



CENTRE FOR QUALITY ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

**EVALUATION REPORT**  
**Of *EUROPEAN BUSINESS STUDIES***  
**STUDY PROGRAMME**  
**at ALMA MATER EUROPAEA**

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Report language – English

## INFORMATION ON EVALUATED STUDY PROGRAMME

Title of the study programme	<i>European Business Studies</i>
Study area	Social Sciences
Study field	Business and Administration Science
Type of the study programme	University studies
Study cycle	Second
Study mode (length in years)	Part-time (2)
Volume of the study programme in credits	120
Degree and (or) professional qualifications awarded	Master of European Business Studies
Date of registration of the study programme	Decision No. 2-201/2008

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## I. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. *Background of the evaluation process*

The evaluation of on-going study programmes is based on the **Methodology for Evaluation of Higher Education Study Programmes**, approved by Order No 1-01-162 of 20 December 2010 of the Director of the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education (hereafter – SKVC).

The evaluation is intended to help higher education institutions to constantly improve their study programmes and to inform the public about the quality of studies.

The evaluation process consists of the main following stages: 1) *self-evaluation and self-evaluation report prepared by Higher Education Institution (hereafter – HEI)*; 2) *visit of the review team to the higher education institution*; 3) *production of the evaluation report by the review team and its publication*; 4) *follow-up activities*.

### 1.2. *General*

The application documentation submitted by the HEI follows the outline recommended by the SKVC. Along with the self-evaluation report and annexes, the following additional documents have been provided by the HEI before, during and/or after the site visit:

No.	Name of the document
1.	Sample of Theses produced by students who have graduated from the programme
2.	Various questionnaire templates designed to obtain feedback from students and staff as part of the quality assurance process operated by the HEI
3.	Information on the higher education system in the Republic of Slovenia
4.	Academic calendar – timetable for 2014-15 academic year
5.	Templates of awarded academic titles and Diploma Supplements
6.	Minutes of the Quality Committee meetings
7.	Other templates and academic staff curricula vitae

### 1.3. *Background of the HEI/Faculty/Study field/ Additional information*

Alma Mater Europaea – European Centre, Maribor (called hereafter AMEU-ECM) is an independent (non-state) Higher Education Institution providing undergraduate and postgraduate study programmes in the Republic of Slovenia. Its mission is expressed as “*to meet the needs of society, the market and the modern lifestyle*”. In accordance with this mission, it is stated that “*Alma Mater Europaea - ECM - University of Leadership offers a liberal, interactive, methodological and professional approach to higher education. In all our undergraduate and graduate study programs, we implement this approach with an individual focus*”. AMEU-ECM is part of an international university project by the European Academy of Sciences and Arts, based in Salzburg. The institution was established in 2007 and started offering study programmes in Nursing, Physical Therapy Social Gerontology, specializations that either were not offered by any university in Slovenia or for which there was a great demand for graduates. Later, the fields of Management, and Archival Studies were added.

Currently, the institution comprises five academic departments (Social Gerontology, Nursing, Physical Therapy, Management, and European Studies). The academic structure is more or less aligned with typical structures found at HEIs within the European Area of Higher Education (e.g. Senate, Management Board, Academic Assembly, Student Council, etc.). Other units supporting academic work include: Study Office, Library, Publishing House, and an International Office. The vision of the management of AMEU-ECM is to achieve University status by becoming part of a larger University establishment, the Alma Mater Europaea University which will operate in the inter-Danube region.

During the last three years AMEU-ECM has achieved significant academic growth in terms of number of enrolled students, study programmes provided, as well as academic organization and infrastructure. Apparently, its development reflects the determination of the institution to respond to the needs of the market and expectations of social partners. It is the considered opinion of the review panel that management is committed to the institution's mission and the achievement of the long-term vision, as outlined in the most recent strategic plan. The programme in European Business Studies is a 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle programme (Master's degree) which commenced in 2012/13 and currently is in its third year of operation.

The team responsible for the production of the Self-Evaluation Report (hereafter – SER) consisted of six members. This group did not contain a student or graduate representative which represents a missed opportunity to obtain feedback from these key stakeholders. The SER, while helpful to the external review panel, would have benefited from a more analytical and critical approach to the internal review process.

#### **1.4. The Review Team**

The review team was completed according *Description of experts' recruitment*, approved by order No. 1-01-151 of Acting Director of the Centre for Quality Assessment in Higher Education. The review visit to the HEI was conducted by the team on 23/02/2015 to 25/02/2015.

*The members of the team were:*

1. Mr John Cusack (team leader);
2. Prof. dr. Pandelis Ipsilandis;
3. Assoc. prof. dr. Nerijus Pačėsa;
4. Mr Richards Blese (students' representative).

