated during the visit in 2015, the business environment (especially for management programmes) is not too open toward accepting trainees. So far, we have been very successful with health center, hospitals, senior homes and similar health-related institutions (representatives are in all of our boards and committees), while other fields don't show too much interest for exchange. This problem has been present for quite a while, as many companies don't even accept students for student work.

Possible solutions are employing experts from the industry to enter additional 20% (legally allowed) employment at AMEU (one of them became our study dean for environmental studies). We are aware of this situation and are constantly working with the business environment to raise awareness for this problem.