



Decision of the Standing Commission of AQAS

on the master degree programme

“European Forestry” (Master of Science)

offered by **University of Eastern Finland (Finland)**

in **cooperation** with **University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna (Austria)**, **Paris Institute of Technology for Life, Food and Environmental Sciences (France)**, **University of Lleida (Spain)**, **University of Freiburg (Germany)** and **Transilvania University of Braşov (Romania)**

Based on the report of the expert panel, the discussions of the Standing Commission in its 1st meeting on 27/28 May 2019, and the circulation procedure of 2nd July 2019 the Standing Commission decides:

1. The study programme **“European Forestry”** with the degree **“Master of Science”** offered by **University of Eastern Finland**, in a consortium with University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences (Austria), Paris Institute of Technology for Life, Food and Environmental Sciences (France), University of Lleida (Spain), University of Freiburg (Germany) and Transilvanian University of Brasov (Romania) is accredited according to the criteria and procedures defined in the European Approach for Quality assurance of Joint Programmes.

The study programme essentially complies with the requirements defined by the European Approach for Quality assurance of Joint Programmes and the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) in their current version. The required adjustments can be implemented within a time period of nine months.
2. The accreditation is **conditional**.
3. The conditions have to be fulfilled. The fulfilment of the conditions has to be documented and reported to AQAS no later than **30 April 2020**.
4. The accreditation is given for the period of **six years** and is valid until **30 September 2025**.

Condition:

The consortium must present a concept on how equal treatment of students regarding the organisation of the writing of the master thesis is assured at all consortium partner universities, and on how the students are informed about it.

The following **recommendations** are given for further improvement of the programme:

1. The number of tracks as well as their content and the number courses offered within the tracks should focus more clearly on specific learning outcomes in order to give students a clear profile. The tracks should be evaluated by the consortium but also by including the feedback of all stakeholders such as students, graduates and the labour market.

2. All external partners should be informed about the results of the quality assurance and the development of the programme, and it should be considered to integrate more partners in the Board on a regular basis.

With regard to the reasons for this decision the Standing Commission refers to the attached assessment report.



Experts' report

on the master degree programme:

“European Forestry” (Master of Science)

offered by

University of Eastern Finland (Finland)

University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna (Austria)

Paris Institute of Technology for Life, Food and Environmental Sciences (France)

University of Lleida (Spain)

University of Freiburg (Germany) and

Transilvania University of Braşov (Romania)

Visit to the University of Eastern Finland (Joensuu/Finland): 25th–28th March 2019

Panel of experts:

Prof. Dr. Achim Dohrenbusch	University of Göttingen (Germany), Faculty of Forest Sciences and Forest Ecology
Prof. Dr. Thorsten Treue	University of Copenhagen (Denmark), Department of Food and Resource Economics, Section for Global Development, Coordinator of the Erasmus Mundus study programme "Sustainable Tropical Forestry"
Sami Oksa	Director, Stakeholder Relations, UPM Forest, North Europe, Helsinki (Finland, labour market representative)
Martin Röder	University of Applied Sciences Weihenstephan-Triesdorf (Germany, student expert)

Coordinators:

Ninja Fischer & Patrick Heinzer AQAS, Cologne (Germany)

Preamble

AQAS – Agency for Quality Assurance through Accreditation of Study Programmes – is an independent non-profit organisation, supported by more than 85 member institutions, both higher education institutions (HEIs) and academic associations. Since 2002, the agency has been accredited by the German Accreditation Council (GAC). It is therefore a notified body for accreditation of higher education institutions and programmes in Germany.

AQAS is a full member of ENQA and also listed in the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) which confirms that our procedures comply with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), on which all Bologna countries agreed as a basis for internal and external quality assurance.

AQAS is an institution founded by and working for higher education institutions and academic associations. The agency is devoted to quality assurance and quality development of both academic studies and teaching in Higher Education Institutions. The activities of AQAS in accreditation are neither restrained to specific academic disciplines or degrees nor to a certain type of Higher Education Institution

I. Accreditation procedure

This report results from the external review of the master programme “European Forestry” (Master of Science) offered by the University of Eastern Finland (Joensuu/Finland), the University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna (Austria), the Paris Institute of Technology for Life, Food and Environmental Sciences (France), the University of Lleida (Spain), the University of Freiburg (Germany) and the Transilvania University of Braşov (Romania).

1. Criteria

The assessment of the programme is in accordance with the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes, which has been approved by the European Higher Education Area ministers in May 2015.

2. Approach and methodology

Initialisation

The University of Eastern Finland (Joensuu/Finland; UEF) mandated AQAS to perform the accreditation procedure in June 2018.

UEF produced a self-evaluation report (SER). In June 2018, the university handed in a draft of the SER together with the relevant documentation of the study programme and an appendix.

The appendix included i.e.:

- consortium agreement
- overview of statistical data of the student body.
- CVs of the teaching staff
- course manuals
- study examination regulations

AQAS checked the SER regarding completeness, comprehensibility and transparency. AQAS informed the relevant accrediting bodies in the countries of the consortium about the procedure in November 2018. The final version of the SER was handed in January 2019.

The accreditation procedure was officially initialised by a decision of the AQAS Accreditation Commission on 20th/21st August 2018.

Nomination of the panel of experts

The composition of the panel of experts follows the stakeholder principle. Consequently, representatives from the respective discipline/s, the labour market and students are involved. Furthermore, AQAS follows the principles for the selection of experts of the European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA).

The Accreditation Commission nominated the expert panel mentioned before in January 2019. AQAS informed UEF about the members of the expert panel and the university did not raise any concerns against the composition of the panel.

Preparation of the site visit

Prior to the site visit, the experts reviewed the SER and submitted a short preliminary statement including open questions and potential needs for additional information. AQAS forwarded these preliminary statements to UEF and to the panel members in order to increase transparency in the process and the upcoming discussions during the site visit.

Site visit

After a review of the SER, a site visit to UEF took place from 25th–28th March 2019. On site, the experts interviewed different stakeholders, e.g. the management of the HEI, the programme management of the consortium and teaching staff, representatives of the labour market as well as students and graduates, in separate discussions and consulted additional documentation as well as student work. The visit was concluded by the presentation of the preliminary findings of the group of experts to the university's and consortium's representatives.

