



CENTRE FOR QUALITY ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

**EVALUATION REPORT
OF *MASTER IN MANAGEMENT*
STUDY PROGRAMME
at ALMA MATER EUROPAEA**

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Report language – English

INFORMATION ON EVALUATED STUDY PROGRAMME

Title of the study programme	<i>Management</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 Management
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 at 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 Master Theses produced by students who have graduated from the programme
2.	Various questionnaire templates used in the Quality Assurance process by students and staff
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 Supplement
6.	Minutes of the Quality Committee meetings
7.	Other templates and 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 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 its mission “*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*”. The vision of the management of AMEU-ECM is to achieve a University status by being part of a larger University establishment, the Alma Mater Europaea University which will operate in the inter-Danube region.

Alma Mater Europea ECM offers study programmes in Nursing, Physical Therapy Social Gerontology, Management, and Archival Studies. The institution comprises five academic departments (Social Gerontology, Nursing, Physical Therapy, Management and European Studies). The management structure consists of Academic Governance Bodies such as, the Senate, Academic Assembly, Management Board, and Student Council.

Since the establishment AMEU-ECM has achieved significant results in terms of enrolled students, offered programmes, academic organization and infrastructures. During the visit it was evident that the management of institution is committed to further development both – in terms of programmes and infrastructure.

The programme Management is a 2nd cycle programme (Master's degree) that started in 2014/15 and currently is in its first year of operation.

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 HEI was conducted by the team on *23-25 February 2015*.

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 Management programme at the Alma Mater Europaea – European Centre Maribor (AMEU-ECM) is in its first year of implementation, and therefore has not undergone an official external evaluation to date. According to the self-evaluation committee responsible for the production of the self-evaluation report (hereafter – SER), the programme complies with all national legal acts and regulations.

The programme's main goal, as described in the public prospectus, is to deepen, upgrade and continue the education, training and development of management staff in all commercial and public sectors. To achieve this outcome, the programme provides students with an opportunity to develop “an in-depth knowledge of the wider area of expertise” in management. In that respect, it seems to accord with the Slovenian Quality Framework (hereafter – SQF) regulations which require students graduating from a second-cycle programme to possess: “*Mastery of highly demanding and complex work processes and methodological tools in specialised fields; Planning and managing the work process on the basis of creative resolution of problems related to the field of education and training; and the capacity for original thinking/work and critical reflection.*”

However, the description of the detailed programme goals resembles to a great extent those of the corresponding undergraduate programme in Management, also offered by the same institution. This conclusion is reinforced by the existence of at least two full subjects common to both curricula i.e. Labour Law and Artificial Intelligence. Furthermore, a Master's programme should be seen to clearly possess certain characteristics that meet the SQF criteria for second-level programmes, such as for example, developing the scientific research capability of students,

as well as their ability to apply knowledge and solve broader-spectrum problems in new, changed circumstances. The development of critical thinking and the provision of skills needed to assume managerial responsibility are other yardsticks normally associated with study opportunities at this level.

The stated goals of the programme convey the impression that the MA in Management is a continuation of the corresponding BA study programme and not a stand-alone postgraduate programme. Its stated purpose is geared towards the education and training of future professionals (*management staff*), some of whom already have managerial experience and/or come from different academic backgrounds. Utilising this programme mainly to teach additional subject content for which time and space were not available while delivering the related Bachelor degree is a key deficit requiring corrective action on the part of institutional management. The focus and level of a Master's programme should distinguish it clearly from undergraduate studies.

An analysis of the programme's aims and learning outcomes and their relationship to the curriculum content highlights certain inconsistencies. For example, the goals and competencies emphasize the development of the students' research capabilities but a business research subject is not included in the curriculum. There are also references to social processes and modern societal management but no corresponding subjects form part of the curriculum. While this Master's degree is defined as a general management programme, content such as Strategic Management and related Contemporary Business Models; Financial Management; Business Development; International Marketing and Sales Management/Advanced Marketing Analysis; Monetary Economics; International Human Resource Management; and Managing Corporate Creativity has either not been included or receives insufficient emphasis within the curriculum.

