



Summary report on the accreditation of the Bachelor and Master programme “Economics” at University of International Business (UIB), Almaty, Kazakhstan

Upon the request for accreditation of the University of International Business from 24th May 2016, AQ Austria conducted the accreditation procedure of the Bachelor and Master programme “Economics” as well as the Bachelor and Master programme “Finance”. The assessments of Economics (BA and MA) and Finance (BA and MA) were conducted within one cluster by a single expert panel, consisting of 5 experts incl. 1 chair. Two separate reports were written.

In accordance with the “Guideline for International Accreditation of Bachelor, Master and PhD Programmes” adopted by the Board of AQ Austria in July 2013, AQ Austria publishes a summary report. This following summary report covers the Bachelor and Master programme “Economics”.

1 Accreditation decision

At its 40th meeting on 23rd May 2017 the Board of AQ Austria decided to grant accreditation to the Bachelor programme Economics and the Master programme Economics for a period of six years (i.e. until 22nd May 2023), subject to conditions.

The fulfilment of these conditions must be documented in writing within nine months (i.e. until 22nd February 2018) and is subject to assessment by AQ Austria. In case of non-fulfilment, the accreditation will be withdrawn immediately.

2 Short information on the application for accreditation

Name of the programme	Economics
Academic degree awarded	Bachelor in Economics
Place of delivery	Almaty (Republic of Kazakhstan)
Date of introduction	03.02.2010 / Pursuant to License No. 0137354 (renewed in 2014) issued by the Ministry of education and science of the Republic of Kazakhstan)
Regular study period	8 semester/ 4 years
Number of ECTS credits / Kazakh credits	256 / 157
Full time/Part time	Full time
Tuition fees	As per year in Kazakhstan tenge ¹ (KZT) for academic year 2016/2017: 660 000 KZT
Name of the programme	Economics
Academic degree awarded	Master in Economics
Place of delivery	Almaty (Republic of Kazakhstan)
Date of introduction	03.02.2010 / Pursuant to License No. 0137354 (renewed in 2014) issued by the Ministry of education and science of the Republic of Kazakhstan)
Regular study period	2 semesters / 1 year (profile Master programme ²) 4 semesters / 2 years (pedagogic Master programme)
Number of ECTS credits / Kazakh credits	52 / 31 (profile Master) 90 / 55 (pedagogic Master)
Full time/Part time	Full time
Tuition fees	As per year in Kazakhstan tenge (KZT) for academic year 2016/2017: 710 000 KZT (profile Master) 660 000 KZT (pedagogic Master)

¹ As for 24/02/2017, 1 KZT = 0.00304 EUR

² UIB Masters programmes are offered in two modes: 1-year ("profile") for students progressing from the same Bachelor degree and a 2-year ("pedagogic") for students changing degrees and those wishing to pursue an academic future.

3 Short information on the accreditation procedure

University of International Business (UIB) submitted an application for accreditation of the study programmes on 11th December 2016.

In its meeting on 21st December 2016, the Board of AQ Austria passed the proposal for experts for the review and assessment of the study programmes.

Name	Institution	Role
Michaela Stock	Karl-Franzens-Universität Graz, Austria	expert from academia; head of expert panel
Alessandro De Chiara	Central European University, Budapest, Hungary	expert from academia
Gudrun Kuffner	EPIC Financial Consulting, Vienna, Austria	expert with professional practice
Armiyash Nurmagambetova	Eurasian National University Astana, Kazakhstan	expert from academia
Ardian Beqiri	Bern University of Applied Sciences, Switzerland	student expert

According to the rules of the Kazakhstan register for foreign accreditation agencies, one of the experts has to be from Kazakhstan.

A site visit at UIB took place in Almaty from 22nd till 24th February 2017, which was attended by the expert panel and coordinators from AQ Austria.

The Board of AQ Austria took the accreditation decisions in its 40th meeting on 23rd May 2017. Both, the accreditation of the Bachelor programme and the Master programme are subject to conditions and are valid until 22nd May 2023.

4 Subject matter of the application

The University of International Business (UIB) established in 1992 is a legitimate provider of higher education in the area of economics/business/social sciences in Kazakhstan. The institution considers itself a leading Kazakhstan university in economics and business and aims to take the lead in developing human resources required for the implementation of the national development plan "Strategy 2050" and becoming a hub for the exchange of knowledge and competencies between Kazakhstan and the global environment.