Report writing

Following the site visit, the expert group drafted the following report assessing the fulfilment of the criteria of the European Approach. The report included a recommendation to the Standing Commission. The report was sent to UEF for comments.

Decision

The report, together with the comments of UEF, forms the basis for the AQAS Standing Commission to decide on the accreditation of the programme. Based on these two documents, on 2 July 2019 the Standing Commission took its decision on the accreditation. AQAS forwarded the decision to UEF and informed the other accrediting bodies in the countries of the consortium about the decision. The university had the right to appeal against the decision or any of the imposed conditions.

In August 2019, AQAS published the report and the result of the accreditation as well as the names of the panel of experts.

II. Assessment

1. General information on the universities

The international master programme “European Forestry” is offered by six European universities. The consortium consists of the University of Eastern Finland, the University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna (Austria), the Paris Institute of Technology for Life, Food and Environmental Sciences (France), the University of Lleida (Spain), the University of Freiburg (Germany) and the Transilvania University of Braşov (Romania). The programme is coordinated by the University of Eastern Finland (UEF).

The course of studies in European Forestry is a two-year Erasmus+, Erasmus Mundus joint master degree programme with universities involved which state to have a high expertise in the field of forestry education. The programme leads to a double degree awarded by UEF as the coordinating university and the second university chosen by the students. The programme started in 2004 and UEF has been the coordinating university ever since.

The consortium consists of the full partners mentioned above as well as associated partner HEIs, associated industrial and scientific partners. As outlined in the SER, full partners have an instrumental role in the programme regarding the programme’s implementation, teaching organisation and administrative support, whereas associated industrial and scientific partners provide e.g. internships or they contribute to teaching from the labour market perspective. The latter comprise partners in the respective countries plus two partners in Brazil, Canada and China.

2. Eligibility

Status

The institutions that offer a joint programme should be recognised as higher education institutions by the relevant authorities of their countries. Their respective national legal frameworks should enable them to participate in the joint programme and, if applicable, to award a joint degree. The institutions awarding the degree(s) should ensure that the degree(s) belong to the higher education degree systems of the countries in which they are based.

Joint design and delivery

The joint programme should be offered jointly, involving all cooperating institutions in the design and delivery of the programme.

Cooperation Agreement

The terms and conditions of the joint programme should be laid down in a cooperation agreement. The agreement should in particular cover the following issues:

- Denomination of the degree(s) awarded in the programme,
- Coordination and responsibilities of the partners involved regarding management and
- Financial organisation (including funding, sharing of costs and income etc.),
- Admission and selection procedures for students,
- Mobility of students and teachers,
- Examination regulations, student assessment methods, recognition of credits and degree-awarding procedures in the consortium.

Description

The University of Eastern Finland states that all full partners are officially recognised and registered as higher education institutions by the relevant authorities of their countries, which enable them to

participate in joint programmes. This was substantiated by the documentation regarding the legal status of each consortium partner.

According to the SER, the attraction of the course of studies is its cooperative character on the European level. The consortium states that the design of the programme is based on an extensive analysis considering societal demands, research trends, European policy and the experience made by the offer of other master programmes.

The partner universities have been selected to cover relevant forest bio-economy topics based on their research experience and to provide geographical forest types throughout Europe. This covers aspects and topics such as bio-economy and boreal forest management (UEF), mountain forestry (BOKU Austria), diversity of forest systems (AgroParisTech), Mediterranean forestry (University of Lleida), multipurpose forestry (University of Freiburg) and Eastern European forestry practices (University of Brasov) which lead to five different tracks in the second year of studies. The study programme is described as the result of a joint effort of the full consortium through an analysis of the forest sector, societal demands, research trends, European policy and former master programmes.

Graduates are awarded a double degree ("Master of Science"). Both degrees belong to the higher education system of the respective country. The first is always awarded by UEF as coordinating university and as it is the host institution of the first academic year. The other degree is awarded by the second-year university. Nonetheless, the degree certificate of UEF includes a reference to the second degree awarded and the description of the course of studies in "European Forestry" including information on the consortium composition. Graduates also receive a Diploma Supplement. The language of education is English.

The six partner universities have signed a cooperation agreement that outlines terms and conditions of the joint programme. The agreement covers topics such as purposes and scope of the programme, central formal aspects and defines responsibilities of all partners involved. Being a jointly carried out programme, each full partner has a representative in the Consortium Board, which meets at least once a year in order to create a mutual exchange of opinions and discussions of important topics. As stated by UEF, other stakeholder groups such as local coordinators of associated industrial and scientific partners or students may be invited as well.

Experts' evaluation

All universities in the consortium are public universities and are legally enabled to award Master degrees, which is confirmed by the documentation regarding the legal status of the higher education institution. As outlined by the consortium the aim of the study programme, on the long run, is to award a joint degree in "European Forestry" to replace the double degree awarded at the moment. However, the experts were informed that due to legislative issues in some consortium countries with accepting a joint degree, the consortium decided to award a double degree that indicate the degree of the University of Eastern Finland (Master in "European Forestry") and the degree of the second host institution (e.g. AgroParisTech "Agrosciences, Environment, Territories, Landscape, Forests; study track: Forests and their environment", University of Freiburg "Forest Sciences", BOKU Austria "European Forestry", University of Lleida "Spatial and Ecological Modelling in European Forestry" and Transilvania University of Braşov "Forestry"). Students receive after completing the Master programme the respective national diploma supplement (UEF plus the second-year choice). This is defined in the consortium agreement. Furthermore, students will receive a transcript of records outlining the personal achievements during the time of study.

Due to changes within the consortium, the committee set up a new agreement in 2017, which includes the newest consortium partner (University of Braşov). The agreement includes the general scope of the programme, the cooperation and programme structure and financial arrangements between the consortium partners. Additionally, the agreement includes industry and scientific

partners (coming from Brazil, Canada, Europe and China). Besides these merely formal aspects, the agreement outlines the responsibilities, obligations and duties of the coordinating institution, all full and all associated partners in a transparent manner. Moreover, it clarifies the responsibilities of the admission and selection procedures (defining the coordinating institution as the point of contact and the consortium full partner as in charge of the selection of candidates) in an adequate way.