The lack of consistency and maximum relevance does not help in providing an identity for the programme and reduces the impact of its key selling points in terms of how it might be perceived by all stakeholders, not least prospective students. Another important factor in this context is the programme title. As a Bachelor degree in Management is also offered by the institution, the use of the single term 'Management' as the label for the Master's study opportunity does not suggest that it is significantly different from the undergraduate programme. Also, its designation as a Bachelor of Arts rather than a Bachelor of Business may be significant in forming perceptions amongst stakeholders.

The programme's learning outcomes (hereafter – LOs), as presented, are often written in purely descriptive terms, and the lack of a specified link between learning outcomes and the assessment procedures across subjects within the curriculum is worthy of further review and attention. The learning outcomes are not stated explicitly but may be identified in different places and forms throughout the programme's prospectus, sometimes as extensions of those identified for the corresponding BA programme. The wide scope of LOs encompasses objectives peripherally related to management but not directly associated with fundamental management practices and functions (*e.g. students becoming "experts" in recognizing and managing social process, risks triggered by new technologies, globalized economic development, changing*

demographic structure, etc.). As described, the LOs tend to focus on teaching activities and goals rather than defining expected student learning outcomes in terms of competencies and skills which are capable of assessment and measurement.

Across many syllabuses, some LOs include “*basic theoretical background of the methods for better understanding; knowledge of the scope of the methods*“. Such references can be seen as too generic, lacking specificity, and lacking the necessary emphasis on analysis, evaluation and synthesis. In essence, due recognition is not afforded to the conceptual framework. Some specific skills related to taught subjects are stated too strongly in functional rather than in managerial terms as for instance: “*Selection of the suitable intelligent systems method for a given problem; Implementation of some methods from the area of intelligent systems; The use of software tools and intelligent services*“. In general, there is an imbalanced orientation of LOs, with too high an emphasis on technical abilities / skills development at the expense of theoretical underpinning throughout the subject descriptions.

By way of adjustment, the learning outcomes should be stated with clarity in terms of measurable knowledge, skills, abilities, or behaviours at the appropriate level for 2nd cycle studies according to the EQF guidelines, and the descriptors of second-cycle studies of the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Areas (the so-called Dublin Descriptors). The document “*Placing qualifications in the SQF and referencing SQF levels to the EQF and QF/EHEA*” provides good examples in relation to the setting of programme learning outcomes.

At the risk of being repetitive, it is essential to emphasise that, currently, the focus of the programme and the different syllabuses place an insufficient emphasis on analysis, synthesis and critical evaluation. The use of terminology such as ‘to familiarise’, ‘to understand’, ‘to become acquainted with’, does not communicate the type of learning outcomes expected at Master's degree level in higher education. In fairness, wording of this type in the definition of learning outcomes probably understates the standard and quality of the programme, as currently delivered by the academic staff team.

In the SER, and during the discussions which the evaluation panel conducted on the occasion of the site visit (which took place on 23-25 February 2015), no substantial evidence was found to confirm the involvement of stakeholders, especially representatives of the business world, in the process of programme development or review. However, it is encouraging to note that “*the strengthening of the involvement of employers in the University sphere*” is one of the programme goals.

The lack of specified, clearly defined links between the learning outcomes and the assessment procedure across subjects within the curriculum is another aspect for further consideration by programme management. There is also the necessity for a stronger, clearly apparent, correlation between the overall aims and objectives of the programme and the learning outcomes specified at individual subject level.

2.2. Curriculum design

The programme delivery period consists of four semesters, three of which contain 3 subjects each, with the final semester being dedicated to the completion of the Master's thesis. The subjects have each been allocated 10 ECTS credits, and are spread evenly throughout the semester. The first two semesters each contain compulsory subjects, with the third being devoted to the teaching of three electives (there is a menu of 11 subjects from which students may select). This wide choice of elective subjects is somewhat unrealistic, given the current situation with regard to student numbers. Consequently, it could lead to unfulfilled expectations on the part of individual students when they discover that one or more of their subject preferences cannot be provided for economic or other reasons.

While the subjects are not repetitive, the curriculum design raises some doubts regarding its effectiveness as a typical Master's degree programme in Management. This is partly due to the fact that there is a certain absence of logic and continuity evident within the curriculum, as presented (reference has already been made above to the lack of certain critical subject content). Benchmarking of the programme against some of the top, internationally recognised study programmes of a similar nature would strengthen significantly the quality of the teaching and learning process for the benefit of all stakeholders, each of whom should have an important role to play in its design, delivery, review and further development in the years ahead.

