

# Report on the outcome

of the accreditation procedure for:

- PhD in Environmental Sciences and Policy
- MSc in Environmental Sciences and Policy

to be offered in Vienna by the Central European University  
Private University

## 1 Subject of the application

The Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation Austria (AQ Austria) conducted an accreditation procedure for the accreditation of PhD in Environmental Sciences and Policy and MSc in Environmental Sciences and Policy to be offered in Vienna by the Central European University Private University (CEU PU) in accordance with § 24 Act on Quality Assurance in Higher Education (HS-QSG) BGBl I Nr. 74/2011 as amended in conjunction with § 2 Private Universities Act (PUG) BGBl. I Nr. 74/2011 as amended and § 17 and § 18 Decree on Accreditation of Private Universities 2019 (PU-AkkVO) as amended. In accordance with § 21 HS-QSG, AQ Austria publishes the following report on the outcome of the accreditation procedure:

## 2 Procedural steps

The accreditation procedure comprised the following procedural steps:

Procedural step	date
Accreditation application of the programmes received	31/10/2019
Decision on the expert panel taken by the Board of AQ Austria	02/01/2020
Request for modification of the application materials	14/01/2020

Decision on expert taken by the Board of AQ Austria (subsequent nomination)	23/01/2020
Amended application for the programmes received	28/01/2020
Information on expert panel submitted to CEU PU	28/01/2020
Complete and formally correct applications confirmed	29/01/2020
Additional application materials received before site visit	03/02/2020
Preparatory virtual conference with expert panel	14/02/2020
Additional application materials received before site visit	19/02/2020
Preparatory meeting with expert panel prior to site visit	25/02/2020
Site visit	25/02/2020 – 26/02/2020
Additional application materials received during site visit	26/02/2020
Expert panel's report finalised	22/04/2020
Expert report submitted to CEU PU for comment	22/04/2020
CEU PU's comment on the expert report received	06/05/2020
Submission of comment on report to expert panel	27/05/2020
Statement of costs submitted to applicant institution	09/06/2020
Expert panel's response to CEU PU's comment	09/06/2020
Modified/final expert report received	10/06/2020
Modified/final expert report submitted to CEU PU	12/06/2020
CEU PU's statement on the statement of costs received	15/06/2020

### 3 Accreditation decision

On July 1<sup>st</sup> 2020 the Board of AQ Austria decided to grant accreditation to the above mentioned degree programmes to be offered in Vienna by Central European University Private University, according to § 24 section 4 Act on Quality Assurance in Higher Education (HS-QSG) in conjunction with § 2 Private Universities Act (PUG) in conjunction with § 9 section 1 Decree on Accreditation of Private Universities 2019 (PU-AkkVO), due to fulfilment of the criteria according to § 17 and § 18 PU-AkkVO.

The Federal Minister of Education, Science and Research approved the decision on July 14<sup>th</sup> 2020.

### 4 Annexes

- Comment on the expert report by Central European University Private University from 06/05/2020
- Modified/final expert report from 10/06/2020

May 6, 2020

The Board of AQ Austria  
AQ Austria  
Franz-Klein-Gasse 5  
1190 Vienna

Dear Madam President, dear Members of the Board,

I hereby confirm that we have received and fully accept the Expert Panel Review Report regarding the following programs: MSc in Environmental Sciences and Policy, PhD in Environmental Sciences and Policy. We are pleased to learn that the Report confirms the academic excellence of the programs and that they fulfill all the criteria for accreditation.

We fully accept all the recommendations made in the Report. The administration of CEU PU will work closely with the Department of Environmental Sciences and Policy to address every recommendation made in the Report. For specific responses to the recommendations of the AQ Austria Expert Panel, please refer to the detailed reply of the Department.

We would like to thank the Expert Panel members for their expertise and insights, as well as for the productive and collegial discussions during the site visit. We are grateful to the Expert Panel members for their hard work, dedication, and enthusiasm with which they approached the task.

We await the decision of the Board with anticipation and looking forward to the opportunity of starting our programs in Vienna in the coming academic year.

Sincerely,



President and Rector  
Central European University Private University

Secretariat of AQ Austria

Reference: I/A24-132/2020

May 5, 2020

Dear Ms. [REDACTED],

Further to your above referenced letter to our Rector and President, [REDACTED] I am pleased to attach the responses of the Department of Environmental Sciences and Policy to the comments and recommendations included in your report. Annex 1 to this letter includes the responses regarding the Austrian accreditation of our Master of Environmental Sciences and Policy Program, and Annex 2 responses related to our Doctoral Program.

Please feel free to contact me at your convenience, in case our responses require any further clarification.

I would like to take this opportunity and thank AQ Austria and the Review Committee for the thorough work on our accreditation request and particularly the recommendations that we believe will help advance our program in Vienna.