As outlined during the site visit, the main management responsibility lies with the University of Eastern Finland being the coordinating institution. Representing the consortium, the coordinating institution delegates a head coordinator for all consortium partners who is in charge for the compliance of the agreement. By this, the responsibilities are clearly regulated.

The panel of experts learned that the Master programme “European Forestry” was created over ten years ago and conclude that the concept of the study programme including the selection of partner universities is overwhelmingly positive. In fact, the programme is the result of a longstanding partnership of most of the universities involved. The jointness of the programme is based on one hand on the expertise of each consortium partner university (contributing an additional perspective on European forestry). On the other hand, the consortium has developed jointly taught common courses as well as the jointly coordinated field trip across Europe, which are extremely valuable for the students. The panel of experts shares this positive impression because it does not only imply getting a diverse view on the subject from different countries, but also gives students the chance to enhance their competitiveness in the labour market in an excellent manner. Especially in the field of forestry this concept seems to be particularly meaningful, since the consortium partner universities do not only offer very different climatic and vegetative conditions (such as boreal, cool temperate or Mediterranean), but also tackle forest management from different perspectives. Based on the discussions held during the site visit, the experts gained the impression that within the consortium professional mechanisms regarding the conceptual exchange between the partner universities are in place. This benefits the jointness of the programme.

Conclusion

The panel of experts commends the good selection of partners. The study programme benefits from the long experience of the study programme since its implementation. The solid and well-conceived joint development of courses underlines the character of the study programme. The consortium agreement defines the consortium obligations of each partner in a transparent and extremely detailed manner. The status of each consortium partner university is clearly documented. Therefore, this criterion is fulfilled.

3. Learning outcomes

Level

The intended learning outcomes should align with the corresponding level in the Framework for Qualifications in the European Higher Education Area (FQ-EHEA), as well as the applicable national qualifications framework(s).

Disciplinary field

The intended learning outcomes should comprise knowledge, skills, and competencies in the respective disciplinary field(s).

Achievement

The programme should be able to demonstrate that the intended learning outcomes are achieved.

Regulated professions

If relevant for the specific joint programme, the minimum agreed training conditions specified in the European Union Directive 2005/36/EC, or relevant common trainings frameworks established under the Directive, should be taken into account.

Description

The “European Forestry” study programme focusses on advanced fields in the application of forest-based bio-economy and ecosystem services for society. UEF states that, in addition, special attention is given to methodological skills in forest information technology and data analysis. Students are supposed to gain fundamental knowledge and experience in state-of-the-art technologies from different European institutions in combination with R&D oriented courses with direct application in the industry. In general, the study programme aims at imparting interdisciplinary competencies and skills in specific topics such as advanced forest management, intensive biomass production, economics of ecosystem services and processing of forest related information, modern data acquisition and processing methods, and advanced theory of forest bio-economy. The consortium has defined overall learning outcomes of the programme which cover the development of an advanced level of expertise and the specialisation in the mentioned study programme topics. Graduates shall either pursue a career in industry, public service, or research.

The graduates are supposed to have general skills, competencies and knowledge such as:

- specialised knowledge in the above-mentioned fields,
- knowledge of current topics of European forestry,
- in-depth knowledge on social, cultural and economic sustainable forestry in different parts of Europe,
- relevant methods for research and understanding of the principles of research in forestry,
- economical alternatives for various scenarios and models.

As stated in the SER, the overall learning outcomes of the programme are reflected in the intended learning outcomes on course level which are outlined in the course description provided in the consortium agreement, the student guides and local online systems.

The intended learning outcomes cover aspects such as theoretical and practical knowledge regarding societal and environmental trends and their relation to European forestry. The consortium explains that the consistent application of the ILOs is put into practice at every consortium partner institution which leads to a constructive alignment supported by a close coherence between teaching strategies, assessment and learning outcomes on module level.

Moreover, it is stated by the consortium that the learning outcomes are not only defined by the consortium but also by industry partners. This includes soft skills as well as generic and specific skills in European forestry which shall support a student-centred learning method with a high level of student participation. The master programme aims at combining academic knowledge and multidisciplinary problem-solving abilities, whereby graduates can either continue with Ph.D. positions, assume positions in public forest and nature management agencies, or work in a problem-oriented business environment.

Experts' evaluation

Based on the self-evaluation report and the discussions during the site visit, the experts come to the conclusion that the learning outcomes of the programme are clearly outlined and well defined. The Master programme “European Forestry” has a total of five major learning outcomes which are allocated to the different modules during the study programme. Furthermore, the consortium allocates the specialised learning outcomes of each track in a matrix. By doing so, the consortium amplifies the possible learning outcomes to be achieved by students during their studies. Additionally, the consortium aligns the learning outcomes to the European Qualifications Framework and

the respective National Qualifications Framework of the consortium countries. The application of this alignment guarantees that the learning outcomes of the study programme appropriately reflect level seven of the European Qualifications Framework.

The Master programme offers a wide and comprehensive range of Master level courses that covers considerable climatic, political and economic diversity in European forestry. According to the self-evaluation report, the lines of specialisations are clearly defined by the array of courses offered at the consortium partner universities where most of the students write their Master thesis. Optional courses offered at the University of Eastern Finland allow students to some extent to specialise in areas where UEF holds special competences. The student body benefits greatly from the fact that the consortium offers tailor-made teaching to bring all students to an adequate academic level within different subjects. The combination of academic and practical skills is reflected in the learning outcomes on programme level. The good selection of the consortium partner universities gives a broad expertise in the field of forestry and students can specialise in important fields of the discipline according to the paths outlined during the site visit. Logically, one consortium university cannot cover all specifics of forestry, but each partner adds their unique point of view to the programme. In consequence, the study programme is able to provide a holistic approach towards European forestry. The panel of experts highly values this approach and especially outlines the importance of the programme. The panel of experts appreciates the pedagogical and academic approach of the programme.