Some subjects, as presented in the documentation provided for the review panel, seem to be too narrow in scope for studies at this level. Examples in this context include: Financial Law; Software Quality; Information Systems Testing; Creative Work Evaluation; Labour Law; and Company Revenue Control (incidentally, the subject titles in some cases differ depending upon which document or source has been consulted). As evidence in support of this contention, the subject Creative Work Evaluation has the following content:

- Basic knowledge of the systems for job evaluation, rewarding and motivating people;
- Basic knowledge of the job assessment methodology;
- Basic salary calculation;
- Knowledge of significance of creative work;
- Knowledge of the characteristics and significance of team work.

Equally, many of the following topics within the Labour Law syllabus could be regarded as lacking in the depth and academic rigour normally associated with postgraduate studies:

- Historical development and characteristics of labour law;
- Legal sources of labour law;
- Basics of international labour law;
- Institutions of the European Union important for the labour law;
- Employment relationship;
- Employment contract;
- Employment relationship and the wage;
- System in the public sector.

Such topic areas can be regarded as largely descriptive, based on knowledge about main issues without raising the problematic and analytical aspects of the subject. The significant variations in the manner in which different syllabuses have been written and are presented should be revised to reflect a more standardised approach. Such a review should also lead to a uniform approach towards recommended reading lists, together with a substantial updating of such material. During the site visit, the expert panel discovered that management place significant emphasis on an interdisciplinary approach within the programme. However, this approach is not adequately reflected or disclosed by the curriculum, where the set of different subjects does not suggest an interdisciplinary focus.

Returning to the theme of subject weighting, 10 ECTS credits is an unusually large allocation when considered in the context of the time allocated to each module, particularly the limited direct student contact hours and an unstructured approach to the self-study process. The general practice would be for each subject to have a weighting which varies from 6 to 8 ECTS credits. The current credits magnitude assumes high requirements for contact hours, clearly defined individual and group work, and a systematic, extensive set of related examination and project assignments. The fact that there are only 15 teaching hours dedicated to each subject per semester and 5 hours for seminars (a variation on the total time allocation stated in the programme description) makes it extremely difficult to justify any subject being assigned 10 ECTS credits. On the other hand, a somewhat unrealistic and exaggerated amount of time has been assigned to self-study, which has not been defined and structured in terms of the activities involved or the related, measurable learning outcomes. It would appear that the only requirement associated with the self-study process is the generally undefined homework associated with preparation for seminars.

Master's degree programmes are expected to place a strong emphasis on research, and not just for thesis-production purposes. The lack of a module on Research Methodology in the curriculum and the absence of student assignments based upon research-related activities, with the exception of the Master's thesis, are significant. This factor also has implications in terms of contributing to the establishment of the correct balance between theory and practice in curriculum design.

Some subject titles do not correspond with their syllabus content, and also do not contain identical wording in all documents in which where they are presented, such as in the self-evaluation report, the programme brochure, and the website references. Examples of the discrepancies include the reference to Business Communication in the SER versus Communication for European Project Management in the programme description, and European Project Finance in the programme description versus Financial Resources for European Projects in the SER. There are also some further anomalies between these two particular information sources in that, for example, the subject Research and Development in the EU and Information Technology and Teamwork are both referenced in the programme description without being mentioned in the SER. Such variations may be attributable to the translation process. However, they should be avoided in the interests of ensuring a coherent, unified message for all stakeholders as part of an overall strategy to promote the programme and reinforce the reputation of the institution.

A variety of teaching methods is listed in the subject descriptions, and some suggest that they are too technical and restrictive for students at this level. In this context, methods and techniques such as the presentation of seminar and laboratory work on a personal computer might be cited. This deficit may be related to the absence of a clearly expressed focus on personal competence development in the LOs and an insufficient concentration on students acquiring the skills such as analytical and critical thinking, problem solving and decision making, and entrepreneurship and innovation competencies as part of the learning process.

In general, the current methodologies for syllabus delivery are not always the most suitable for the purpose of developing the above-mentioned personal competencies. One of the most widely deployed methods to achieve the outcomes essential in postgraduate studies globally is the case study approach. Much potential for the use of reputable and well-established case study material exists across different subjects within the curriculum. There may even be the possibility of students writing case studies, to be assessed as part of research-based assignments involving team working. The review panel concluded from reading the documentation and the discussions held during the site visit that few approved case studies are being used in the classroom. However, some academic staff members are presenting their prepared examples as business scenarios for teaching and learning purposes.