Information about the institution	
Institution (applicant)	University of International Business, UIB
Number of study programmes offered at the institution	21 Bachelor, 11 Master, 1 MBA, 3 PhD programmes
Number of students at the institution	2500

The Bachelor and Master programmes “Economics” aim to provide students with modern international (globalised) knowledge and appropriate localised competencies (contextualisation), while shaping the graduates’ intellectual competencies so that they remain seekers of knowledge, creative problem solvers and open-minded employees/managers/entrepreneurs. Graduates’ knowledge of economics and major business process components allow them seeking employment in local organisations/businesses as well as Kazakhstani entities with international operations and foreign entities operating within Kazakhstan that are in need of local specialists with an understanding of international standards, policies, products and systems.

The Bachelor programme is designed to develop students into skilled, strategically-oriented economics specialists equipped with in-depth knowledge in social sciences, economics, business, finance, accounting, management, and international disciplines. The key theoretical economic course work at the introductory and intermediate levels, critical areas of study including applied economics and in-depth analysis are required in the programme. The importance of ethics, professional values and international issues is emphasized throughout the curriculum, along with core competencies in technology and communication.

The Master programme provides students with enhanced understanding of economic topics, integrates practice with theory and develops a strategic orientation. Students pursue in-depth and specialised topics, allowing them to contribute their know-how to the furthering of advanced organisational priorities and to understand the external expectations upon economic analysis and its implementation. The programme also provides additional coverage of international economic issues. Students pursuing the 2-year “pedagogic” programme are provided with knowledge and skills applicable in their later careers as academics or researchers.

5 Summarizing results from the assessments of the expert panel

The overall assessments of the expert panel of all standards may be summarized as follows:

5.1 Standard 1: Study programme and programme management

(a) Statements

The review panel considers the objectives of the **Bachelor and Master programmes “Economics”** to be well aligned with the overall strategic goals of UIB as a strongly business-oriented institution rather than a research-based one. The study programmes are delivered in three languages (Kazakh, Russian, and English tracks), though not all the tracks may be activated for the Master programme every year due to a low enrolment level. Both programmes have a comprehensible structure consistent with the formulated qualification objectives. The panel notes, however, that in contrast to the actual curriculum design, modules should include more than one course. The study programmes include specialised and advanced courses that enable students to develop a deep understanding in the subject area. The panel appreciates the good blend of different teaching and assessment methods exposing UIB students to various learning and studying techniques. However, the panel would like to emphasize that, according to the European understanding of Economics as an area of

specialisation, the study programmes under review correspond more to the area of General Management: many core, profile, and elective courses are more typical of management, and only a fraction of courses taught in the programmes could be identified as a true economics content. This is especially the case with the **Master programme** in which very few or no advanced courses in macroeconomics, microeconomics, industrial organization, monetary economics, and econometrics, mathematical and statistical methods are offered which are of paramount importance for the education of professional economists. In addition, the two-year Master programme does not currently comply with minimum credit requirements as stipulated by the national legislation of Kazakhstan.

In compliance with the national legislation, UIB uses the national credit system which differs from the ECTS system used in EHEA. A plausible system is in place for converting Kazakhstani credits into ECTS. Discrepancies have been revealed between the national regulations and the actual programme structure. Thus, the two-year (pedagogic) **Master programme** does not currently comply with minimum credit requirements as stipulated by Kazakhstan law. Furthermore, no EC standard-approved Diploma Supplement is issued to UIB graduates. UIB provides its students with a national-format diploma supplement issued in 3 languages. The student workload is considered appropriate in both programmes; an in-built system of mentoring is in place. Internships make an integral part of the study process. A strong asset of the university is its cooperation with employers, allowing a high employability for their graduates.

(b) Assessments

Bachelor Programme: The panel has assessed the standard as **“partially met”** under the following **condition**:

1. UIB shall issue a completed Diploma Supplement to all graduates of the programmes under review. The Diploma Supplement should follow the model developed by the European Commission, Council of Europe and UNESCO/CEPES. UIB should issue an EU-standard Diploma Supplement to every student in addition to the national diploma supplement. The European-format Diploma Supplement should be provided to all students on default, not upon students' individual requests. The EU-format Diploma Supplement should be approved by the respective authority and implemented (review report, p.17).

Master Programme: The panel has assessed the standard as **“partially met”** under the following **conditions**:

1. UIB shall issue a completed Diploma Supplement to all graduates of the programmes under review. The Diploma Supplement should follow the model developed by the European Commission, Council of Europe and UNESCO/CEPES (review report, p.18).
2. Increase the number of courses with a true economic content (e.g., advanced econometrics, advanced macroeconomics) and introduce courses which develop skills essential for the formation of professional economists (e.g. advanced statistical methods). (Review report, p.18)
3. UIB shall ensure proof that its 2-year Pedagogical Master transparently and consistently complies with the requirement of a minimum 59 KZ credits (review report, p.18).