The learning outcomes of the study programme with the different tracks are elaborated and demanding. The variety of learning outcomes reflect in fact the variety of European forestry within the programme. As outlined in the self-evaluation report and based on the discussions, it became obvious that graduates of the programme have a deep knowledge in the field and possess methodological, theoretical and practical skills that qualify them to find good positions in the labour market. The inclusion of the labour market and the different consortium partners during the creation process of the study programme has obviously been very fruitful and the learning outcomes are very suitable for the programme. Based on the evidence seen during the site visit, the expert panel concludes the achievement of the learning objectives in all different tracks due to the thematic relevance of the Master theses. The joint efforts of the programme (namely the joint introductory course and the joint field course) provide an important add-on to the programme. The thoughtful combination of different perspectives on forestry converts the study programme to an attractive Master programme in Europe and beyond.

The "European Forestry" study programme is not affected by the European Union Directive 2005/36/EC.

Conclusion

Due to the excellent concept of the study programme and its contribution to the academic education of students on Master level, the experts conclude that the criterion is fulfilled.

4. Study programme

Curriculum

The structure and content of the curriculum should be fit to enable the students to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

Credits

The European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) should be applied properly and the distribution of credits should be clear.

Workload

A joint bachelor programme will typically amount to a total student workload of 180–240 ECTS-credits; a joint master programme will typically amount to 90–120 ECTS-credits and should not be less than 60 ECTS-credits at second cycle level (credit ranges according to the FQ-EHEA); for joint doctorates there is no credit range specified. The workload and the average time to complete the programme should be monitored.

Description

The programme comprises two years (four semesters) of full-time studies in which students gain 120 credit points (CP) according to the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) in total.

Since Forest Sciences are described as an applied field of studies with the necessity to get practical field experience the study programme aims for the students to experience different environmental and social-economic conditions and on providing information how these conditions affect bio-economic aspects. The modules are differentiated in three kinds: a field course to provide practical knowledge, a joint introductory course, and a global seminar with joint teaching efforts of all partners, and advanced modules which the students attend at one of the partner universities of the consortium in the respective country. The elective courses in the second semester result in six different tracks: “Decision support systems for resource management”, “Resource management for ecosystem services”, “Spatial and ecological modelling”, “Resource economics and policy”, “Silviculture and forest engineering”, and “Global perspective” which includes one of the other tracks in Europe and studying at one of the associated partner universities in Canada, China or Brazil.

According to UEF, the programme is designed in order to enable students to achieve the specific learning outcomes both on course and programme level. The study programme is structured in modules. Every student has at least two attempts to pass each module. The consortium has agreed upon joint rules for the workload which differs between 25 and 28 working hours for each credit point.

The curriculum amounts to the following structure:

First & second semester:

Module 1 (12 CP) offered by UEF including trends in European forestry, academic skills in Forest Sciences, research methodology in Forest Sciences, global virtual seminar; elective courses (at least 30 CP);

Module 2 (18 CP) offered by a consortium partner institution including the European forestry field course and an applied period at a forest institution (can either be offered by a consortium partner institution, an associate partner institution or an associate industrial and scientific partner).

Third & fourth semester at one of the consortium partner institutions:

Module 3 including advanced courses (30 CP), the master thesis and an online thesis seminar (30 CP).

Experts' evaluation

By its genesis, the study programme has been developed in a way that the structure has to be seen as a two shifted study phase. The first phase consists of modules that have been jointly developed by the consortium full partner universities and that focus on providing a common background in forest management issues on a national, European and global scale. Students will get to know a holistic approach towards European trends in forestry. This implies both theoretical and practical knowledge regarding environmental conservation, interrelations between decision-making processes and societal behaviour, and the active role of the industries in the field. Additionally, academic skills will be fostered and levelled up during this first phase. Already in this phase the coordinating university evens out the path for students regarding the track of the second year (namely Decision support systems for resource management, resource management for ecosystem services, spatial and ecological modelling, resource economics and policy, and silviculture and forest

engineering) by offering elective courses. The joint efforts of the first phase are clearly visible within the curriculum. The experts appraise positively the balanced selection of topics. The curriculum as it stands covers a broad-ranging approach towards forestry from a European perspective. The content and structure of the courses promote the achievement of the learning outcomes on programme level. For the further development of the study programme and to round out the curriculum, the experts think that current topics such as economics or European legislation (both from a forestry point of view) and more practical ones such as forest operations should be considered to a higher extent due to the holistic demands in the labour market. Additionally, and like other professional and academic fields, the forestry discipline undergoes constant changes. Already on national level, the challenges of academia to fulfil these demands from the labour market are often hard to meet and it is even tougher for a cross-country European wide consortium to adapt to current topics which are relevant for the study programme as a whole. Nonetheless it has been mentioned during the site visit that some current topics such as REDD (reduced emissions from deforestation and forest degradation), FLEGT (forest law enforcement governance and trade), the EUTR (the European Union's timber regulation), or forest and forest product certification schemes are currently underrepresented in the curriculum. The panel of experts follows this argumentation and recommends strengthening the curriculum towards current topics. The expert suggests analysing which partners have the most expertise in each of the above-mentioned topics and recommend that the consortium offers such courses as electives at those universities (**Finding 1**).

The curriculum also underlines its practical approach by integrating a very valuable European field course and an applied period in the industry. The panel of experts emphasizes the role of this field course due to its relevance for the study programme and its cohort-building character. Students will get to know the specifics of European climate conditions and their impact on forestry. By applying this knowledge during the period in the industry, they will be able to combine these aspects, which is an important element of the study programme.

Since many of the students come from non-English speaking countries the challenges for students in terms of languages are obvious. The consortium has decided that the majority of the modules shall be held in English. The University of Braşov for instance offers its programme completely in English, which is unique in Romania. This approach is really appreciated by the panel in order to lower linguistic obstacles for students. Based on the discussion with current and past cohorts of the study programme, students often additionally start to learn the language of the second host university, which is of course beneficial for them. In individual cases a few elective modules, i.e. beyond the curriculum's core modules might only be available in the host universities' language, which, due to the language courses offered through the consortium, the panel of experts perceives as an added value to the curriculum.