While programme management is committed to curriculum renewal, a systematic process to ensure its achievement is not in place. In order to enrich the quality of teaching and learning, the establishment of a clear policy and related guidelines for the purpose of curriculum adjustment is worthy of the fullest support. Individual faculty members are given informal responsibility to renew the subject(s) they teach, but peers are not involved and there is no official programme committee with a formal structure and a defined purpose. The inclusion of external stakeholders in curriculum design and renewal activities would also add value to initiatives in this area.

2.3. Teaching staff

As stated in the SER and from the information which the expert team was given verbally, it seems that the only requirement to qualify as a teacher of academic programmes at first and second cycle levels in Slovenia is for the staff member to possess a valid habilitation - no other quantitative requirements appear to exist. Academic staff appointments for the programme are approved by the Senate of AMEU-ECM and satisfy State requirements.

The lecturing team members responsible for programme delivery seem to be highly qualified in their particular fields. Documentation presented to the review panel indicates that there are 10 academics involved in teaching the different subjects. Their composition and credentials appear to be sufficient to the programme's requirements. However, it should be stressed that the teaching of the curriculum is heavily dependent on part-time staff. All of the faculty members have other institutions / organisations as their main employer. This can be regarded as a serious limitation in the area of postgraduate studies which require a high level of interactivity with students and substantial mentoring, especially in relation to research activities. The lack of full-time teaching staff may also pose a risk to continuity and further progress in

programme development and the improvement of quality standards. The external review team also considers the lack of full-time teaching staff as a potential obstacle on the path towards realizing the institution's vision of achieving University status.

In a similar context, there is a requirement for stronger and more focused academic staff commitment to research related to the aims and objectives of the programme. The research activities of lecturers are related mainly to their own particular interests, with the outputs contributing largely to other institutions' scientific credibility, without having a really positive impact in terms of AMEU-ECM research activities. Even though some teachers can point to a significant volume of published research, in many cases the focus is not in line with this particular programme's goals and needs. The existence of a research strategy involving clusters of staff / researchers focusing on research and innovation in related fields would represent a positive development for this study programme. The functioning of common research interest groups could increase team coherence, enhance the identity of the programme, help exploit funding available at European level, and create additional developmental opportunities for junior staff and students.

The professional development of academic staff should encompass areas such as the determination and writing of learning outcomes at the appropriate level, the identification of individual student's learning styles, the use of case studies, and the introduction of integrated assessment tests to help cement the connection between different but related subjects across the curriculum. The results would strengthen the programme and enhance the knowledge, skills and competencies of future graduates.

Teaching staff members, by virtue of their individual circumstances, are much more involved in activities at their parent employment organisations rather than having a strong institutional involvement in academic activities at AMEU-ECM. This unsatisfactory situation is manifested by their limited role in the preparation of the self- evaluation report and in the finalisation of the curriculum. The evaluation team received explanations that the programme was designed in a formal manner in preparation for official approval in line with national quality requirements. It is now time to progress to the next developmental stage, influenced by the recommendations and proposals outlined in this report. Without placing too much emphasis on a bureaucratic model, formal guidelines and procedures should be established whereby faculty members are allocated certain responsibilities. As a minimum, a programme committee, a research committee, and a social partnership forum should be established. Such supportive mechanisms would greatly facilitate the programme renewal process, assuming that the respective roles of peer faculty members and all other stakeholder representatives are defined unambiguously. The preparation of annual development plans by individual lecturing staff members would also increase commitment and team working, as well as assisting the institution in planning future actions.

The representative staff members who participated in the discussions with the experts panel during the site visit expressed enthusiasm about their work at AMEU-ECM and a willingness to become more involved. Some positive comments illustrated a higher satisfaction level with the work environment in this institution than elsewhere. Such high morale reflects

deserved credit on institutional management for establishing a positive working environment. The platform already established should serve as a solid foundation for harnessing the goodwill of lecturers and their willingness to create a strong sense of programme ownership. The review team believes that academic staff should be actively and formally involved in the future development of the programme. In addition to the input from the designated teaching staff, this study programme (and both of the others being reviewed by the external panel) would benefit from a wider involvement on the part of visiting lecturers/guest speakers, especially those with particular expertise in the business sector. When it comes to the stage of assigning supervisors for students preparing their theses, it is important to ensure that this workload is shared rather than relying on too few academic staff members to supervise the production of too many theses.