## **II. PROGRAMME ANALYSIS**

### ***2.1. Programme aims and learning outcomes***

The Master in European Business Studies programme is currently delivered partly in Slovenia (about 20% of lectures) and mostly in Croatia (about 80% of lectures), where the majority of enrolled students come from, but also attracts several students from the neighbouring countries (Serbia, Slovenia, and Bosnia). The decision to offer the programme in Croatia, as explained by the Head of the Study Programme and in the SER (also confirmed by students and graduates) results from Croatia's recent accession to EU membership. This created a particular need for human capital properly educated and trained to effectively manage and administer activities created by or linked to EU policies and funding opportunities in both the public and private sectors. The programme is designed to address these needs by providing students with specialized knowledge at a postgraduate level aimed at producing innovative managers who will lead businesses and lever European policies to the advantage of their country's economy and society. Evidence from recent graduates of the programme indicates that the knowledge and skills provided were instrumental in their gaining of employment in relevant areas (e.g. Development Agencies, Non-Government Organizations, Local Administration Offices, and Self-owned Business etc.) or in upgrading their careers. The success rate of graduates in obtaining or retaining employment is a source of pride to the institution.

The programme maintains a European dimension not only in content but in other aspects as well. The participation of students from different European countries, the requirement that all students take an internship in another European country or participate in a study visit to EU institutions in Brussels and write an article on a subject related to European Union or business, the delivery of certain modules in the English language, and the participation of lecturers from abroad are noteworthy features that give an international profile to the programme. These aspects should be maintained and further enhanced, and are evaluated highly by students. The programme is taught mainly in the Croatian language. Student representatives informed the review panel that they would prefer if the entire programme was delivered in English so they could practise another language.

According to the institution's self-evaluation team, the programme complies with all relevant legal requirements, and this is the first time it is being reviewed by an external team of experts. No information was received by the external panel regarding whether the programme is registered or licensed in Croatia although, the panel recommends to contact Croatian authorities regarding the licensing of provision of the study programme and awarding of qualification. As a general rule, Higher Education qualifications awarded in any EU country are recognized across all national boundaries within the EU, but also there are practices where qualifications awarded in foreign countries are not recognized if no licence to operate in that country was obtained.

The programme's main goal, as stated in the institution's public prospectus, is to educate and train students in all commercial, public sector and public administration segments at national and sub-national levels, and in the areas of business sciences, economy and law at the European level. Thus, the programme was initially designed to offer three specialization paths from which

students could select: Project Management in the EU; European Integration; and European Regional Development. The availability of these three areas was designed to address particular knowledge and skills requirements across various dimensions of public services provision, as well as in the private business sector. However, so far, only the Project Management path is active, as it is regarded by students as the one that currently offers immediate employability prospects.

In terms of the exact title of the programme, two versions are presented in different source documents i.e. Master in European Business (European Project Management) and Master in European Project Management (European Business Studies). The programme is listed as a Master's degree in Project Management on the institution's website and also in the programme description document. At the same time on the AMEU-ECM website there is also a reference to it as the European Business Studies programme with only one specialization path, that of project management with the same curriculum but different electives. Inconsistencies among sources of information can create confusion for students and other stakeholders. Many examples of a lack of standardised information could be cited from the different documents provided for the review panel.

The programme's aims and learning outcomes (referred to as 'competencies') are divided into general competencies and specialization competencies, in order to provide prospective students with a clear idea of the aims and learning outcomes of the studies. The general competencies are stated unambiguously and, in the main, are presented at the proper level for a 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle programme. However, attention should be given to the subject-specific competencies, so that these do not remain extensively descriptive but instead specify learning outcomes at the appropriate level, the achievement of which can be measured and verified. At the same time, those high-level learning outcomes for each subject, when revised, should be cross-linked and supported by the content of the programme and the learning outcomes of all complementary subjects within the curriculum.

As evidenced by students and graduates, this programme is distinct in the geographical area of the Western Balkans, where no other such programme is offered by public or private Higher Education Institutions. Thus, the total enrolment over the three-year period exceeds 100 students.

Although the response to the immediate needs in specific skills in the economy and the students' expectations in terms of employment can be seen as a vital element in the success of the programme, these factors could pose a risk to maintaining the programme's academic rigour and status as a 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle degree. The driving force to respond to students' eagerness for acquiring skills that increase their short-term employability prospects cannot justify a shift in LOs towards addressing immediate, somewhat narrowly defined, labour market needs at the expense of providing students with a strong theoretical background in the wider field of project management which will be valuable and essential for their career enhancement prospects in the longer term. Project management in its own right is emerging as a powerful instrument in the planning and implementation of strategic business activities and it would be inappropriate to confine the aims and learning outcomes of the programme to mainly addressing current training needs arising

from EU funding opportunities. This is not to deny that the later should also form part of the curriculum.