Your sincerely,

[REDACTED]  
Professor and Head of Department  
[Department of Environmental Sciences and Policy](#)  
[Central European University](#)

Senior Fellow  
[International Institute for Sustainable Development](#)



ANNEX 1: Response by the Department's Masters Program Committee

Page number	
27/7.2.1. and 38/1	As part of our Departmental strategy towards the CEU 2025 Plan, we have already identified this concern, which we share. We are already looking at ways of consolidating courses and/or clusters within the Winter Term, and reducing the number of courses offered over the next few years.
28/7.2.2. and 39/2	Related to the point above, we have already started dialogue on this issue, and will continue an iterative discussion with CEU PU, external teaching/research partners in Austria, and individual faculty as our teaching loads are sorted out across the various new BA programmes as well.
28/7.2.3. and 39/3	This is a welcome observation, and we will endeavour to seek an appropriate blend of science, policy, and management in relevant courses. Clusters do all have a policy component, so the potential to develop such an emphasis is there.
29/7.2.4. and 39/4	Most of our students already come into the programme well-versed in the content of at least one of the three foundational courses, and we do encourage them to enroll in the foundational courses where they have less of an academic background. However, we will consider the panel's suggestion to require students to take appropriate foundational courses (rather than leaving the choice to them), and/or introduce other measures to help ensure that all students will achieve the overall programme level learning outcomes.
31/7.2.7. and 39/5	We have started this process last Academic Year, and will continue to work towards applying a variety of suitable assessment methods that are able to capture (non-exhaustively) the prescribed course's Learning Outcomes.
32/7.2.11. and 39/6	CEU PU will be updating the referenced policy to the Austrian context, along with any other remaining policies that require an update. The updates will be made by the beginning of Academic Year 2020-21 the latest.
34/7.3.3. and 39/7	Many of our resident faculty are already embedded within scholarly expert networks (including collaboration with faculty in related disciplines from other CEU departments) and will continue to pursue such engagement. It is envisioned that this aspect of our activities will become more widespread across the department as we settle into academic life in Austria.
36/7.5. and 39/8	We assume that 'labs' here mean IT labs and not 'wet' labs. IT labs are currently being developed at CEU PU, which we trust will meet the needs of our teaching and research. Where wet labs are concerned, this would require substantial technical and resource capacity which we currently do not have. However, as in our programme based in Budapest, we will pursue working partnerships with Austrian universities and research institutions to allow some components of the programme to include hands-on exposure to such facilities. CEU PU leadership has expressed a commitment to cooperate with the Department on the matter.
37/7.7. and 39/9	As part of our Departmental strategy towards the CEU 2025 Plan we are considering the introduction of a professional track, which would probably include an extended internship along the lines outlined in this recommendation. We would, however, still likely retain the option of a more academic research project similar to the current model.

Please note the following suggestions related to the correction of factual errors in the report.

Page number	
25	REPLACE "Refinement of the course programme is undertaken by the MSc committee including all resident teaching staff" WITH "Refinement of the course programme is led by the Masters Programs Committee and ultimately involves all resident teaching staff."
26	REPLACE "In term 2, students follow electives in two clusters..." WITH "In term 2, students follow electives in one or two clusters..."
33	REPLACE "The whole programme is managed by a committee consisting of all staff and overviewed by..." WITH "...The whole programme is managed by a committee consisting of selected faculty and staff, and overviewed by..."
33	REPLACE "The programme governance is shared between the MSc director, the MSc committee and the head of department..." WITH "...The programme governance is shared between the Masters Programmes Director, the Masters Programmes Committee and the Head of Department..."
34	REPLACE "CEU PU does not quantify the divide of faculty time into research, teaching and administrative activities." WITH "CEU requires faculty to self-report the amount of time they spend on research, teaching and administrative activities in their annual faculty reviews."
35	REPLACE "...it is required that each faculty member teaches at least one course per semester in their research area. Since teaching in the fields of research is mandatory..." WITH "...faculty members are encouraged to regularly teach courses in their research area. Since teaching in the fields of research is strongly encouraged..."
36	REPLACE 'It is CEU PU policy to require faculty to teach at least one course per semester in their research area.' WITH 'CEU PU encourages faculty to teach regularly in their research area.'
37	REPLACE '...these co-operations are developed exclusively by the head of department to provide...' WITH '...these co-operations are developed by the head of the department and other faculty to provide...'



## ANNEX 2: Response by the Department's Doctoral Program Committee

Page number	
10	This is a welcome comment. We actively take faculty research interests and fit with our research clusters into account as key components of PhD student recruitment and will continue to do so. We will also encourage faculty to issue more directed calls for applications related to particular topics, in cases where topics and related funding can be clearly identified.
10	The department will continue to develop each research cluster and its international visibility. In regards to analyzing PHD placement, we have compiled some of the requested information which we did not have readily available at the time of the site visit. We have received career survey responses from 45 of the 55 alumni of our PhD program (please see attached). Of these, 29% are working in the academic/public sector, 27% in the private sector, and 22% each in international organizations and the non-profit sector. We will use this data to further explore how to help our students establish relevant professional networks already during their studies (see below).
12	This is an area of ongoing development and discussion within CEU. The department agrees and will be actively seeking internal CEU expertise (and/or new hires) to build capacity in this field for both the MSc and PhD programs.
14	This is a good suggestion as we find that about 70 per cent of our graduates are working outside academia. We will consider including an optional internship component into the Research Assistantship possibility to help students who do not plan to go into the academic field build up their research and professional networks. Similarly, we will explore the opportunities to award credits for completed internships as part of the Professional Development Practicum. In some cases this would require commitment of new resources from the central budget or from external sources.
15	In line with CEU regulations that govern the amount of coursework possible in the first year, the department will continue to require 8 ECTS credits of methods training in the first year of doctoral studies for all students. We are developing in-house capacity and collaboration in this field by showcasing the diversity of research approaches within our department in the 4 ECTS PhD course on methodological debates. Students then focus their methods training as it relates specifically to their dissertation research in a further 4 ECTS course anywhere within the University, chosen in conjunction with their supervisors. PhD students who require further specialized methods training have the option to apply for research grants to engage with centers of excellence in the necessary methods.
15	In addition to the 8 ECTS credits of methods training offered in the first year at CEU either in the department or at other Units in the University, we will actively encourage students to pursue opportunities for additional in-depth methodological training by applying for summer school/winter school grants to take methods courses at external institutions.
20	We agree and are currently reviewing the situation in the near term. As teaching in the BA programs expands, it may well become necessary to hire new faculty in order to further enhance the quality of our programs.