UIB should also consider fulfilling the following recommendations of the expert panel.

Bachelor and Master programmes:

- UIB goals and objectives should be reflected in quantitative terms. A business plan should be developed outlining the next three to five years with regard to required capital expenditures (CAPEX) needed to implement the strategic goals and the resulting effects on the financial standing (on UIB level) as well as enrolment and recruitment (on programme level).
- Include scientific skills as part of the programmes' qualification objectives.
- Raise awareness of scientific databases among both faculty and students. Make sure that the databases form an integral part of the students' courses, especially at a more advanced level (third and fourth year of the Bachelor programme and the entire Master programme).
- Encourage students to take on the English track as it gives an international outlook to the entire university. One possibility could be that of implementing a system, which encourages students to choose the English track through reduced tuition fees.
- Offer all fundamental electives in English leaving no choice regarding the language of instruction.
- UIB should have a more transparent and workload adequate system for expressing the workload of the students. For Bachelor theses, UIB should award credits which are effectively consistent with the amount of workload they entail.
- UIB should reorganise the curriculum so that one module is more than one course.
- UIB shall issue a completed Diploma Supplement for each programme undergoing the accreditation to each graduate of such programmes irrespective of whether students or other stakeholders explicitly ask for it. UIB should cooperate with ENIC NARIC office in Kazakhstan (<http://www.enic-kazakhstan.kz/>) concerning the topic of Diploma Supplement development and issuance.
- Ensure availability of all MOODLE functions in three languages by the beginning of Academic Year 2017/18.
- Improve collection of employment statistical data. The information should be processed at a deeper level of detail, distinguishing placements according to industry, function, region, gender, and even provide compensation information (where possible), i.e., similar to placement tracking carried out at Business schools across Europe and the United States.

Bachelor programme:

- Increase the Economics content in the Bachelor programme "Economics" with regard to disciplines with a true economics content (e.g., industrial organization and monetary economics).

Master programme:

- Improve econometric and statistical courses. Increase the use of econometric and statistical programmes. Some of the most advanced software, such as "R", are freely available, which makes their introduction in the courses essentially costless. However, the university must also ensure that there are faculty capable to use such software, have solid knowledge of up-to-date statistical and econometric techniques, both on a theoretical and practical level, and are able to convey their knowledge to students.
- Make the Master programme in Economics available in English irrespective of the number of applicants.

5.2 Standard 2: Staff

(a) Statements

The panel is of the opinion that the composition as well as the number of faculty in both **Bachelor and Master programmes "Economics"** fulfil the requirements of a scientific education. Faculty have access to resources, which guarantee their professional and scientific development. Students receive adequate support and guidance from faculty. Management pays particular attention to the quality of the teaching skills and methods in the recruitment process and constantly and closely monitors the faculty's scientific and education achievements.

(b) Assessments

Bachelor Programme: The expert panel has assessed the standard as **"met"**.

Master Programme: The expert panel has assessed the standard as **"met"**.

UIB should also consider fulfilling the following recommendations of the expert panel.

Bachelor and Master programme:

1. UIB should offer longer-term contracts for most competent faculty members.
2. Follow through on the measures described by the Vice Rector for Scientific Affairs.
3. Balance supervision and independence in Bachelor thesis / Master dissertation writing: increase students' personal involvement and contribution in planning, carrying out and communicating their research.
4. Provide a more structured and transparent incentive scheme for teachers who actively develop their skills, take on further education/pursue additional titles or degrees, or regularly publish in refereed international journals.
5. Provide incentives for teachers who take on didactic training and innovative teaching methods.

5.3 Standard 3: Quality assurance

(a) Statements

The panel states that the **Bachelor and Master programmes in Economics** have institutionalized measures for quality assurance, which still could be further enriched. Various stakeholders are considered and appreciated for the programme development and students have different channels and bodies to address issues or give feedback. While UIB is on a good track for continuous improvement, the panel believes that the functions of the Quality Assurance Office (QA Office) could be enriched and strengthened. In particular, the centralized lead of the QA Office and its current helpful but limited to "informative" role is a boundary for the perception of quality and hence is likely to limit its impact. The panel is convinced that providing a traditional internal auditing role to UIB QA Office would be essential to the effectiveness of the management action and the improvement of the governance process.