There is no concrete evidence of the involvement of stakeholders in the process of programme design, review and development to date. Especially lacking in this regard is essential input from representatives of the public sector and the business world, as well as from the employers of programme graduates and the graduates themselves. Active student participation in such decision-making processes should also be strongly encouraged and facilitated. Since the programme has already produced one cohort of over 30 graduates, alumni can be asked to contribute to further development of the programme, and the establishment of an Alumni Club should facilitate such a process. Similarly, although the documentation states that "the programme is comparable with similar programmes outside of Slovenia" there is no indication of any formal benchmarking having taken place, although many similar-type Master's programmes are offered by various universities across Europe.

## ***2.2. Curriculum design***

The Master in European Business Studies consists of 4 semesters and attracts 120 ECTS credits, 90 of which are assigned to taught subjects, and the remaining 30 to the Master's thesis. As indicated above, the overall structure of the curriculum is designed to accommodate three specialization paths: Project Management in the EU, European Integration, and European Regional Development, with the first semester being common for all three pathways. As was stated in the previous section, so far only the Project Management in EU path is realized. Thus, the review contained in this report is confined to the programme as currently provided.

The curriculum is structured in a rational way with four parts, one per semester. The taught curriculum (3 semesters) involves 15 subjects of 6 ECTS credits each. This includes ten (10) compulsory subjects, four (4) subjects which students may choose from a set of more than eight (8) electives, and a subject that includes a four-week internship in another country or a study visit to EU Headquarters in Brussels along with the production of a publishable article on a subject related to European Union or business (the alternatives here would appear to be somewhat unequal). The stipulation that the student who undertakes the one-month long internship is expected to "present a reference letter confirming that the internship has been completed" would seem to need strengthening in terms of establishing more precise criteria designed to measure the extent to which the learning outcomes associated with such an activity have actually been met (perhaps the seminar paper achieves the same purpose).

The first semester is devoted to subjects related to European Studies, the second includes content linked to aspects of Project Management, and the third allows students the opportunity to select subjects that relate to their interests and career development plans. The fourth semester aims to integrate the knowledge acquired and the skills developed through the production by each student of a Master's thesis. The current structure facilitates the delivery of the programme in case more than one specialization path should be offered in the future. However, if only the Project Management route continues to be provided, then the institution might consider restructuring the curriculum and offer in parallel the compulsory subjects in EU Studies and



Project Management in the first two semesters, starting with fundamentals and continuing with the more advanced content.

The external review panel findings, based on a study of the programme focus and structure, the syllabi and related documentation and on discussions with stakeholders, including lecturers and students, can be summarised as follows:

The first semester includes subjects that address European issues in terms of fundamental cultural and civilization values, the political and economic aspects of European integration, and the development of EU institutions, policies and structures. This initial phase is designed to provide students with a solid background knowledge regarding the evolution of the political and economic environment in Europe. It is also important at this stage that special emphasis is being given to the development of the students' research capacity through the provision of a compulsory subject in research methodology. This subject helps to ensure that students are prepared to cope with the requirements of a Master's programme.

The second semester is intended to focus on developing the managerial capabilities of the students, with particular emphasis on aspects of Project Management. It consists of one 6 credit subject on the fundamentals of Project Management, while the remaining four subjects (with similar and equal weighting) address specific issues that arise in the management of EU projects. The review team has concluded that this part of the programme gives a disproportionate weighting and emphasis to very specific issues narrowly related to the management of EU projects.

In certain cases, the syllabi of those subjects are already outdated since the content refers to EU programmes that have already expired, or are overlapping. For example, the syllabi presented for subjects such as Legal Aspects of EU Projects, Funding of EU Projects, and Financial Resources for EU Projects, refer to various practical aspects of managing projects in the EU without providing additional conceptual knowledge, but rather skills which nonetheless are useful to students. A consolidation of these subjects could allow the content of the programme to expand much further into other key management areas such as Business Strategy, Risk Management, Entrepreneurship, Finance, Advanced Economics, International Marketing, and e-Business etc. In this context, it is important to note the view of the institution, confirmed in Slovenia's National Development Plan, to the effect that students in higher education do not generally obtain sufficient education and training in areas such as management, entrepreneurship, commerce and law.