21	The suggestion for formalized PhD supervision training for new faculty hires is a good one, and we have brought it to the attention of the Central Administration to consider including through the Center for Teaching and Learning, as this is an issue across all departments.
21	The funding for the program is dependent on the structure of the University, not the department. We have brought this recommendation to the attention of the central administration, but there are currently no plans to change the structure. The funding for the first three years of the program is guaranteed as long as progress is maintained. The fourth year of funding will be slightly different for each student, as they are eligible to apply to spend one semester as a visiting scholar in an external university, but they can receive the funding if they have made all adequate arrangements. They must also apply for the last six months of write-up grant funding, which they receive if the supervisor confirms that they have demonstrated enough progress to indicate that they are likely to complete the dissertation for final submission within six months. In addition, students may apply for Global Teaching Fellowship positions, and new teaching assistantships will open in the BA program as it continues to expand. The University is also introducing a paid childcare leave policy for PhD students which should help reduce stress. We will make information about all of these possibilities clearly visible in our program handbook so that students know all their options upfront.



# Expert reports on the accreditation procedure for the doctoral programme in 'Environmental Sciences and Policy' and the master programme in 'Environmental Sciences and Policy' conducted in Vienna by the Central European University Private University

pursuant to § 7 of the Accreditation Regulation for Private Universities 2019 (PU-AkkVO)

Vienna, 10 June 2020

## Table of contents

<b>1 Basic principles for the procedure.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2 Short information on the accreditation procedure.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>3 Preliminary notes of the experts.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>4 Review and assessment based on the assessment criteria stipulated in the PU-AkkVO – ‘Environmental Sciences and Policy’ doctoral programme.....</b>	<b>8</b>
4.1 Assessment criterion § 18 (1) 1 to 2: Development and quality assurance of the doctoral programme .....	8
4.2 Assessment criterion § 18 (2) 1 to 6: Research environment .....	9
4.3 Assessment criterion § 18 (3) 1 to 3: Supervision and counselling services .....	13
4.4 Assessment criterion § 18 (4) 1 to 8: Degree programme and degree programme management .....	14
4.5 Assessment criterion § 18 (5) 1 to 5: Staff .....	19
4.6 Assessment criterion § 18 (6): Funding .....	21
<b>5 Summary and final evaluation .....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>6 Documents reviewed .....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>7 Review and assessment based on the assessment criteria stipulated in the PU-AkkVO – ‘Environmental Sciences and Policy’ master programme.....</b>	<b>25</b>
7.1 Assessment criterion § 17 (1) 1 to 2: Development and quality assurance of the degree programme .....	25
7.2 Assessment criterion § 17 (2) 1 to 11: Degree programme and degree programme management .....	26
7.3 Assessment criterion § 17 (3) 1 to 5: Staff .....	33
7.4 Assessment criterion § 17 (4): Funding .....	35
7.5 Assessment criterion § 17 (5): Infrastructure.....	35
7.6 Assessment criterion § 17 (6) 1 to 2: Research and development and/or the advancement and appreciation of the arts.....	36
7.7 Assessment criterion § 17 (7): Co-operation .....	37
<b>8 Summary and final evaluation .....</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>9 Documents reviewed .....</b>	<b>39</b>

# 1 Basic principles for the procedure

## **The Austrian higher education system**

To date, the Austrian higher education system comprises:

- 21 public universities;
- 16 private universities, run by nationally accredited private entities;
- 21 universities of applied sciences, run by state-subsidised entities organised under private law or by nationally accredited public entities;
- the university colleges of teacher education, run by nationally accredited public or private entities;
- the philosophical-theological higher education institutions, run by the Catholic Church;
- the Danube University Krems, a public university for post-graduate continuing education whose structure largely corresponds to public universities;
- the Institute of Science and Technology – Austria, which focusses its tasks on the advancement and appreciation of new fields of research and a post-graduate training in the form of PhD and postdoc programmes.

In the winter semester of 2018/2019, 293,644 students were enrolled at public universities (incl. the Danube University Krems). Furthermore, 53,401 students were enrolled at universities of applied sciences and 14,446 students at private universities.<sup>1</sup>

## **External quality assurance**

Pursuant to the Act on Quality Assurance in Higher Education (HS-QSG), public universities shall perform an audit procedure for the certification of their internal quality management system every seven years. There are no legal or financial consequences linked to the decision on certification.

Private universities require institutional accreditation conducted by AQ Austria every six years. After twelve years of uninterrupted accreditation, the accreditation may also be awarded for twelve years. Interim degree programmes and certificate university programmes for further education leading to a degree programme also require accreditation.

Following the six-year period of institutional initial accreditation, universities of applied sciences must be re-accredited. After that, they pass on to the audit system. However, the accreditation is linked to a positive decision on certification in the audit procedure. Before degree programmes may be offered, they must be accredited once.