The second phase of the curriculum aims at the specialisation in one track at one of the full partner universities. Based on the documentation provided the panel of experts expected that each full partner university largely stands for a specific track. During the discussions, it became clearer that in fact most of the consortium partners can contribute to each track. Since its implementation, the tracks offered within the study programme are not defined by a fixed set of courses. Moreover, the tracks are meant to be a guidance for students. From the consortium's point of view this approach increases flexibility of the options for students regarding their second-year choice. In fact, students are not fully aware of the different tracks and their content until they have talked to the responsible persons. The structure of the programme with a start at one university and the approach of getting to know different aspects of European forestry is a meaningful approach to this niche discipline. Overall, the study programme fulfils its objective and offers students a well-planned, comprehensive and ambitious education. The panel of experts testifies that the partner universities provide thorough modules with fitting concepts. The experts learned that, apart from the six tracks, an additional track has been developed which covers not only the European perspective but integrates the global

dimension of the discipline by having an internship abroad (either Brazil, Canada, or China). The idea of having such a special track is appreciated by the panel of experts due to its additional perspective. The panel, however, concludes that clarification regarding the tracks would be beneficial for the programme. As outlined above, all consortium partner universities can contribute to all tracks. Based on the discussions with all consortium partners during the site visit, the panel of experts acknowledges this fact and underlines this as a very positive sign for the consortium structure. Notwithstanding, the positive assessment of the general structure of the programme's second year, the panel of experts highly encourages the consortium to consider the number of tracks and their content. The panel follows the explanation of the consortium that the current track structure benefits the flexibility within the consortium, but recommends to rethink and to canalize the potential of each consortium partner university in order to structure the tracks more efficiently. By doing so, the consortium would improve the guidance of students (**Finding 3**).

All consortium partner universities apply the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) in a constant and transparent manner. The consortium agreement regulates the distribution of credit points for each study phase (the first year at the coordinating university and the second at one of the other consortium partner universities). Being an essential part of the study programme, it has been outlined by the consortium that the mutual recognition of modules is key for this programme. The consortium agreement defines that the different grading schemes at the different universities are translated into a common grading scheme to make grades comparable within and across cohorts. Based on the evidence given in the self-evaluation report, the number of credits is outlined on the webpages of the consortium partner universities. For the second year, credits are made up of seminars, field trips, workshops or lectures. All consortium partners have agreed on a common range of workload which specifies that the equivalent for one ECTS corresponds between 25 and 28 hours.

As outlined in the self-evaluation report and the consortium agreement the overall workload of the study programme is 120 ECTS. Students must complete 30 ECTS each semester and the nominal programme length is two years. The effectiveness of the workload is checked at individual course-level as well as programme-level. If needed, appropriate measures will be taken by the consortium board to adjust the students' workload. The panel concludes that these instruments are suitable to verify the workload of the programme.

Conclusion

The "European forestry" study programme consists of a well-conceived, compelling, and holistic curriculum. The curriculum offers a good practical approach and each consortium partner university brings in their specific expertise regarding European forestry topics. The decision to create specialised tracks shows that the consortium is very vivid in terms of further developing the programme. This criterion is substantially fulfilled.

5. Admission and recognition

Admission

The admission requirements and selection procedures should be appropriate in light of the programme's level and discipline.

Recognition

Recognition of qualifications and of periods of studies (including recognition of prior learning) should be applied in line with the Lisbon Recognition Convention and subsidiary documents.

Description

As stated in the SER, the student selection criteria are determined jointly by the consortium members in an annual meeting. The operational student selection is organised by UEF as the consortium coordinating university. UEF performs a preliminary ranking after an eligibility check of the applicants. The criteria include relevance of previous degree, academic excellence, motivation letter, work experience, international experience and two recommendation letters.

Applicants should have completed a Bachelor's degree in Forest Sciences or a related field corresponding to at least three years of full-time academic studies (equivalent to 180 CP). Additionally, UEF points out that applicants must prove good knowledge of English (secondary education in English, TOEFL or IELTS).

According to the SER, the final decision lies with the consortium and is done in a meeting where a representative from each full partner is present. In that meeting the consortium agrees upon a main list and a reserve list.

In accordance with national and institutional regulations, the institution in charge is responsible for the grading scale for each module. The recognition of modules and grades is regulated in the consortium agreement and the "Students' assessment regulations at Full Partners". In consideration of the Lisbon Recognition Convention periods of study and the achieved credits at the different full partner institutions shall be fully recognised by all of them.

Experts' evaluation

As outlined in the self-evaluation report and based on the discussions during the site visit, the point of contact regarding the admission of students is the coordinating university. The consortium partners have agreed on this mode as stated in the consortium agreement. After creating a shortlist based on the formal admission criteria of the programme, the consortium members meet to decide on the candidates. All consortium members have set up a minimum entry criterion for students which consist of a Bachelor's degree in Forestry of a similar field and level in English (TOEFL Internet based 90 / paper based 580 or IELTS 6.5) according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFRL). As observed during the site visit, the selection procedure and admission criteria are well in place and fit for purpose.

Recognition of qualifications and periods of studies are in place. All achieved credits at full partner universities are fully recognised by all partners. This is stated in the consortium agreement and indicates the grade of jointness within the study programme and the consortium. In case students have started their Master studies at another higher education institution, they can apply for recognition of their prior studies. This follows the Lisbon Recognition Convention and happens at the admission phase. In addition, students can also apply for substitution of studies, in case of non-formal prior-learning such as employment. It has been stated that these cases are relatively few, but on the formal site the consortium has taken this possibility into account.

Conclusion

The panel of experts evaluates very positively the well-conceived consortium agreement, which covers many of possible scenarios. Therefore, admission and recognition procedures are centralized, clearly outlined and transparently described. This criterion is fulfilled.

6. Learning, Teaching, Assessment

Learning and teaching

The programme should be designed to correspond with the intended learning outcomes, and the learning and teaching approaches applied should be adequate to achieve those. The diversity of

students and their needs should be respected and attended to, especially in view of potential different cultural backgrounds of the students.

Assessment of students

The examination regulations and the assessment of the achieved learning outcomes should correspond with the intended learning outcomes. They should be applied consistently among partner institutions.

Description

The diversity of students and their needs is one of the specifics of this Erasmus Mundus Masters study programme. Therefore, the study programme design is described as aiming to enhance students' intercultural awareness and their foreign language competences. During the mobility phases, all students are encouraged to learn and use the local language which is supported by the language courses that are offered during the first academic year in Finland. Additionally, the university offers an intercultural workshop at the beginning of the programme, which aims to provide students with skills and communication knowledge to work in a multicultural environment.