Several anomalies have been identified by the review panel with regard to the electives on offer, as well as with the corresponding subject titles, depending upon where the information is sourced. The list of electives in the SER, the programme booklet, and on the web-site does not always correspond, which could create confusion among prospective students and other stakeholders. In addition, a rationalization of the electives is needed in terms of content (i.e. concerns have arisen among the external review panel as to whether subjects such as Business English, Business in Russia, China etc. are appropriate for inclusion in a 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle programme). The number and range of elective subjects is also excessive under circumstances where only a

few of these can be provided realistically. Since not all electives will be offered, some students expecting to avail of a particular choice(s) are likely to be disappointed, which could reflect adversely on the reputation of the programme and the management team.

Most of the subject syllabi are sparse in content and consequently do not actually describe with enough information what is currently taught. The reading lists associated with the different subjects vary a lot in terms of volume of reading, most of which is not adequately updated in the bibliographies provided to the review panel.

At the subject level there is no uniformity of approach to stating learning outcomes. Certain subject descriptors contain proper learning outcomes but, in many cases, LOs are expressed in purely descriptive terms or as the rationale for the specific subject and topics being taught. Statements such as *“Through active participation of participants within group work and discussion about each topic of the course, a student, as a qualified participant in the area of legal aspect of European projects, will become qualified to participate in a project group.”*, currently found in syllabi should be replaced by specific subject-level Learning Outcomes (LOs) which must be defined explicitly in terms of measurable knowledge, skills, abilities, competencies or behaviours at the appropriate level for a 2<sup>nd</sup> cycle programme according to the Slovenian and European Quality Frameworks. In the same context, links to the assessment methods for each subject should be provided so that the defined learning outcomes can be assessed and verified.

It is understandable that this is not an easy task, especially if previous related experience does not exist, but AMEU-ECM should invest time and effort to train teaching staff in formulating both programme and subject LOs at the appropriate level. Furthermore, a mapping scheme between subject LOs and overall programme LOs will guarantee that the programme delivers to students what is expected.

The review team observed a 100% uniformity in assessment methods across all subjects, which does not allow for the effective assessment of LOs in all cases (e.g. assessing a student by way of a project could be more relevant and effective than an examination in determining project management knowledge and skills). The possibility that a student may use written materials (up to 30% of the total) already produced for the Bachelor degree thesis when submitting a Master's thesis also appears anomalous and seems to require amendment.

It was evident from the panel discussions that most of the lecturers currently involved in the delivery of the programme did not participate in the development of the syllabi at the initial accreditation stage of this programme. It is realized that updating and upgrading the syllabi takes time and effort, but this is a necessary task to maintain quality standards of teaching and learning, regardless of which individual academic staff member delivers the subject at any particular time. The active involvement of all lecturers, as well as other stakeholders (students, alumni and employers), in this process will help to produce quality results. The external review panel recognizes that the management team is aware of the need *“to renew the programme”*, as was reported during the discussions on the site visit, and hopes that the comments and suggestions made in this section will help in that direction.

### ***2.3. Teaching staff***

As stated in the SER and from the information which the expert team received subsequently, it seems that the only requirement regarding the teaching of academic programmes at first and second cycle levels in Slovenia is for staff to possess a valid habilitation. No other quantitative requirements appear to exist, such as employment status or other credentials. All academic staff appointments for the programme are approved by the Senate of AMEU-ECM, and satisfy State requirements.

One of the strong points of the programme is that over its three years in operation no significant attrition of teaching staff is noted. This gives the management team an opportunity to intensify the involvement and participation of lecturers in the continuous development of the programme, in combination with input from other stakeholders. The programme is supported by an adequate number of academic staff (13 in total), and two expert associates. However, the arrangements for teaching staff involvement in programme delivery are unsatisfactory. Only one member of academic staff at the level of Associate Professor is involved (on a part-time basis) with the two expert associates being employed on a full-time basis. The remaining members of the teaching staff are contracted to deliver specific subjects.

The management of the institution has pointed out that one of the aims is “*getting the best professors and the best students*”. Indeed, the group of highly qualified individuals – 11 out of 13 have a Doctorate degree – has been drawn from other Slovenian universities, as well as from industry, to teach the programme. The group is complemented by two academics from abroad, one being a well-known expert in project management who brings a strong academic record as well as experience gained from his involvement with the International Project Management Association (IPMA). Overall, this combination of staff represents a strong advantage for the programme, in that it provides a rich blend of academic, contextual and ethnical backgrounds crucial for achieving its aims and objectives; thereby giving it an international character and bringing to the curriculum a rich blend of experience and expertise for the benefit of the students.

