

The Assessment Decision of the EKKA Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education

12/10/2015

**A proposal to the Minister of Education of the Republic of
Moldova to
ACCREDIT**

**the Master's study programme
"International and Institutional Law"
of the Free International University of Moldova
FOR 3 YEARS**

Acting in accordance with the authorization granted by the § 10 (4) of the Universities Act and sections 3.7.1 and 3.7.3 of the Statutes of the Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education (EKKA) and based on section 33.4 of the document "Requirements and Procedure for Accreditation of Study Programmes in Moldova", the EKKA Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education shall state the following.

1. On February 23, 2015, the Director of EKKA approved by her order the following composition of the

Assessment Committee:

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| Aalt Willem Heringa – Chair | Professor of (Comparative) Constitutional and Administrative Law, Faculty of Law, Maastricht University, Holland |
| Aušra Rauličkyte | Adviser to the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Moldova |
| Aliis Liin | Legal Counsel, University of Tartu, Estonia |
| Stela Buiuc | Deputy Director, Centre for Legal Approximation, Ministry of Justice, Moldova; PhD Student, Law Department, State University of Moldova |

2. The Assessment Visit to Free International University of Moldova took place on May 21, 2015.
3. The Assessment Committee sent the preliminary report to EKKA on July 6, 2015. The Assessment Committee received the comments of Free International University of Moldova on July 21, 2015, and approved the final version of the component assessments on September 9, 2015.
4. The Secretary of the Council forwarded the assessment report containing the component assessments to the members of the EKKA Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education on September 24. The assessment report forms an integral part of the assessment decision. The report will be made available on the EKKA website.
5. **The component assessments were as follows:**

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| Study programme and its development | Conforms to requirements |
| Teaching and learning | Partially conforms to requirements |
| Teaching staff | Partially conforms to requirements |
| Students | Partially conforms to requirements |
| Resources | Partially conforms to requirements |

6. The EKKA Quality Assessment Council discussed the assessment report along with the comments of the Free International University of Moldova and other relevant materials at its session on October 12, 2015, with the participation of 9 Council members. The Council decided to point out the following strengths and areas of improvement of the Master's study programme "Business Law":

6.1.

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| Study programme and its development | Conforms to requirements |
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Strengths

- It is to be commended that the university has a clear vision of its development and understands the importance of strategic planning.
- The programme has a specific focus and has taken many steps to build and structure its proper place.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- It is recommended to finalize and adopt the Strategic Development Plan for 2015-2019 of the University and develop detailed Actions Plans, which will not simply reflect the usual

activities of the units, but will support reaching concrete aims and smart objectives of the Strategic Development Plan.

- It is recommended to consider revising the title of the study programme in order to reflect in more direct way the content of the study programme and make it easily understandable for possible students and representatives of the labour market.
- It is recommended to reflect on subject matters that appear obviously missing: (international) trade, international/European environmental law, international business/commercial law, arbitration, to name but a few examples. Choices must be reflected in the title of the programme, and the description of the programme and must be conscientiously made, also in light of society's wishes, labour market demands and general trends in comparable programmes elsewhere.
- It is recommended to ensure that internships are organized only in the institutions, which are directly related with the international or European law application/approximation, ensuring that internship will support achievement of the objectives of the study programme.
- The students' independent workload is not clearly regulated, and as it was identified during the meetings with the teaching staff and the students, the student workload of independent work is not meeting the requirement of 90 ECTS (25-30 hours per credit point). It is recommended to increase the study load of students and thus the substance of and challenges posed by the courses and internship.
- Although information on labour market demands is received by the university in various ways, it is recommended to do it in a more systematic way, establishing constant channels of communication with employers and social partners.
- Although the Self-Evaluation Report and the interviews showed the existence of communication with employers and receiving feedback from students, it is recommended to establish a more systematic approach to gathering feedback from larger number of employers and social partners and ensuring more frequent collection of student feedback – not only once a year, but after each course, internship, master thesis development, etc.
- It is recommended to strengthen and upgrade the research focus in all courses and the master thesis, also in line with the earlier finding and recommendation to strengthen the programme's scope and substance and challenges.

6.2.

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| Teaching and learning | Partially conforms to requirements |
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Strengths

- It is commendable that students themselves have taken responsibility for analysing the feedback and proposing changes in the programme and study management based on the results of feedback. Students could be encouraged even more to take active part in quality assurance processes of the study programme.

- Majority of the teaching staff and students knows foreign languages and uses books in English/French for teaching/learning purposes.
- The eagerness of the teaching staff in applying new and more interactive teaching methods and sharing experience among each other is commendable and worthy to set as an example to other universities.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- It is recommended to publish all the regulations on the website of the University and to have them translated into English and electronically published for the international students who should be aware of the study regulations.
- It is recommended to launch the strategy of improving the English language skills of the staff and students to make them more competitive on the labour market.
- The sources available to the students are out of date and scarce, specifically on international law and European law in the English language. The students should be provided with more up-to-date contemporary literature and teaching materials in English.
- The duration of internship is not in accordance with ECTS credits. It is advisable to analyse the duration of the internship and the volume of work the students have to do during the internship and adjust them so that the weekly workload of students would be reasonable and in line with the ECTS credits and hours connected to the credits.
- It is recommended to find partner organisations that offer internship places for ULIM students also among international organisations and other institutions dealing with international law, at home and abroad, in order to give students more opportunities to deepen their understanding of international law and obtain a true and necessary experience of working within the realm of international and European law and with foreigners as well as in foreign languages.
- The grades are incomprehensibly high (the average grade for the exams in 2015 was 9.14) and the current grading system does not even formally conform to the ECTS grading scale. It is highly recommended to analyse the practice of implementing the present grading system and give teaching staff instructions about correct implementation of the system. It should be considered whether the level of teaching in this Master programme is really high enough and whether there are enough true challenges, depth and substance. Speedy remedies are necessary here.
- Research skills of both the students and teaching staff are insufficient and should be increased. It is recommended to bring students in closer contact with the research conducted by the staff and make the programme a research led master programme.
- There is no system of gathering feedback from the students about the satisfaction with the quality of supervision of the thesis. It is recommended to gather feedback from the students about the satisfaction with the quality of supervision of the thesis after they have defended their thesis and use this feedback for improving the skills of supervision of the teaching staff.