## **Accreditation of private universities and their degree programmes**

In order to be active as a higher education institution in Austria, private universities require institutional accreditation which must be renewed on a regular basis. In addition to institutional accreditation, newly established degree programmes must be accredited once before they may be offered by the private university. The Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation Austria (AQ Austria) is responsible for carrying out accreditation procedures.

<sup>1</sup> As at May 2019, data source: Statistics Austria/unidata. Contrary to the data of the public universities, the student numbers of the universities of applied sciences do not include non-degree seeking students. 278,039 degree students were enrolled at the public universities in the winter semester 2018/19.



The accreditation procedures are carried out in accordance with AQ Austria's Accreditation Regulation for Private Universities 2019 (PU-AkkVO). Furthermore, the agency has based its procedures on the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area.<sup>2</sup>

The AQ Austria appoints experts for reviewing accreditation applications. On the basis of the application documents and a site visit at the applicant institution, the experts draw up a joint written expert report. The Board of the AQ Austria then makes a decision on accreditation which is based on the expert report and takes into consideration the higher education institution's comment on the expert report. If the statutory prerequisites for accreditation are met and the required qualitative requirements are fulfilled, the degree programmes shall be accredited by official notification.

Before its entry into force, the official notification of the Board shall be subject to approval by the competent Federal Minister. After the procedure has been completed, a report on the outcome of the accreditation procedure as well as the expert report shall be published on the websites of AQ Austria and the applicant institution. Personal data and those parts of the report that disclose funding sources as well as business and operational secrets shall be exempt from publication.

The Act on Quality Assurance in Higher Education (HS-QSG) and the Private Universities Act (PUG) form the legal basis for the accreditation of degree programmes at private universities.

## 2 Short information on the accreditation procedure

Information on the applicant institution	
Applicant institution	Central European University Private University (CEU PU)
Legal nature	GmbH
Initial accreditation	16.07.2019
Last extension of accreditation	-
Site	Vienna
Number of students	ca. 1800 planned
Information on the accreditation application – PhD in Environmental Sciences and Policy	
Name of the degree programme	PhD in Environmental Sciences and Policy
Type of the degree programme	Doctoral programme
ECTS credits	240
Normal period of studies	4 academic years (12 terms)
Number of study places	5 <sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)

<sup>3</sup> Five students per year are admitted with CEU PU doctoral funding. Additional students may be admitted if funding is available through faculty research projects.

Academic degree	Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)
Organisational form	Full-time
Language used	English
Site at which the degree programme is offered	Vienna
Tuition fees	Fully funded with scholarship
Information on the accreditation application - MSc in Environmental Sciences and Policy	
Name of the degree programme	MSc in Environmental Sciences and Policy
Type of the degree programme	Master programme
ECTS credits	60
Normal period of studies	1 academic year (3 terms)
Number of study places	15-25 per year
Academic degree	Master of Science (MSc)
Organisational form	Full-time
Language used	English
Site at which the degree programme is offered	Vienna
Tuition fees	€ 12.000

The Central European University Private University submitted the applications for accreditation on 31.10.2019. In its decision on 02.01.2020 and 23.01.2020, the Board of AQ Austria appointed the following experts for the review of the accreditation applications:

Name	Institution	Role of the expert
Univ.Prof.Dr. Sigrid <b>Stagl</b>	WU Vienna University of Economics and Business	Chairing Expert with scientific qualification in a relevant discipline of the degree programme
Prof. Frans <b>Berkhout</b>	King' s College London	Expert with scientific qualification in a relevant discipline of the degree programme
Prof. Ivo <b>Wallimann-Helmer</b>	University of Fribourg	Expert with scientific qualification in a relevant discipline of the degree programme
Bruna <b>Campos</b>	BirdLife International/BirdLife Europe and Central Asia	Expert with relevant work experience
Doris <b>Friedrich</b>	University of Vienna	Student expert

On 25.02.2020 - 26.02.2020 the expert panel and representatives of the AQ Austria conducted a site visit at the facilities of the site at which the doctoral programme in 'Environmental Sciences and Policy' and the master programme in 'Environmental Sciences and Policy' of the Central European University Private University shall be offered.



### 3 Preliminary notes of the experts

The four-year PhD programme Environmental Sciences and Policy was created in 2005 and was one of the last programmes to be started at Central European University (CEU). The PhD programme grew out of the decade of experience in delivering the one-year MSc in Environmental Sciences and Policy programme (MESP) and the two-year Masters of Environmental Sciences, Policy and Management programme (MESPOM) and adds up to 240 ECTS credits. The one-year MESP programme adds up to 60 ECTS credits. Even though both programmes are accredited in the United States, an Austrian accreditation is deemed necessary due to the recent move of CEU's campus to Vienna, where CEU was institutionally accredited as Central European University Private University (CEU PU) in July 2019. In the course of the institutional accreditation, the MESPOM programme was also accredited. The students of both the MESP and MESPOM programmes, share courses at CEU PU.