On the other hand, the almost exclusive dependence for programme delivery on contracted staff introduces a possible risk concerning the stability of the programme, leads to a greater administrative workload, and brings about the necessity to apply firm Quality Assurance processes to maintain programme quality and guarantee its continuing development. The expert team understands the practicalities which make it difficult to increase the number of full-time teaching staff and accepts the sincere intention of management to move in that direction in the near future as a necessary requirement for realizing the vision to reach University status.

AMEU-ECM is also fully aware of the importance of academic research in its further development and has been active since 2011 in organizing scientific conferences, with participation by staff and postgraduate students. The research activity of the staff involved in the delivery of the programme shows that individual members – mainly those who have permanent employment with other academic institutions – have their own research interests and pursue research agendas accordingly. Some can point to a significant volume of published work, and the institution is commended for attracting academics with such research records. Yet, the review

panel notes the lack of an institutional research strategy with the aim of creating clusters of staff / researchers focusing on investigative areas and innovation in fields related to this study programme. The establishment of common research interest groups would increase team coherence, enhance the identity and reputation of the programme, enable staff to join research consortia, and exploit research funding opportunities available at European level. Such an environment would also help to create further career development opportunities for both junior staff and students.

At the same time, professional development of the staff is also necessary in areas of didactics (e.g. proper use of case studies, other teaching methodologies and approaches, sharing of best practice, etc.). Preparation of annual development plans by all academic staff members should result in increased staff affiliation and at the same time help the institution to plan appropriate developmental activities.

Overall, the external review team recognizes that the qualifications and general profiles of staff are indicative of the high calibre of lecturers associated with this study programme. The representative academic staff members who participated in discussions with the review panel during the site visit were enthusiastic about their work at AMEU-ECM and willing to become more involved. The management should harness such enthusiasm and apparent willingness to create a much stronger sense of programme ownership among academic staff. For example, while it became evident that members of the staff care a lot about the development of the subjects which they teach, the same intensity and level of involvement did not appear to exist when matters regarding overall programme development were discussed. The expert team believes that staff should be encouraged to become much more actively and formally involved in the future development of the programme.

#### ***2.4. Facilities and learning resources***

Initially, the programme was delivered in Karlovac, then in the next year in three different centres (Karlovac, Bjelovar and Zagreb), and currently, the third year of its delivery, only in Zagreb. This location was chosen because it is conveniently accessed by students from various cities in Croatia, as well as from surrounding countries. The lectures and seminars are held in the conference room of a Zagreb hotel, which is well equipped to host the interactive IT tools provided by AMEU-ECM to support the learning process. So, in this respect, the premises where the programme is delivered may not be inferior to the properly equipped classrooms used in the other locations of AMEU-ECM. The shortcoming of students not fully experiencing an academic environment (i.e. space that they can use off-class for group work; easy personal access to teaching staff, proximity to student support functions, etc.), under the current circumstances are alleviated somewhat by the support and arrangements provided by the institution so that students studying at Croatia may enjoy similar privileges to the remainder of AMEU-ECM students. They also have access to academic libraries and can book inter-library loans through the network of Slovenian academic libraries (COBISS), of which AMEU-ECM is a member.

The institution has developed excellent IT facilities to support student learning. A video conference system allows students to watch the lectures from any place, in case they cannot

attend in person. The system also supports real-time interaction during the lecture / seminar, so students may pose questions for the lecturer and participate in discussions. The use of interactive Smart boards allows the student to capture the lecturers' presentations on the board or the podium during the delivery. Furthermore, all lectures are videotaped, and students may access these off line at any time during the semester, along with all other reading material which is made available to them via the Moodle platform. Student representatives with whom the panel met emphatically acknowledged the usefulness of the available technology in supporting their studies. However, they indicated, and the review panel agrees, that they do not consider the system as a replacement for class attendance. It is important to mention that the use of the interactive technology in the study process is not limited to certain subjects or specific members of the teaching team, but has been adopted widely by all lecturers and can be considered one of the strong points of the entire institution.

A well-staffed study office at the headquarters in Maribor, including technical support staff members, helps to guarantee the smooth running of the platforms, the continuous updating of information, and the quality and effectiveness of the communication with students. It is evident that AMEU-ECM displays care and commitment to the continuous upgrading of the available infrastructure. The institution recently made an effort to organize the small library facilities which are located in Maribor and Musca Soboba, so that these meet academic standards, and joined the national network of academic libraries (COBISS). A library administrator was appointed after being trained, while the services of an external librarian were also hired for organizing the library. The review team visited the Maribor University library to which AMEU-ECM students have full access rights. Student representatives confirmed that they also have access to the bigger library in Ljubljana, as well as electronic access to approximately 10,000 bibliographical units available at COBISS, the virtual academic library service in Slovenia.