- The university is encouraged to make sure that a system of evaluation, analyses and application of the learning outcomes is put in place and executed.
- It is recommended to launch a regular course for the teaching staff aimed at improving the competences of teaching.

6.3.

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| Teaching staff | Partially conforms to requirements |
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Areas of improvement and recommendations

- Among the 9 staff members, only 4 are full-time employed lecturers. The small number full-time staff poses a risk from the perspective of building a true academic culture in the institution and guaranteeing full expertise and knowledge to be present in all domains of the programme. An increase in the number of full-time staff members of the master programme is absolutely necessary to make the programme more durable and ensure its quality.
- No visiting lecturers have been involved in the implementation of the programme. It is recommended to structurally increase the involvement of foreign visiting teaching staff in the teaching of the study programme. Video conferences for involving visiting lecturers in teaching process would be, for instance, one option.
- Only very limited number of teaching staff have developed their skills at foreign higher education institutions; no staff member on the MA programme has participated in international networks. The University is recommended to plan the development of the skills of teaching staff at foreign higher education institutions and participation in international networks, motivate lecturers to undertake such activities and provide necessary funds for that.
- The participation of teaching staff in international research projects and participation in international scientific conferences is not sufficient.
- It is recommended to seek scientific cooperation partners from countries other than Ukraine or Belarus. Since the focus in the master programme is also on European law, co-operation and exchange with EU partners and universities is imperative.

6.4.

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| Students | Partially conforms to requirements |
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Strengths

- The university has a functioning system for career counselling and orientation as well as psychological counselling for students.
- The university has a Centre for International Cooperation responsible for students' mobility and its web-page.
- A functioning system is in place for detection and prevention of academic fraud.

- The students and graduates demonstrated adequate skills and good command of English.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- The university has to reflect on how to make the programme attractive and competitive. The Committee suggests that the best way is to develop the programme into a top level programme, with higher challenges for the students, international mobility, and perspectives on relevant labour markets. It is recommended to increase efforts for better links and exchanges with international and European oriented labour markets and societal needs.
- It is recommended to increase the transparency of the admission process for the 2nd cycle by adopting and publishing on the university’s web-site the internal act which would clearly regulate the admission requirements for the Master studies.
- It is recommended not to apply different tuition fees to students dependent on the university from which they graduated BA studies. The aim of ULIM should be to attract best students from all over the country and abroad and to avoid potential academic inbreeding.
- Both external and internal mobility activities must be broadened and more EU and other foreign universities and institutions included in the selection. International law master programme is an international programme and this facet and focus must also be seen to be truly reflected in how the programme is taught and how its facilities are set up. Being international implies to be truly international in outlook, exchanges, study materials, jobs, internships, mobility, and teaching staff and its qualifications.
- No students enrolled in the MA programme have participated in international mobility programmes so far. The university is strongly recommended to further continue the efforts to create opportunities and encourage international mobility for MA students.
- The unemployment rate shown by the University in SER is very high - 43% and contradicts the statement that about 80% of students are already employed. The university does not have accurate data about the employment rate and the competitiveness of the graduates of the MA programme. It is recommended to improve the tracking and monitoring mechanism of the graduates’ career and establish an alumni association which would create more opportunities for the graduates and the university to keep in contact with each other.

6.5.

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| Resources | Partially conforms to requirements |
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Areas of improvement and recommendations

- The figures of intake in the Master programme show a decline from 43 in 2010, to 23 in 2014. The University is encouraged to work more intensively towards the marketing of the programme, making it more attractive for potential students, so that the goal of 40

students regarding intake per year would be achieved. The declining number of students and inevitable investments in full-time staff, research, staff and student mobility will threaten the sustainability of the programme.

- Communication portals and E-learning facilities need to be incorporated more into the teaching process.
 - The University needs to make substantial investments into updating and expanding the library with international literature and journals regarding international and European law.
7. According to section 33.4 of the document "Requirements and Procedure for Accreditation of Study Programmes in Moldova", if three or four of the component assessments by an assessment committee are "partially conforms to requirements", the Quality Assessment Council shall decide to make a proposal to the Minister of Education to accredit the study programme for a period of three years.
 8. Taking into account the component assessments referred to in clause 5, as well as the strengths and areas of improvement of the study programme,

the Council DECIDED

To make a proposal to the Minister of Education of the Republic of Moldova to accredit the Master's study programme "International and Institutional Law" at the Free International University of Moldova for a period of three years.

The decision was adopted by 9 votes in favour and 0 votes against.

9. Contestation:

9.1. Evaluation proceedings conducted by EKKA may be disputed if the proceedings do not comply with the procedure provided for in this document. The challenge is filed with the Management Board of the Archimedes Foundation within 30 working days after the person filing the challenge became or should have become aware of the contested finding.

9.2. The assessment decision by the EKKA Quality Assessment Council may be disputed after adoption of the corresponding administrative decision by the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Moldova.

Tõnu Meidla
Chair of the Council

Hillar Bauman
Secretary of the Council