## 'Environmental Sciences and Policy' doctoral programme

### 4 Review and assessment based on the assessment criteria stipulated in the PU-AkkVO – 'Environmental Sciences and Policy' doctoral programme

#### 4.1 Assessment criterion § 18 (1) 1 to 2: Development and quality assurance of the doctoral programme

##### Development and quality assurance of the degree programme

*1. The degree programme was developed using a predefined procedure for the development and establishment of degree programmes and involving the relevant stakeholder groups.*

The four-year PhD programme, Environmental Sciences and Policy, was created in 2005 and was one of the last programmes to be started at Central European University (CEU). The PhD programme grew out of the decade of experience in delivering the one-year MSc in Environmental Sciences and Policy programme (MESP) and the two-year Masters of Environmental Sciences, Policy and Management programme (MESPOM).

Initially, it was run as a partnership with the Hungarian Academy of Sciences to enhance the range of disciplinary expertise that could be offered to PhD students. As the Department of Environmental Sciences and Policy (ENVS) at CEU grew, this relationship was no longer deemed necessary and ended at some point. The PhD programme has been established and its quality assurance procedures follow CEU PU's general rules. The experts were provided with a document outlining CEU PU's Institutional Assessment and Quality Assurance (IAQA) Policy. This document describes the procedure for the development and establishment of CEU PU's programmes and how relevant stakeholders are involved in the quality assurance of the programmes.

The structure of the programme, including mainly taught elements during the first year, followed by a comprehensive exam and then the shift to supervised research, is a model familiar in North American universities. The comprehensive exam in the PhD in Environmental Sciences and Policy programme is a version adapted and suitable for interdisciplinary studies. The expert panel learned during the site visit that, over time, the Environmental Sciences and Policy doctoral programme has been adapted at CEU (now CEU PU), following external evaluations, which concluded that the taught element was too large. CEU PU is reviewing the balance between taught and supervised elements, which is particularly important for interdisciplinary programmes with diverse student intake.

The experts consider the criterion to be **fulfilled**.

The expert panel supports CEU PU's intentions to continue reviewing the balance of taught and supervised research elements of the programme, including reviewing best practices in other European institutions.

#### Development and quality assurance of the degree programme

*2. Following its accreditation, the degree programme is incorporated into the private university's quality management system. The quality assurance measures also comprise adequate structures and procedures to ensure that the rules of good scientific practice are adhered to.*

The key elements of the quality assurance measures for the PhD programme are:

- competitive recruitment of students;
- quality assurance of taught elements of the programme;
- assessment of the comprehensive examination after one year;
- the quality of supervision and support for students;
- the quality of the PhD defence.

All of these processes are fully described in CEU PU's PhD Handbook and meet international standards. The structures and procedures of CEU PU's quality management system, which are laid down in the Institutional Assessment and Quality Assurance (IAQA) Policy, therefore ensure that the rules of good scientific practice are adhered to.

The experts consider the criterion to be **fulfilled**.

## 4.2 Assessment criterion § 18 (2) 1 to 6: Research environment

#### Research environment

*1. The private university has developed a research concept which incorporates the doctoral degree programme and a development plan which comprises enhancement measures for the degree programme.*

The PhD programme is set within the research strategy of CEU PU and the Department of Environmental Sciences and Policy. The department has recently developed five research clusters through which the taught Master programmes and the PhD programme are organised:

- Environmental and Resource Governance;
- Environmental Justice, Politics and Humanities;
- Energy Transitions and Climate Change;
- Sustainable Management of Socio-Ecological Systems;
- Resource and Disaster Management and Pollution Control.

These research clusters and the department's overall research strategy are clearly outlined in the document Department of Environmental Sciences and Policy Research Strategy. Over time, PhD students are allocated across these five research domains in the department, creating a critical mass and enhancing the research capability of the department. The department demonstrates a high level of self-reflection about its evolving research strategy, to which the research of PhD students contributes. The mandatory teaching and research practica, taught and organized by CEU PU's Center for Teaching and Learning within the PhD programme's curriculum, provide another opportunity for the PhD students to contribute to the department's teaching and research and prepares them for a career in academia.



The experts consider the criterion to be **fulfilled**.

Recommendation:

The expert panel encourages the Department of Environmental Sciences and Policy to continue to consider carefully its research strengths and the scientific contributions it wishes to make, allowing these choices to influence topics and candidates in the PhD study programme.

#### Research environment

*2. The private university has defined a research focus for the degree programme which covers the broadness of the respective discipline as regards content and methods. The focus of the research performance corresponds to the university's approach as well as to the respective subject culture and guarantees international visibility.*

For a relatively small environmental sciences/studies department, there is an acknowledged challenge to cover a dynamic and broadening field. The 12 faculty members represent a good range of natural sciences, social sciences and humanities expertise appropriate to the field of environmental studies. As was communicated during the site visit and outlined in the 'Department of Environmental Sciences and Policy Research Strategy', within each domain choices have been made to improve the focus of the research. In the experts' opinion, this is appropriate. Faculty members are all research active and a good number of them produce work, which has international visibility and also corresponds to the private university's approach to be a research-intensive university. This is evident in the faculty members' lists of publications. The expert panel learned during the site visit that PhD graduates from the programme go on to follow a number of career paths (e.g. postdoc positions, research positions and policy positions).

The experts consider the criterion to be **fulfilled**.

Recommendations:

The five research clusters (see criterion § 18 (2) 1) were introduced relatively recently and the department is still working to align and focus its research around them, including the connections between them. This process will take some time. The expert panel recommends that the department should continue to work on the (dynamic) focus of their research, with attention given to making distinctive international scientific contributions. For further developing the structure of the research clusters, CEU PU could benefit from information regarding the share of PhD students moving into academic research, teaching roles and other fields. An improved and/or extended alumni survey, alumni network or alumni club might deliver relevant data.