In the context of expanding facilities and resources, the institution has hired part of a building in the centre of Maribor which was a purpose-built premises for the School of Theology of Ljubljana University and was recently vacated. All teaching and administration activities will be moved to this new location inside the next few months.

### ***2.5. Study process and student performance assessment***

The study programme has been implemented in Croatia since the 2012-13 academic years. The admission regulations are clear. The programme admits holders of a 1<sup>st</sup> cycle degree (academic or professional) in the area of social sciences; while holders of a 1<sup>st</sup> cycle degree from other areas must successfully complete a preparatory programme which has been assigned 20 ECTS credits. No other entrance requirements, such as the grade of the first degree award or business experience, are stated. Almost all students enrolled in the programme are in employment. The programme appears to be the most popular study opportunity which AMEU-ECM offers in the area of management. The current number of available study positions is 45 per academic year, and enrolment during the first three years was: 48 students in year 2012-13; 36 students in 2013-14; and 23 students in the current academic years 2014-15. The drop in student enrolment is attributed to the high level of demand which existed prior to the programme's inauguration, since no similar postgraduate study opportunity was available. This level of demand has smoothed out

somewhat since the programme was introduced. Student's numbers to date are sufficient for sustaining the programme and for all academic purposes (student interaction, diversity and sharing of experiences, etc.).

There are specific regulations for student advancement from the first to the second year that require the successful attainment of at least 45 ECTS credits (out of 60). The statistics on student progress illustrate that the majority (92-94%) progresses successfully from first to second year, while 82% of the first cohort of students have finished their studies in the allocated time. The institution lists the programme in the category of part-time studies, mainly because it is targeted to students in full-time employment and is delivered mostly at weekends in block teaching mode. Despite its part-time classification, students are allowed to take a full-time 30 ECTS credits workload during each semester. To accomplish this, each of the 6 credits taught subjects is stated to include 25 hours of lectures (or other teaching activities not mentioned explicitly in the syllabi), 25 hours of tutorials (non-scheduled consultation with teachers), and 130 hours of self-study. The self-study element does not appear to be structured and the volume of hours assigned to it could be regarded as excessive. Thus, the study process is a blend of contact and distance learning. There are no minimum attendance requirements, but students reported that attendance is over 50%, and for some subjects close to 80%.

The workload stated in the syllabi meets the nominal metrics for ECTS credit calculation. However, the review team feels that certain provision must be made to ensure that the actual student workload does not deviate significantly from the nominal one. For example, depending on the subject, contact hours should be increased to maintain equilibrium between what is promised and what is being delivered. The self-study work on the part of the student should also be customized in a more guided and structured way to include specific activities and related learning outcomes that are explicitly defined in the syllabus, known to students, and verifiable by lecturers.

Similarly, the study trip abroad is a feature of the programme that provides significant benefit to students. This component which would also be further enhanced if its intended learning outcomes and how these are to be assessed were expressed definitively. From discussions with staff, it appears that there is a great variation amongst students with regard to the quality of the seminar-papers they present on completion of the study visit. A systematic approach should be adopted in respect of internship reports for those who might choose this as an alternative to the study trip (although students so-far seem not to favour it).

The review team identified the need for a mechanism to ensure that the assessment process verifies that the stated LOs have been achieved (e.g. moderation of examination questions, review of assignments by peers or a study programme committee, peer review of the marks/grades allocated). Also, clear, transparent guidelines for assessing any piece of work are needed. For example, each subject syllabus could include specific requirements that should be met to achieve different levels or grades (i.e. pass, merit, distinction). The current grading system in operation should be rationalized (i.e. two "very good" scales and uneven ranges or bands of marks are present). These scoring systems should be revisited, clarified regularly, and

made accessible for students after having been presented and explained to them during the first class meeting.

The institution and the programme management team are concerned about the maintenance of academic integrity and have taken appropriate measures to prevent cheating and student dishonesty. A booklet containing instructions on how to properly cite sources and authorship in texts has been introduced, and students are informed and receive guidance especially focused towards the preparation of the thesis. As part of the quality assurance processes, all student submissions (term papers, seminar papers, theses) are placed in two systems (Turnitin and a local software safeguard) to undergo a plagiarism check. The need for a comprehensive anti-plagiarism policy is recognised in the field of higher education. Such a policy provides formal guidelines and regulations concerning how the institution will respond to suspected acts of academic dishonesty and what the consequences for offending students are likely to be.