(b) Assessments

Bachelor Programme: The panel has assessed the standard as **“partially met”** under the following **condition**:

1. The Head of the Quality Assurance Office should be independent from the operative management, so that perceptive bias can be eliminated to the fullest. UIB should separate the functions of Vice President and Head of the Quality Assurance Office. Also the functions and responsibilities of the Quality Assurance Office should be expanded to the extent of an internal audit position so that it can be used as a management tool rather than an information allocator (review report, p.23).

Master Programme: The panel has assessed the standard as **“partially met”** under the following **condition**:

1. The Head of the Quality Assurance Office should be independent from the operative management, so that perceptive bias can be eliminated to the fullest. UIB should separate the functions of Vice President and Head of the Quality Assurance Office. Also the functions and responsibilities of the Quality Assurance Office should be expanded to the extent of an internal audit position so that it can be used as a management tool rather than an information allocator (review report, p.24).

UIB should also consider fulfilling the following recommendations of the expert panel.

Bachelor and Master programmes:

- Scientific stakeholders should be better represented in the curriculum design, review and implementation.
- UIB's alumni should be more actively engaged the curriculum design, review and implementation of the study programmes.

5.4 Standard 4: Funding and infrastructure

(a) Statements

The panel found out that the funding of the **Bachelor and Master programmes** is ensured through increasing student numbers for the upcoming academic year and through the support of the private foundations. Adequate rooms including libraries and technical facilities are available and are undergoing renovations that will be beneficial for the study programmes. Plans for the campus expansion are much appreciated by the panel and will help UIB to highlight their presence in Almaty.

(b) Assessments

Bachelor programme: The expert panel has assessed the standard as **“met”**.

Master programme: The expert panel has assessed the standard as **“met”**.

UIB should consider fulfilling the following recommendation of the expert panel.

Bachelor and Master programmes:

- At all times UIB should maintain a 3-5 year business plan listing itemized capital expenditures (CAPEX) and reflecting the overall strategy and resulting financing needs as well as sources of funding.

5.5 Standard 5: Research and development and appreciation of the arts

(a) Statements

The panel came to the conclusion that UIB favours a practical approach to teaching and learning rather than a more scientific one. This is reflected in the good placement outcomes of its students, on the positive side, and the scant attention paid to the development of research, which can meet international standards. Recent changes, exemplified by the appointment of the new Vice Rector for Scientific Affairs, promise to significantly strengthen the research profile of the institution, with obvious long-term benefits to the quality of the **Bachelor and Master programmes**. Students' involvement in research activities is limited, although this is fairly standard for a **Bachelor programme**, where typically the sole instance in which students have to carry out a serious research project is the final thesis. In this respect, students are insulated from the challenges that research work entails, since their work is closely monitored by their thesis advisors. In regard to the **Master programme**, students' involvement in research activities is limited to the Master dissertation. The evening mode of the programme delivery, which is in many cases accompanied by daytime employment, makes it hard for the students to devote enough time to carry out a comprehensive research project. The panel found that the topics of the final Bachelor theses/Master dissertations are typically closely related to the professional content of the internships, which strengthens the professional rather than scientific orientation of both programmes.

(b) Assessments

Bachelor Programme: The expert panel has assessed the standard as “**met**”.

Master programme: The expert panel has assessed the standard as “**met**”.

UIB should consider fulfilling the following recommendations of the expert panel.

Bachelor and Master programmes:

- Given that the university's core task is to carry out research, UIB should (1) provide its researchers with adequate time and resources for pursuing research and translating it into research-based teaching for the long-term benefit of students; (2) continue in its effort to promote a research culture.
- UIB should capitalize on recent hires such as the new Vice Rector for Scientific Affairs and promote research. The institution should try to strike a balance between practical experience and scientific research of the faculty.
- UIB should encourage students to become critical thinkers. UIB should keep in mind the ambitious long-term goal of molding tomorrow' citizens (and in some cases, leaders) and not limit itself to train professionals in economics for their first employment.
- The easiest way to emphasize science and develop advanced skills is to combine theoretical classes with the use of state-of-the-art econometric and statistical

software, which may well be free and open-source, and the regular use of databases that UIB purchased five years ago. Making them an integral part of teaching material and courses will encourage students to use them.

- Strengthen the UIB system of incentives for staff engagement in organizing conferences and workshops.
- Develop a more transparent system of incentives for the faculty who produce high-value research.

Bachelor programme:

- Introduce academic writing on the Bachelor level for the Bachelor theses.