#### Research environment

*3. The private university has employed professors qualified in primary occupation in the discipline relevant for the degree programme who cover the broad range of the discipline's content and methods. Primary occupation here means working at least 50% of one's total working hours in salaried employment at the private university.*

According to CEU PU's application documents, the 12 faculty members of the Department of Environmental Sciences and Policy are all employed full-time as researchers and teachers at CEU PU. In addition, the department currently has research fellows on fixed-term contracts in externally-funded research projects. There are also about two visiting faculty members. From the expert panel's perspective, this is an appropriate staff complement for an environmental sciences/studies department. The academic staff in the department have appropriate academic qualifications from a range of European and North American universities (see also criterion § 18 (5) 1).

The experts consider the criterion to be **fulfilled**.

#### Research environment

*4. The private university maintains institutionally anchored co-operation projects in research and development or the development and appreciation of the arts which are relevant for the degree programme and adequate for the respective subject culture.*

The Department of Environmental Sciences and Policy maintains a broad range of scientific relationships, individually and as a collective. Each faculty member maintains national and international networks through their own scholarship. Furthermore, the department has a well-established track record in EU-funded research projects, which involve partnerships with universities, NGOs and government agencies in a range of European countries. As supporting evidence, CEU PU provided the expert panel with a document listing various grants, e.g. five EU/H2020/RIA grants, awarded to the Department of Environmental Sciences and Policy. On the institutional level, the research environment is also fostered through 18 European Research Council (ERC) projects, including three major Synergy grants.

Furthermore, the Masters of Environmental Sciences, Policy and Management (MESPOM) programme is a long-standing Erasmus-funded programme involving four leading European universities with support from two universities in the USA and Canada as well as 18 partners around the world. CEU PU thus maintains adequate institutionally anchored co-operation projects in research and teaching.

The experts consider the criterion to be **fulfilled**.

#### Research environment

*5. The private university promotes research and development activities by providing for appropriate organisational or structural framework conditions.*

According to the application documents, CEU PU has a strong research support function, including financial support for research and administrative support for the development of research proposals, as well as post-award support (e.g. research leaves, the Academic Cooperation and Research Support Office (ACRO)). The effectiveness of this support function is evidenced in the high level of external funding of research from competitive EU sources at CEU PU and the Department of Environmental Sciences and Policy, which is about 15% of the total income. This demonstrates international competitiveness of CEU PU's as well as the Department of Environmental Sciences and Policy's research. This leads to the conclusion that CEU PU's organisational framework conditions are a good foundation for the private university's research and development activities.

The experts consider the criterion to be **fulfilled**.

#### Research environment

*6. The private university's research infrastructure as well as its facilities and equipment are adequate on a quantitative and a qualitative basis for operating the degree programme. In the case that the private university draws on external resources, their authorisation to use them has been contractually secured.*

Most of the research conducted by the Department of Environmental Sciences and Policy is desk-based. At CEU PU's campus there are computer lab facilities, but no wet labs. From the experts' standpoint, this is appropriate to the range of research conducted by the department. The expert panel toured the extremely spacious and well-appointed university buildings in Vienna and was impressed with them as a research environment, including excellent library facilities. The sub-lease of CEU PU's Vienna campus is contractually secured through the 'Sublease Agreement', which was enclosed in the application documents. Concerning the aforementioned wet labs, CEU PU pointed out, that the private university will pursue working partnerships with Austrian universities and research institutions to allow some components of the programme to include hands-on exposure to such facilities.

The experts consider the criterion to be **fulfilled**.

Recommendation:

Environmental and sustainability research will increasingly draw on sophisticated data science methods, digital data collection and monitoring as well as databases. Therefore, collaboration with relevant experts at CEU PU will be important. It is also likely that for a strong research environment and education, further investment by the Department of Environmental Sciences and Policy itself will be needed.



#### 4.3 Assessment criterion § 18 (3) 1 to 3: Supervision and counselling services

##### Supervision and counselling services

*1. The private university shall conclude agreements with the doctoral students which govern the respective rights and duties of the private university, the doctoral students and their supervisors.*

Doctoral students sign a 'Doctoral Supervision Agreement' between the supervisor(s) and the doctoral students that includes the basic details of the dissertation, the name of the supervisor(s), the deadlines and the responsibilities of the doctoral student and the supervisor(s). Other supervisory and assessment regulations are specified in CEU PU's 'Doctoral Regulations'. The 'Student Rights, Rules, and Academic Regulations' and the 'Doctoral Regulations' outline further rights and duties of the students, the supervisors, and the private university.

The experts consider the criterion to be **fulfilled**.

##### Supervision and counselling services

*2. The private university shall enable the doctoral students to engage in an intensive dialogue with scientists or artists, respectively, by collaborating with higher education institutions and, if applicable, partners outside the higher education area in Austria and abroad and promote the participation of doctoral students in national and international symposia.*

The expert panel concludes from the discussions during the site visit that the PhD supervision culture in the Department of Environmental Sciences and Policy is strong. Effort is expended during the first year of the programme to create a cohort of students who support and challenge each other. During the site visit, the expert panel learned that there are close and supportive relationships between PhD candidates and academic supervisors. There is an appropriate independent grievance procedure at CEU PU, but there was little evidence that this procedure is needed to be evoked. The number of students is appropriate, with no faculty member supervising more than five students, with a limit of six students.