2.4. Facilities and learning resources

The programme is delivered in two venues, Murska Sobota and Maribor. It seems that there are adequate facilities in both centres for the volume of students currently enrolled. As the student number is very small (8 in the first year) and they are remotely located, the quality of the distance learning environment is critically important. In this context, the teaching and learning process is supported by a modern, integrated IT infrastructure. Specifically, the Moodle platform provides a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) that supports the depository of additional teaching materials, communication amongst students, and between students and lecturers, control of the teaching process regarding assignments, feedback provision, and other administrative functions.

A video conference system allows students to watch the lectures on their home computers, thereby supporting real-time interaction between the lecturer and the students. The use of interactive Smart boards allows the capture of the lecturers' work on the board or the podium during the lecture. In addition, lectures are taped and uploaded to Moodle for off-line use, so students may both watch in live stream and re-run these at home as often as required. Student representatives, in discussion with the review panel, emphatically expressed their appreciation of the range of technology available to support their studies, as well as their satisfaction with its operation.

AMEU-ECM recently made efforts to organize the small library facilities which are located in Maribor and Murska Sobota, so that these would meet academic standards. A library administrator was appointed after being trained, while the services of an external librarian were hired for organizing the library. Students also may use the facilities of the library of the University of Maribor, while those studying in Murska Sobota have access to the library in Ljubljana. Virtually, students are provided with the possibility of electronic access to approximately 10,000 bibliographical units inserted in the COBISS (virtual library services in Slovenia) system. With reference to the teaching and learning materials at the disposal of students, the inadequacy of the recommended textbooks and other reading materials (many are dated in the 1990s) should be addressed. This deficit is particularly significant in the context of subjects of a technical/technological nature.

In terms of physical infrastructure, the premises at Alma Mater Europaea – European Centre Maribor are adequate, both in size and quality. These are equipped (especially for e-

learning) sufficiently for the needs of the programme and recent renovations have also taken place. The number and dimensions of rooms available for study purposes are also appropriate. At the same time, it should be stated that the premises is a shared facility amongst various departments of AMEU-ECM.

During the site visit, it became clear that students are generally operating via remote study mode, leading to both themselves and their tutors utilising intensively the potential of Moodle and other e-learning facilities. However, the reliance on technology creates academic challenges in relation to the comparative lack of opportunity for using active learning methods in classroom situations. Key contributing factors in this less than desirable situation include the small student cohort and the relative scarcity of direct class contact hours. During the discussions, it became apparent that even such a low number of class contact hours attract comparatively few students.

A well-staffed study office at the headquarters in Maribor, including technical staff members, guarantees the smooth running of the platforms, continuously updates information and attends to the communication with students. It is evident that AMEU-ECM shows care and commitment to continuous upgrading of the available infrastructure. Alma Mater Europaea is planning to move inside the coming months to a new headquarters close to the existing premises in Maribor. This relocation will provide valuable additional space for the expansion proposed in the institution's strategic plan.

2.5. Study process and students' performance assessment

The SER indicated, and meetings with staff and students confirmed, that the admission requirements for the programme are not sufficiently clear. Other than the Bachelor degree being necessary, no other requirements are specified. The only limiting factor appears to be that applicants are expected to have a background in a "similar study area". This stipulation is somewhat vague and open to different interpretations.

The organisation of the study process for students should be more precise, despite the fact that the size of the institution leads to much direct communication between staff and students. Taking into consideration that the actual teaching hours delivered are significantly below those stated in the programme description for the various subjects, a question arises as to whether, generally speaking, too much flexibility and an over-reliance on ad-hoc arrangements prevails within the programme. The current approach also raises some concern as to whether the ECTS credits assigned to individual subjects, as well as to the entire programme, are fully justified.

Meetings between the review panel and different stakeholders confirmed that student attendance in class needs to be improved, a factor which is readily acknowledged in the institution's latest strategic plan. Corrective measures towards this end are required. The strategic plan also identifies the necessity to monitor more closely the self-study activities of students, as well as the workload of academic staff. While the greater proportion of the total student hours has been assigned to self-directed learning, a structured system to monitor this process has not been implemented. However, the institution's intention to constantly review and develop the

Quality Manual and to ensure that the quality dimension of all aspects of the study process is improved on a regular basis is readily acknowledged.