The arrangements relating to the Master's thesis appear to be well organized. An elaborate system of methodological guidelines and procedures is in place and presented to students during the first semester of their studies, with students also receiving supplementary support from personal consultations with their supervisor. The topics which have been selected for thesis purposes seem appropriate and relevant to the study programme. The expert team cannot really assess the quality of the finished student works in any depth since all these have been written in the Slovenian or Croatian language, and experts considered only the English summary and the bibliography. The range of grades seemed to be concentrated between 8 and 10, with 75% of students receiving the two top grades (9 or 10). As was explained, this happens because the supervisors do not allow a thesis to be defended unless it is of a very high quality. Overall, these research projects address very interesting topics. As expected, most focus on general organization, policy and economic issues in the EU, while some deal with project management and / or general management problems. Each thesis is supervised by one or two academics, all having a Doctorate degree. In this context, it is important that the workload involved in supervising theses is distributed amongst as many members of academic staff as possible. Also, the membership of the Commission set up to evaluate the quality of theses should be extended to include external representation.

The review panel is aware of the commitment of the thesis supervisors to quality and considers that additional improvements can occur by provisions such as the introduction of external examiners for assessment purposes and the enforcement of minimum requirements in respect of recent international bibliography consulted, together with an insistence on the limited use of internet sources. This latter comment is made in the knowledge that the guidelines issued to students contain requirements such as “A minimum of 60 written sources that are not more than 10 years old” and “One-fifth must be foreign literature and sources etc.”. The inclusion of a compulsory reflective section, if not already stipulated, would enhance the learning process for each student.

Students appear to receive appropriate social and academic support. An apparently well-organised study office handles all administrative tasks related to students via intensive communications on a continuous basis. The study office organizes an induction weekend at the

institution's premises at the beginning of studies, and is responsible for collecting assignments, keeping the calendar and issuing calendar alerts, receiving thesis documents and making consistency checks. In general, this office is the communication focal point between the institution and students.

It appears that there is no organized effort for the promotion of student mobility (incoming and outgoing), and this seems to happen on an ad-hoc basis. For this particular programme no student mobility was reported beyond the compulsory study trip or internship to EU headquarters. Because students are already in employment, it is accepted that availing of mobility opportunities is not always convenient or suitable for them. However, it is understood that one student will participate in an Erasmus exchange programme in the coming months. The establishment of an international office in the institution is expected to expand the horizons of this and other study programmes in the years ahead.

According to the SER, no survey on the employment status of the programme's graduates has taken place due to the fact that only one cohort of students has graduated to date. It is understood that this survey will be conducted at the end of the current academic year, when two cohorts of students will have graduated. Discussions with graduates' representatives revealed that the qualification has helped some to move to new jobs more relevant to their studies, and provided the catalyst for others to improve their careers, as already alluded to earlier in this report. A case of one graduate who was appointed to a ministerial position in the government of a neighbouring country was also reported. The overall conclusion of students is that the employability prospects for graduates are very good.

## ***2.6. Programme management***

AMEU-ECM has a clear vision and associated strategy for future development, as expressed mainly by the President, Professor dr. Ludvik Toplak. Since the institution is still relatively small, the dynamic, personal involvement of the President is readily discernible in the growth and expansion achieved over recent years.

The European Business Studies programme is managed by a Study Dean who also serves as the Head of the Department of Management. The Study Dean is responsible for the delivery of the programme, coordinates the team of academic staff, is personally involved in the delivery of the programme and has direct contact with students and teachers. From discussions held on the occasion of the site visit, it would appear that the holder of this role has a strong sense of programme ownership, a sincere desire for continuous improvement, and the authority to take action in this direction.

The official institutional document '*Rules on Quality Procedures*' which was presented to the expert team serves both as a Statute of the Institution and also as a Quality Manual. It describes, in detail, the roles and responsibilities of the different bodies and individuals involved in the management of the institution i.e. Management Board, President, Senate, Academic Assembly, Student Council) as well as the decision-making process on academic and administrative matters.



In addition, it describes comprehensively all QA functions and devotes a full section to Measurement Analyses and Continuous Improvement.

In the SER there is evidence of Senate decisions regarding changes in the academic calendar, the introduction of new electives and approval of their syllabi, teaching assignments, etc., all indicators suggesting that the existing academic management structure functions effectively. During the visit, the review team was provided with minutes of the quality assurance meetings and a sample of survey templates used to collect opinions from students, staff and graduates. Discussions with students and staff confirmed that the feedback process is taking place regularly, but it is not clear how and to what extent the results are used. The management team receives an analysis of the results, and it was intimated that, to date, there has been no necessity to take action based on the input received. The meeting with academic staff representatives indicated that they receive some feedback informally, but not on a regular basis. The review panel suggests that it is necessary to provide formal feedback to lecturers on a regular basis. This can serve as affirmation and reinforcement, as well as helping to resolve problems which have been identified and initiate necessary improvements.