Students are encouraged to present their findings at internal seminars and also externally. A description of the Doctoral Research Environment at CEU PU sets forth that "Travel Grants support student participation at academic conferences where they present their research to build networks and obtain feedback on their work in progress from other scientists in the field." This corresponds with international best practice.

Due to a lack of response from alumni, it is unclear how many students continue in academia. The programme does not foresee any specific collaboration outside the higher education area. However, as per information gathered during the site visit, students can develop their research through a placement outside the higher education area.

The experts consider the criterion to be **fulfilled**.

Recommendation:

Given that many students might not be able to pursue an academic career, it is recommended that students are also provided a placement grant to give interested students the opportunity to network and gain experience outside the higher education area.

#### Supervision and counselling services

*3. The private university shall provide the doctoral students with adequate counselling services which are tailored to the specific degree programme.*

Counselling occurs at different levels: within the close student community; within the departmental research clusters; and through a university student counselling service. The open door policy of faculty members and the programme coordinator allows students to air grievances in an informal way. According to the 'Doctoral Regulations' and the 'Student Rights Policy', the Disciplinary and Grievance Committee deals with complaints on a higher level and in a formal way. The expert panel learned during discussions at the site visit that, given the small scale of all activities at CEU PU, a safe and supportive environment and culture exist, allowing stress and problems associated with PhD research to be properly addressed. The department is very aware of these challenges and will offer workshops on stress management and other relevant topics in the future.

The experts consider the criterion to be **fulfilled**.

#### 4.4 Assessment criterion § 18 (4) 1 to 8: Degree programme and degree programme management

##### Degree programme and degree programme management

*1. The profile and the intended learning outcomes of the degree programme have been clearly defined. They include scientific as well as artistic competences, personal skills, and social competences and are in accordance with level 8 of the National Qualification Framework.*

The learning outcomes are defined as related to knowledge, skills and values, which are further specified in the 'Doctoral Program Student Handbook and Regulations'. Furthermore, the PhD in Environmental Sciences and Policy programme emphasises the multi- and interdisciplinary nature of its research and teaching, an attitude and competence that it aims to develop in its students. The programme has a clear structure with key assessment stages, which builds up in a logical way to a PhD degree. To a large extent, the learning, experience and outcomes of PhD research and assessment are specific to the respective project and the individual student. In addition, students have to enrol in mandatory courses in teaching and earn practical teaching experience as teaching assistants (Teaching & Research Practicum). Each PhD career is unique, but the programme allows that each individual PhD student is able to gain methodological skills. The research environment of the department, the supervision and research culture, the PhD community and the opportunities and challenges offered to PhD candidates are consistent with the development of the expected competencies for an international PhD programme.

The experts consider the criterion to be **fulfilled**.

#### Recommendations:

The expert panel recommends to continually review the growing importance of sophisticated methodological skills at the PhD level as the PhD programme should offer enhanced opportunities for development of these skills.

The expert panel recommends that further attention is given to methodological training of students, possibly through further methods training capacity in house and/or greater access to external courses and programmes.

#### Degree programme and degree programme management

*2. The name of the degree programme and the academic degree correspond to the degree programme's profile.*

According to the profile of the proposed doctoral programme as described in the application documents, students are given the opportunity to "pursue fundamental and applied research to address some of the most urgent environmental challenges in the world."

The curriculum contains courses on both environmental sciences and environmental policy. This is mirrored in the name of the programme ('Environmental Sciences and Policy') and the academic degree (PhD), which thus correspond to the programme's profile.

The experts consider the criterion to be **fulfilled**.

#### Degree programme and degree programme management

*3. The minimum duration of studies stipulated in the curriculum is three years. The contents and structure of the curriculum ensure that the intended learning outcomes are achieved, while combining research (research and development and/or advancement and appreciation of the arts) and teaching.*

According to the documentation provided by CEU PU and conversations during the site visit, the current programme is of 3 years in duration which will change to a 4 year programme following the move of the private university to Austria, with PhD candidates being able to take up to 6 years to graduate. The first year taught programmes, comprehensive exam and preparation of a PhD prospectus after one year, create the academic basis for approximately 3 years of research. Following this phase, the second phase of research and thesis-preparation takes 2-3 years. The curriculum thus combines research and teaching elements and ensures that the intended learning outcomes can be achieved. This is consistent with international practice. The PhD scholarship is for 3 years, with funds available for extensions of 9 months and 6 months beyond that.

The experts consider the criterion to be **fulfilled**.

#### Degree programme and degree programme management

*4. The workload related to the individual modules ensures that the intended learning outcomes, especially writing the doctoral thesis, can be achieved within the stipulated duration of studies. The ECTS is applied correctly; in any case to the curricular parts (courses) of the degree programme.*

The workload during the first year of the programme, which is composed of taught courses, the Teaching & Research Practicum I & II and the Comprehensive Exam, is 60 ECTS credits. The total PhD programme adds to 240 ECTS credits. The experts consider this to be an appropriate workload. Furthermore, the expert panel was provided with data showing that the PhD completion rates are good. The expert panel learned from discussions during the site visit that PhD defences are usually successful, as problematic cases are spotted at the pre-defence. To the extent that PhD defences are successful, which is normally the case, and Environmental Sciences and Policy PhD graduates move to appropriate roles afterwards, the learning outcomes can be assumed to have been achieved.