An important dimension of any such improvement would be a mandatory emphasis on student involvement in research. Apart from this being an essential dimension of the programme, the benefits gained by students should increase their effectiveness in work and enhance their career development prospects. As already alluded to, there is an onus on programme management to improve the assessment process and to link its component parts to the stated learning outcomes for individual subjects. The difficulties referred to above with regard to the establishment of the programme's goals, learning outcomes and content at the appropriate level could perhaps be alleviated somewhat through the establishment of a formal, unambiguous assessment process designed to verify whether the defined LOs have been achieved.

Another concern for the review panel arises from the grading system in place and the approaches to student assessment currently being adopted. It is felt that there should be a more logical distribution of bands within the template used to grade student performance (there are also two "very good" categories with a different band of marks) , as well as clearer guidelines for management staff in defining examination requirements and formats. Potential also exists for the replacement of some oral examinations with more relevant and meaningful practical tests. The custom whereby students may request an oral rather than a written examination is worthy of careful monitoring in the interests of equity, fairness, and the maintenance of common assessment standards. The decision to allow students to use written materials already produced when completing the Bachelor degree thesis (up to 30% of same) implies a dilution of standards at postgraduate level.

During the site visit, it was ascertained that student grades in examinations are generally high. Predominantly, the top-end marks are received by students (extending from 8 to 10). Staff explained that such an outcome is influenced by the traditions of the national higher education system, where grades below 8 are not the norm. However, in the international higher education arena the existence of such a concentrated set of high marks within a narrow range would be regarded as surprising. Any conclusions on the matter in the context of this programme should be postponed until the first cohort of students has graduated.

In relation to the wider role of students in academic affairs, it is understood that this year none of management students from all programmes participated in any valuable or worthwhile social or charitable activities extending beyond the domain of academic programme requirements. A wider involvement along these lines would introduce the social responsibility concept into the personal development process and help their preparation to assume wider societal roles after graduation. Self-organisation and better time management would be further benefits likely to accrue from student involvement in reputable extra-curricular activities. A mitigating factor, by way of explanation for student inactivity, is the fact that the majority, if not all, are in employment at any one time.

The inclusion of ethics and principles of ethical behaviour in the curriculum is reinforced by the care taken by management to monitor and eliminate academic dishonesty and

to preserve the integrity of the study programme and associated qualification. An up-to-date, comprehensive and clearly understood anti-plagiarism policy is essential for all higher education institutions. This provides formal guidelines and regulations concerning how the institution proposes to act in cases of alleged cheating, and outlines the consequences for students who are found guilty of breaching the code of conduct, which must be adhered to at all times. The use of Turnitin and other software to detect plagiarism together with the manual offering guidelines and advice to students involved in thesis preparation represent safeguards against dishonest practices.

The Master's thesis preparation and delivery process seems to be well defined. The methodological guidelines (mentioned above) and the procedures in place are presented to students during the first semester of their studies. They also receive supplementary support from personal consultation with their supervisors. As the Master's in Management programme has just first-year students at this stage, it was not possible to evaluate fully the preparation arrangements associated with the thesis. However, the postgraduate programme in European Business Studies shows that each thesis is supervised by one or two academics, each having a Doctoral degree. From discussions with faculty and students, the commitment of thesis supervisors to quality and discipline was readily discernible. If not already planned, it is suggested that the inclusion of a reflective section in each student's thesis would enhance the learning process associated with the completion of this major project.

Overall, the study office plays a key role in providing essential student services, and is seen to display a high-level of commitment in dealing with all administrative tasks related to students during their study period. The student representatives were pleased to confirm that they receive well-organised support from administration through intense and regular communication. The study office staff also demonstrated their organizational capability during the site visit by supplying any additional documentation or information requested by the review panel. It should also be mentioned that a strong sense of collaboration and team working, based on mutual trust and respect, appears to exist between students and staff at all levels within the institution.

2.6. Programme management

Generally speaking, all management systems and arrangements in relation to this programme are broadly similar to those typically found in other higher education institutions. The structure of departments and academic governance de jure are in place. However, de facto there is some scope for the fine tuning of aspects of programme management. For example, there is a lack of involvement of different stakeholders, there are no special-purpose academic committees for quality assurance and programme development, and the renewal of the programme is based mainly on individual initiatives implemented by the part-time faculty members on a subject-by-subject basis.