Teaching staff members are comfortable to contact the Study Dean to discuss issues concerning the teaching of their subjects and decisions are often taken informally on an ad-hoc basis. The size of the institution allows for much personal contact, informal communication between academic staff and management, and flexibility in decision making. Despite these advantages, the lack of a formal body where academic management and staff, together with student representatives, could participate (at least once per semester) for the purpose of discussing matters regarding the improvement of the quality of the teaching and learning process and the development of the programme can be regarded as a serious deficit in the current system. In an environment which lacks all the formalities of an academic department and where the majority of academic staff are employed on a contract basis, the management team is obliged to pay much attention to ensuring that channels of communication are formalised, clearly understood, and working effectively so that all staff share the vision and work towards the achievement of the aims and objectives of the programme.

Although the Study Dean empowers academic staff in taking ownership of their subjects, it is advisable that the formal processes described in the Quality Manual are implemented. The document 'Rules on Quality Procedures' provides for Study Commissions. However, its constitution and working procedures might be reviewed with a view to provide a Social Partnership Forum which would allow for feedback and the capture of ideas from all stakeholders. Such wisdom could be discussed and evaluated, thereby leading to appropriate recommendations to be progressed within the structures of AMEU-ECM. This committee would retain formal records and minutes. Many HEIs find it helpful to integrate inputs from all such available sources into the formulation of an annual Quality Enhancement Plan which captures the agenda for continuous improvement and also reviews progress made to date.

The following recommendations are intended for consideration by Alma Mater Europaea for the purpose of strengthening this Master's degree programme still further. These proposals are not necessarily listed in order of importance. It should also be emphasised that this report has been

written as a unified document, which means that suggestions already made and not repeated amongst the recommendations should not be considered as having a lesser importance than those presented below.

### **III. RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following list is not intended to be comprehensive but rather to facilitate Alma Mater Europaea in signposting areas for critical attention as part of the institution's stated and genuine commitment to enriching the programme and to establishing its status, nationally and internationally.

- 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. In the latter case, it is advisable to consider revising the title in order to better reflect the content of the programme and the structure of the curriculum. Should the current title be retained, and even if it is not, significant adjustment to the curriculum content is strongly recommended along the lines suggested in the Curriculum Section above. Furthermore, keeping two specialization paths inactive weakens the importance of the specialization route that is offered, and is also misleading for prospective students.
- The aims, objectives and learning outcomes (LOs) of the programme should conform to requirements for 2<sup>nd</sup> 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. In order to prepare students to progress in their careers, nationally and internationally, it is essential that the focus of the programme extends far beyond mere functional activities and the training needed to discharge specific and sometimes narrowly defined tasks. The vision of the institution is to achieve full University status. Consequently, this programme must establish a strong academic profile, even if this is somewhat at variance with the students leaning towards meeting their shorter-term training and employment needs. The approach which the review panel is proposing will require an overall review of the programme and a renewal of the curriculum.
- 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. The active involvement of the academic staff as a team and not as individuals will be crucial for this reengineering work.
- 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. The whole process, when completed, will contribute significantly to the standardization and enrichment of the quality of teaching and learning. Additionally, the current arrangement whereby a student may request to be examined via an interview or the production of a seminar paper rather than a written test should be subjected to further scrutiny by management in the interest of ensuring assessment standards which are equitable and seen to be credible at this level.

- All programme-related documents, internal or public, in any form, written or electronic, should be reviewed and checked for consistency of information. Harmony and consistency of approach when presenting information about this postgraduate study opportunity are essential for its status and reputation, as perceived by prospective students, enrolled students, employers, academic staff, potential partner institutions and organizations, and all other interested stakeholders.
- 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.
- 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. As already highlighted in this report, the benchmarking of the programme against similar postgraduate degrees must be regarded as a priority for the purpose of guaranteeing its standards in the years ahead.
- Programme management should also consider the involvement of employer stakeholders in ways that could add value to the programme for the benefit of students. Examples of such extended participation and partnership could include sponsorship of prizes, provision of internships, guest lecturing, working with academic staff in developing case studies, and supporting Master's thesis research that addresses real problems and issues. It is understood that many of the thirty nine very worthwhile partnership agreements already made do not extend into the business sector of the Slovenian economy.

In conclusion, the panel members wish to record their gratitude to the President and staff of Alma Mater Europaea at all levels for the support and cooperation received throughout the evaluation process. The willingness and commitment of management to build upon and enhance the quality of this study programme was readily discernible. We wish their efforts every success in the years ahead and trust that the graduates from the programme will continue to enjoy rewarding and fulfilling careers.