As outlined in the SER, the study programme takes the need to use and learn different communication methods and approaches into account. Additionally, it is described as combining traditional and innovative learning and training methods such as e-learning, blended-learning or distance learning. In general, courses are described to be carried out as a combination of traditional and innovative teaching and learning methods. As stated in the module compendium, courses can either have a lecture, a group work or a seminar character. UEF outlines that nearly 25% of the courses are carried out with case studies or as project-based learning, and in several courses an active pedagogy lecture approach is implemented (blended learning). Learning diaries are also used with the aim to diversify the programme's learning methods.

Throughout the course of studies, the students are supposed to get to know a variety of assessment types. As stated in the SER, a common framework of the partners for achievement of credits and subject to qualification descriptors of national authorities shall assure academic integration and quality within the programme. The assessment of students is regulated by joint rules for examination and re-sits which every consortium partner has agreed upon. Local study guides of partner universities exist as well and are supposed to regard the mentioned joint rules. Additionally, the student examination regulations cover the learning outcomes and study modes of the applied period in forest institutions which is to be done in the second semester.

Experts' evaluation

As outlined during the discussions, the consortium has selected different academic subjects according to their expertise in the field of forestry. The panel of experts gained the impression by discussing the teaching methods with each consortium partner and the students that the respective teaching methods are in accordance with the respective learning outcome of each module at each consortium university. Students get to know a broad variety of examinations during the study programme (written and oral exams or presentations). By doing so, students foster their communication skills which is beneficial for them on the labour market.

Furthermore, the study programme has some modules which are jointly developed and each consortium partner contributes its specific expertise to the module. Especially the study field trip was highlighted by students and graduates. The study field trip has the purpose to gain a broader overview of forestry specifics across Europe. Most of the students stated that this field trip is a once-in-a-lifetime experience, although it is a tough and stressful component of the study programme. The experts follow this impression and clearly underline the importance of the field trip with extraordinary multiplier effects for the students.

By nature of a consortium, differences regarding teaching methods are to be expected but the panel of experts testify that the methods used are fit for the intended learning outcomes. Irrespective of possible differences, the panel of experts values the strong interaction between the colleagues who are involved in the programme. This happens in formal and non-formal ways and helps to level possible differences. Particular emphasis must be placed on the administration and coordination of the study programme, which the students evaluated very positively.

The examination regulations are defined by the consortium board and are applied at all universities of the consortium (e.g. re-sit options at each university). The examination regulations are outlined in the study guide, which each student will receive at the beginning of their studies. In general and based on the impressions gained during the site visit, the experts confirm that no problems have been stated and students are well-informed about the examination regulations and methods on module level. Nonetheless, it has been stated that there are certain differences regarding the timeline of the Master thesis at the different consortium universities. Generally, students can start their Master thesis after completing the first year. In some instances, problems may occur due to the fact that some students get jobs before they complete the Master programme. The expert panel clearly understands that these kinds of problems are normal and follows the argumentation of the consortium that this additional double burden might cause delay in thesis writing. However, it was stated that students are only allowed to start their Master thesis after the completion of the first semester of the second year which is covered by the examination regulation for the programme. In some instances, this impedes for instance the collection of field data for the Master thesis. In consequence, the equal treatment of students at each consortium partner university is at risk, because students might not have sufficient time to complete their Master thesis in the pre-defined timeline. Thus, the consortium must present a concept on how equal treatment of students at all partner universities is assured (**Finding 4**).

Conclusion

The panel highly values the common framework of teaching and learning methods of the consortium universities. It became evident that on an informal and formal level the study programme benefits from the good coordination and coherence within the consortium. Nonetheless, equal treatment regarding the Master programme has to be guaranteed. Therefore, this criterion is only partially fulfilled.

7. Student support

The student support services should contribute to the achievement of the intended learning outcomes. They should take into account specific challenges of mobile students.

Description

Being an intercultural programme, the course of studies is supposed to consider the special necessities of its students. According to the SER, student support is three-pronged. It is outlined that students are well informed about study aims, learning outcomes, structure of the programme as well as practicalities related to mobility during the application phase. Additionally, they receive a students' practical guide on their arrival at UEF, which contains information on all full partner higher education institutions and practical information on accommodation. To enhance the information level for beginners a welcoming day and a two-day excursion with an intercultural workshop is held at the beginning of the first semester.

As outlined in the SER, the consortium has agreed to provide students of the programme with all rights of regular enrolled students and additionally all privileges of international students. Practically, this means that programme coordinators and international offices of each participating university are responsible to provide guidance and support to the students.

UEF also provides guidance in terms of coordinating and approving a personal study plan by the academic study advisor. Guidance can be given by suggesting specific elections of courses to emphasize certain topics to underline a personal profile development of the student. Information and advice are also given by the academic staff and the study advisor about the selection of the second-year host university possible tracks, specializations, and available courses at the second-year host university. Regarding the different study tracks, the information of the students is passed on to the local coordinator of each second host university. The tasks of the local coordinators also cover practical topics such as residence permit, visa, travel and accommodation.

At the second host university, welcoming and orientation days aim to make the acclimatisation easier for the students. Social integration of students at each participating university is also envisaged by all consortium members. Therefore, student tutors, student unions and faculties' student associations are integrated in the acclimatisation process of new students.

Experts' evaluation

The diversity of the student body coming from different countries is a plus for the study programme, but simultaneously this implies additional support obligations for the consortium. Being the coordinating university, the University of Eastern Finland plays a huge role as a first point of contact for students. The coordinating university is not only in the lead for supporting the students before the admission to the programme, but throughout the whole study programme. Students are informed beforehand about the admission procedure. Students receive a practical guide which covers organizational (residence permits or accommodation), financial (scholarships) or information regarding the online platform. In addition, a study guide is given to students in order to inform them about the academic content of the study programme. This second guide covers topics such as the intended learning outcomes on programme and module-level, information about the consortium and industry partners, the academic schedule, or the alumni platform. The panel of experts highly appreciates the intensive support of new students of the consortium. The consortium organizes a welcome day for new students followed by a two-day field trip to give a first glimpse of forestry conditions in Finland. By doing so, the heterogenic student body can be harmonized. New students will be supported by local students under a mentorship programme.