The programme's unique selling proposition, together with the benefits to be gained from acquiring the qualification, should be reinforced for all stakeholders, not least prospective students. It is suggested that there should be more managerial efforts undertaken to discover the reasons for the current low recruitment situation and to identify measures that could render the programme more popular. During the site visit, specific actions to promote this postgraduate study opportunity were not discussed, neither was it obvious that a focused strategy is in place

for the purpose. While the current number of students facilitates individual attention to each, the other advantages from the presence of a larger, more representative (and viable) student group are being lost.

In general, the impression is that AMEU-ECM may be over reliant on the efforts of one person and his vision. The question arises as to whether other members of the current management team are too occupied with operational matters to have enough time to complement the work in turning this vision into reality. In this context, ownership of the study programme should be extended to support the efforts of the Head of Department and management generally in order to improve the curriculum and increase the study programme's attractiveness for students. The establishment of formal structures along the lines already referred to in the report could facilitate significant progress in this direction.

In positive terms, it should be emphasised that there are already distinct efforts in place to institutionalize programme and quality management. The official institutional document “*Rules on Quality Procedures*” serves both as a Statute of the Institution and a Quality Manual. It describes, in detail, the roles and responsibilities of the different bodies established at the institution (Senate, Management Board, President, Academic Assembly, Student Council) as well as the decision-making process on academic and administrative matters. In addition, it offers a comprehensive coverage of all QA functions and devotes a full section to Measurement Analyses and Continuous Improvement.

During the site visit, minutes of the quality assurance meetings were made available to the experts panel, while discussions with academic staff indicated that they receive some informal feedback from management, but not on a regular basis. The formal communication of feedback, both positive and negative, to lecturers on a regular basis is strongly advisable.

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.

- 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. It is essential to create a strong correlation between the focus of the programme and the defined learning outcomes for each subject within the curriculum. This unambiguous unity of purpose should extend to ensure that the assessment processes in place are seen to measure the attainment of particular learning outcomes, as stated in the syllabus for each particular subject.
- The relevant internal and public documents should be reviewed and checked for consistency of information in order to avoid any misunderstanding or the formation of the wrong impressions by stakeholders. Similarly, all promotional material relating to this postgraduate degree should establish and clarify how the level and content distinguish it (assuming that they do) from a related undergraduate study programme, without in any way diminishing the status and value of the primary degree qualification. This approach should include a clear focus on the benefits of the qualification for the graduates who are most likely to become involved in meeting the challenges and availing of the opportunities which arise in modern business and public sector management.
- It is essential that the curriculum contains a much stronger coverage of topics related to entrepreneurship and innovation. This will strengthen the competencies of graduates wishing to establish SMEs (small and medium enterprises), while also enabling others to provide a consultancy service to those already engaged in this vital sector of the economy. Similarly, the other core missing subjects referred to earlier in this report should be introduced into the curriculum as a priority. Examples in this regard have been introduced above in the curriculum section of this report. In overall terms, the unique selling proposition and attractiveness of this degree qualification should be obvious to all concerned.
- 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. This process should serve to reinforce current strengths and also identify areas where improvements are both desirable and necessary. The use of a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis could form part of this initiative.
- The overemphasis on descriptive syllabus content at the expense of a more analytical and evaluative approach must be addressed in order to establish the credibility and standing of the programme as a postgraduate study opportunity, rather than one merely covering additional material at the same level as the related Bachelor degree. The teaching and learning methodologies associated with the programme should be adapted and adjusted

accordingly, to delineate the distinctions between these two levels of qualification in higher education.

- The quality of learning would be enhanced by providing substantially more direct student contact hours (a 20 hours' allocation per subject is inadequate). The structuring and granting of additional meaning to self-study work could be achieved by the introduction of appropriate tasks in each subject to help justify the ECTS credits weighting assigned to it. In this context, and as the programme is currently constituted, the credits weighting of subjects needs to be revised because a 10 ECTS credits allocation to each subject is excessive when all relevant factors, including the part-time nature of the programme, are taken into account. As part of the restructuring of the self-study component, all formal requirements, learning outcomes, and assessment procedures should be made explicit and become functional at the appropriate level.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.

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.