5.6 Standard 6: National and international co-operations

(a) Statements

The university has struck some agreements for national and international cooperation. Its effort to increase mobility and international exposure are challenged by cultural and language barriers, and have recently been undermined by adverse economic conditions. UIB offers its **Bachelor students** the possibility to spend periods of time in other higher-education institutions abroad, but the number of opportunities available is currently limited. The possibility to spend periods of time abroad in other higher-education institutions abroad is more limited for **Master students**, given the short length of the study programme and the contemporaneous work duties of the job environment of most students. The student exchange is substantially one-sided as the university is unable to systematically attract foreign students and researchers, which limits a fruitful exposure to a variety of cultural backgrounds.

(b) Assessments

Bachelor programme: The expert panel has assessed the standard as **“met”**.

Master programme: The expert panel has assessed the standard as **“met”**.

UIB should consider fulfilling the following recommendations of the expert panel.

Bachelor and Master programmes:

- Invite scholars of different backgrounds to ensure exposure of UIB's staff and students to a different cultural environment and bring in different perspective into the university's teaching and research community.
- Promote cooperation between the Career Centre and the International Office.
- Strengthen the international focus of the university by encouraging both incoming and especially outgoing mobility. Measures which can help the university become an appealing destination to foreign students and faculty include, but are not limited to the following: internationalisation of the curriculum (e.g., scope of the courses), an increase in the English content of the lectures, international placement, a deeper involvement of research staff in international research projects.

Master programme:

- UIB could explore opportunities of industry-sponsored grants for 1 year Master courses in universities outside Kazakhstan.

6 Statement of the University of International Business to the report of the expert panel

The institutional response to the review reports submitted by UIB on 18 April 2017 states the following: "University of International Business accepts the reports of the AQ Austria Panel regarding the review of UIB study programmes in Economics (BA and MA) and Finance (BA and MA) as well as the conditions and recommendations outlined in the reports. UIB would further like to thank the Panel members for their understanding of our operations and the valuable insight/feedback offered, which will allow the University to further enhance its programmes in the future".

7 Summary and conclusion

The review report is comprehensive and the expert panel's assessments are consistent with the findings. The conditions formulated by the expert panel are necessary because the respective standards are assessed as partially met and support the further development of the programmes. Therefore the conditions are considered necessary and appropriate.

Due to the institutional character of the condition, the Board of AQ Austria decided to transform the following conditions into a recommendation, although the Board perfectly agrees with the findings and considers it really important:

The Head of the Quality Assurance Office should be independent from the operative management, so that perceptive bias can be eliminated to the fullest. UIB should separate the functions of Vice President and Head of the Quality Assurance Office. Also the functions and responsibilities of the Quality Assurance Office should be expanded to the extent of an internal audit position so that it can be used as a management tool rather than an information allocator (Standard 3.1).

8 Decision of AQ Austria Board

The Board of AQ Austria based its decision on the self-documentation and supporting documents submitted by UIB, the review report of the expert panel, and the formal statement by UIB.

The Board of AQ Austria decided to grant accreditation to the study programmes

Economics (Bachelor)

for a period of six years, subject to two conditions. The fulfilment of these conditions must be documented in writing within nine months (i.e. until 22nd February 2018) and is subject to assessment by AQ Austria. In case of non-fulfilment, the accreditation will be withdrawn immediately.

Condition:

1. UIB shall issue a completed Diploma Supplement to all graduates of the programmes under review. The Diploma Supplement should follow the model developed by the European Commission, Council of Europe and UNESCO/CEPES. (Standard 1.8).

and ***Economics (Master)***

for a period of six years, subject to four conditions. The fulfilment of these conditions must be documented in writing within nine months (i.e. until 22nd February 2018) and is subject to assessment by AQ Austria. In case of non-fulfilment, the accreditation will be withdrawn immediately.

Conditions:

1. UIB shall issue a completed Diploma Supplement to all graduates of the programmes under review. The Diploma Supplement should follow the model developed by the European Commission, Council of Europe and UNESCO/CEPES. (Standard 1.8).
2. Increase the number of courses with a true economic content (e.g., advanced econometrics, advanced macroeconomics) and introduce courses which develop skills essential for the formation of professional economists (e.g. advanced statistical methods). (Standard 1.5)
3. UIB shall ensure proof that its 2-year Pedagogical Master transparently and consistently complies with the requirement of a minimum 59 KZ credits (Standard 1.6).

9 Annex

- Review report of the expert panel
- Formal statement by UIB