Apart from the organizational support by the coordinating university, the international offices of the respective consortium partner universities play an important role. Based on the discussions with the students, the experts highlight this intense but student-oriented support within the programme. Students often stated that the interaction between current students, alumni, programme leaders and teachers is familiar which creates a very good atmosphere. This good interaction between the international consortium of the "European forestry" study programme must be seen as positive sign and indicates that the well-established mechanisms within the consortium board radiate from the inner core of the consortium to teachers and supporting staff at each consortium partner university.

Students receive two handbooks (study handbook and practical handbook) at the beginning of their studies. The two detailed handbooks help students from the beginning to gain a clear overview over the programme and enhance the level of awareness for possible problem areas. Based on the discussions, the experts gained the impression that students classify the level of support as good if not excellent. Nonetheless, it can differ from university to university.

Students receive important practical information regarding the university specifics, facilities, accommodation, insurances, housing, country information, or banking issues. The experts deduce from the impressions gained during the on-site visit that students feel very well-guided and well-informed during their studies. This applies for all consortium partner universities. The study handbook prepares students additionally for the second year. Information regarding course options at each consortium partner is available beforehand and very informative. In addition, students receive support

in terms of special needs. This is mainly based at the coordinating university but students can also use the support at each second-year university.

Conclusion

The panel of experts testifies the well-established interaction between the consortium universities regarding student support. The level of student support is on a constant high level at all universities of the “European forestry” study programme. The intensive support mechanisms benefit the realisation of the study programme in a way that the special needs of a heterogenic student body are considered in a good and consistent manner. This criterion is fulfilled.

8. Resources

Staff

The staff should be sufficient and adequate (qualifications, professional and international experience) to implement the study programme.

Facilities

The facilities provided should be sufficient and adequate in view of the intended learning outcomes.

Description

As outlined in the SER, the key staff involved is internationally recognised for research, scientific outcome and academic merits. In total, the coordinator board comprises of seven academic members of each full partner higher education institution involved.

Based on the documentation, the teaching staff within the consortium consists of six main responsible coordinators according to each consortium partner university. In total the academic staff involved in the programme are 109 persons out of which the majority has at least a Ph.D. The allocation of staff to each consortium university differs between eight people involved in teaching (University of Braşov) and 31 (University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna).

Mobility for partners of the consortium is also highlighted in the documentation. As outlined, teaching and administrative staff visit other partners in order to gain competences and skills with regard to their own professional practices, integrating good practices and new methods.

Enrolled students of the course of studies have access to all facilities at the institutions of the consortium partners, including libraries and computer rooms. Online resources such as learning platforms or online library services are also made available. As stated in the SER, all full consortium partners have sufficient facilities to impart the outlined learning outcomes adequately.

Experts' evaluation

Based on the self-evaluation report, the “European forestry” programme has access to excellent academic and administrative staff. The expertise outlined in the CVs of the staff contributes to the study programme such that the content of the programme including all tracks can be offered by the consortium partner universities in a consistent manner. The expertise with different backgrounds and knowledge covers all aspects of European forestry and enables a provision of a thorough and deepening education in the discipline. As mentioned, one of the main characteristics of the study programme is the high level of collaboration between the responsible teaching staff which was evident during the on-site visit. The panel of experts shares this impression of high collaboration and concludes that the consortium structure empowers the responsible teaching staff to integrate their expertise for the further development of the programme. This indicates that the structure of the consortium board has a low-threshold communication, which is beneficial for the programme.

During the initial phase of the study programme all representatives of the consortium meet at the University of Eastern Finland to present the second-year university and its focus towards forestry to the students. The jointly offered first year seminar represents a kind of teacher mobility. The panel of experts appreciates the added value of the students' mobility during the whole programme and highlights additionally the jointly carried out field trip between the first and the second year.

In addition, all consortium universities have administrative staff allocated to the modules. The students benefit from this set-up because they know whom to contact both on academic and administrative issues. The consortium can relate to their experience in terms of additional administrative support. During the application phase the administration of the coordinating university is the main contact point for prospective students. This concentration bundles the support mechanisms for the study programme and strengthens the programme.

The experts testify that the facilities outlined in the self-evaluation report reflect the reality of the consortium. This includes libraries, computer laboratories and facilities for self-studying. These facilities are available nearly at each consortium university 24/7. Based on the discussions during the site visit, the panel concludes that the consortium provides an infrastructure of high quality and students have constant access to the facilities. In addition, all students have access to a Moodle platform and to an online library during the entire study programme. The local coordinators are responsible for the up-to-dateness of the content on these platforms. The experts observed that the practical study guide covers information on housing, which makes it easier for students to be aware of possible problems.

Conclusion

Based on the evidence given during the site visit, the expertise held within the consortium is of a high quality and fits the purpose of the ambitious study programme. The panel of experts testifies good facilities for all consortium partner universities, which guarantee a constant high level of teaching within the study programme. The strong interaction of the consortium board members in terms of constantly developing the study programme is highly reflected in the resources of the study programme. This is especially appraised by the experts. Thus, this criterion is fulfilled.

9. Transparency and Documentation

Relevant information about the programme like admission requirements and procedures, course catalogue, examination and assessment procedures etc. should be well documented and published by taking into account specific needs of mobile students.

Description

Relevant information on the joint programme can be found on the programme homepage, e.g. on financial support, mobility grants, the programme's courses and links to the study programme partners and their services. Enrolled students and teaching staff have access to the programme's eLearning platform for joint courses which are described as an interlinking point between students, instructors and administrators. Additionally, students' progress is collected by the study programme coordinator. Student grades are submitted by the partner universities during the second year to the coordinating university, which maintains an overview of the results. Moreover, two study plans (for the first and for the second academic year) and so-called evaluation reports (mid-term reports) are submitted by the students. The evaluation reports aim to document the individual student development and progress during the second year and they are especially supposed to document the progress of the student's thesis project.

Experts' evaluation

Based on the documentation and impression during the site visit it became evident that special attention is paid to transparency and documentation. A very good example is the thorough and extensive consortium agreement which clarifies admission, examination and assessment procedures. By having such a well-established agreement, the general direction of the study programme is set and on this basis the study programme can develop in a constant and rational manner.

The consortium has created a homepage for the study programme under the lead of the coordinating university. This homepage covers all relevant information of the study programme such as information about the consortium, learning outcomes, study handbook, information about quality assurance procedures, opinions of alumni of the programme and a list of most frequently asked questions. In addition, references regarding financial support and mobility grants are given, such that students are fully aware of financing options. Links to the consortium partner universities are also created in order to give students the chance to inform themselves about these as well. The labour market orientation of the study programme is outlined by giving examples of alumni paths after the completion of the study programme.

Enrolled students may use an eLearning platform to see the course syllabi and course specific information (schedules, location, etc.). By using this platform, the consortium creates an interlinking point for information and communication within the study programme. Both teachers, coordinators and the specific student can see the individual progress of the student. Being the fixpoint during the whole study programme, the progress of students for the first year at the coordinating university and their second-year choice is monitored via this platform. The panel of experts appreciates this structured and efficient way of keeping track of students.

As mentioned, the experts commend the decision of the consortium to diversify the study programme by using different tracks. As outlined (see Chapter II.4.), the panel of experts recommends clarifying the structure of the tracks and its specifics to better guide the students (**Finding 5**).

Conclusion

The panel of experts concludes that the study programme has well-established transparency regulations for the study programme. (Prospective) students as well as outsiders can inform themselves about the study programme beforehand. The clear connection between each consortium partner generates an added value in terms of the level of information. Nonetheless, the panel of experts sees room for improvement regarding the information on the new established track system. Thus, this criterion is fulfilled.

10. Quality Assurance

The cooperating institutions should apply joint internal quality assurance processes in accordance with part one of the ESG.

Description

Quality assurance processes are carried out on internal and external level.

The consortium has agreed upon best practices and course evaluations to be conducted annually. The annual consortium meeting is mainly reserved for a feedback discussion and deriving actions to enhance the quality of the programme. Additionally, feedback instruments such as alumni questionnaires are used with the aim to strengthen the connection between the study programme, the labour market and its requirements.

Internal evaluation procedures involve representative members from the consortium and one or two representatives from the current student cohorts. They comprise the collection of student feedback after each course. Each consortium member has its own quality assurance unit which also collects

students' feedback. The results of both UEF and consortium partner evaluations are discussed in the annual consortium board meeting in which student representatives also present their views and make suggestions for improvement. Actions regarding curriculum improvements are to be taken based on those results, and both students and affected instructors are informed immediately about the outcome.

An external quality review board is chaired by the UEF coordinator in which industrial and scientific associated partners are involved. This board holds annual meetings and its main task is to analyse students' feedback and give recommendations for further curriculum development. Additionally, applied period evaluations are carried out by the industrial partners according to guidelines set by the consortium agreement.

Experts' evaluation

As outlined above, the consortium offers a good study programme with an important approach to forestry. Since its initiation the consortium board of the study programme is in charge of the general quality assurance. If needed, the consortium can be extended with a student representative, consortium partner personnel, or representatives of the industry partners when certain expertise is needed. These ad-hoc representatives of the consortium board have no voting right. Based on the agreement the consortium board meets at least once a year to analyse the current state of the study programme and possible areas for improvement. To minimize efforts for each partner, video conferences can be held in addition to the yearly meetings.

The challenges of evaluating an European study programme instead of evaluating a single degree programme are relatively high. The "European forestry" consortium tackles this challenge through its consortium board. The quality procedures for the study programme are two-sided: internal and external. Internally the consortium board evaluates the yearly feedback on the courses (at the coordinating university and the second-year university). The consortium members have agreed on a common framework of collecting feedback from students to have an instrument to assess their feedback. The consortium board meetings are designed in a way that one of the main tasks of these meetings is to analyse the feedback collected from the students in order to detect possible shortcomings or areas for improvement. Based on the discussions, it became clear that in these meetings the overall development of the study programme in the past years is taken into consideration when further developing the study programme.

The consortium has implemented an external quality review board which consists of the coordinating entity of the study programme, a representative of the industry partners, and a representative of the scientific partners. Based on impressions gained during the on-site visit, the study programme is clearly visible from the labour market's point of view. The fact that a high percentage of graduates are integrated in the labour market, indicates that their skills and competences are highly valued by employers. The alumni of the study programme are very appreciated in the market and they hold good positions on a very high level. This became evident during the discussion with the labour market representatives and based on the documentation handed in.

The labour market representatives stated that they are constantly asked to give feedback regarding the content of the programme and the quality of its alumni. Although the perception of the labour market representatives is that the suggestions are implemented in the curriculum, the experts learned that currently the consortium does not have an institutionalized way of giving feedback about the implementations to all external stakeholders involved. In order to close the feedback loop, the panel of experts recommend that all external stakeholders involved in the programme should be informed about the results of quality assurance and the changes and developments of the programme. Furthermore, more partners should be integrated in the board meetings on a more regular basis (**Finding 6**). By doing so, the consortium would create an even higher visibility of the study programme in the labour market and a greater proximity to the relevant labour market.

Conclusion

The panel of experts appreciates the quality assurance mechanisms which are applied at all consortium partner universities. Although national regulations are taken into consideration when collecting feedback from the students, the consortium agreement defines in a detailed manner the instruments to be applied within the consortium. The two-sided approach which the consortium has chosen enables them to define and, if necessary to adjust, the general baseline and strategy of the programme. On the other hand, the external quality assurance board generates important insights from the labour market point of view. However, the consortium should consider to close the feedback loop regarding the further development of the study programme. Thus, this criterion is fulfilled.

Findings:

1. Current topics such as European legislation, REDD, FLEGT and EUTR should be considered as electives within the curriculum. The consortium should use the existing expertise within the consortium partner universities, when implementing these contents.
2. The number of tracks as well as their content and the number of courses which can be chosen within each track should be evaluated.
3. The consortium must present a concept on how equal treatment of students at all partner universities is assured.
4. Once the consortium has considered the tracks for the study programme, a clarification of the structure of the tracks and its specifics should be drafted and published in order to better guide the students.
5. All external partners should be informed about the results of the quality assurance and the development of the programme, and it should be considered to integrate more partners in the Board on a regular basis.