The experts consider the criterion to be **fulfilled**.

#### Degree programme and degree programme management

*5. Regulations for doctoral programmes have been established. The examination methods are suitable to assess whether and to what extent the intended learning outcomes have been achieved.*

CEU PU has a mature set of regulations governing all aspects of academic programmes. Regulations for the PhD in Environmental Sciences and Policy programme are outlined in the 'CEU PU Doctoral Regulations' and the draft for the Doctoral Handbook. Examination types include the comprehensive exam, the prospectus defence, the dissertation submission, and the public defence arrangements, which allow for a written or oral defence to suit the different students' needs and types of learning. In the experts' view, the examination methods are well-defined and appropriate.

The experts consider the criterion to be **fulfilled**.

#### Degree programme and degree programme management

*6. A "Diploma Supplement" that complies with the requirements laid down in Annex 1 to § 6 of the University and Higher Education Statistics and Education Documentation Decree (Universitäts- und Hochschulstatistik- und Bildungsdokumentationsverordnung, UHSBV), original version: F. L. G. II no. 216/2019, will be issued.*

The sample diploma supplement enclosed in the application documents follows the model developed by the European Commission, Council of Europe and UNESCO/CEPES. It provides a description of the nature, level, context, content and status of the study programme and the requirements for its successful completion. The diploma supplement is in line with Annex 1 to § 6 of the University and Higher Education Statistics and Education Documentation Decree (Universitäts- und Hochschulstatistik- und Bildungsdokumentationsverordnung, UHSBV).



The experts consider the criterion to be **fulfilled**.

Degree programme and degree programme management

*7. The admission requirements have been clearly defined. In terms of the qualification level, they correspond at least to the provisions provided by the Universities Act (UG).*

The admissions requirements and the admissions procedure have been clearly defined and are described in the Admissions Policy and Procedures of CEU PU. The evaluation of each student's application is the responsibility of a Doctoral Committee organised within the given programme. According to the Department of Environmental Sciences and Policy's draft of the Doctoral Handbook, eligible applicants must have earned a Master's degree or equivalent in an environment-related field, such as natural or social sciences, engineering, economics, law or management and must demonstrate proficiency in English. The criteria on which the admission is based include, but are not limited to, grade point average, class rank, and the Master's thesis quality.

The experts consider the criterion to be **fulfilled**.

Degree programme and degree programme management

*8. The admission procedure has been clearly defined and ensures a fair and transparent selection of the applicants according to the admission requirements and the required competences.*

The admissions procedure is clearly defined and described in the 'Admissions Policy and Procedures' of CEU PU. The recruitment to the PhD programme requires candidates to provide a research proposal and a statement of purpose. During the site visit, faculty members stated that the department assesses candidates by project proposal, world region and aims to award PhD scholarships more equitably and to create a diverse PhD community.

The recruitment of students is rigorous (for the 2019-2020 academic year there were 90 applications for 5 places) and is centred on the allocation of 5 PhD scholarships. This process is carefully done. This is evidenced by good and improving completion rates of PhD candidates. The taught programmes include mandatory and elective elements, including theory and methods courses, as well as courses in teaching competences and more specific courses. The comprehensive exam includes both written and oral components and the public defence has an independent chair.

The expert panel is of the opinion that these procedures are in accordance with European standards.

The experts consider the criterion to be **fulfilled**.

#### Degree programme and degree programme management

*9. The recognition procedures for higher education competences in terms of crediting towards examinations or parts of a degree programme have been clearly and transparently defined. When recognising or crediting higher education competences, the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region (Lisbon Recognition Convention) shall be considered.*

Assessment criteria are published in the PhD Handbook for the taught elements of the programme in year 1 and the framework of ECTS credits for different components are articulated and clear. The standard Bologna and Lisbon criteria are used. In common with other CEU and CEU PU programmes, the PhD programme has evolved through US, European and Hungarian accreditation systems. This is quite unique and has, as the expert panel learned during the site visit, created a strong awareness of regulatory requirements.

CEU PU has a credit recognition policy, which is outlined in the 'Student Rights, Rules, and Academic Regulations'. In addition, CEU PU provided the document 'Policy on Recognition of Qualifications held by Refugees and Asylum-seekers with a legal right to live and study in Hungary', which can be seen as an example for the consideration of the Lisbon Recognition Convention by CEU in Hungary.

The experts consider the criterion to be **fulfilled**.

#### 4.5 Assessment criterion § 18 (5) 1 to 5: Staff

##### Staff

*1. The private university has sufficient scientific and/or artistic staff as well as sufficient non-academic staff for operating the degree programme.*

The faculty in the department has appropriate academic qualifications from a range of European and North American universities. The Department of Environmental Sciences & Policy's faculty is a mature and stable group, with the last academic hire having been in 2010. There is adequate support from non-academic administrative staff with 4 FTE for the department. The faculty are further supported by the academic support unit encompassing 4 FTE staff at CEU PU's Center for Teaching and Learning, which are widely used to support new programme development and education in teaching for PhD candidates.

According to interviews during the site visit, gender balance is an important issue for CEU PU and the department. It was explained that there is a "pyramid of ranks", with more women at the bottom of the hierarchy and very few or none at the top, while men experience rather the opposite. However, the Provost sees the move to Vienna as an opportunity to improve the gender structure and to set a higher index for the salary increase of junior faculty and administrative staff. CEU PU is currently also establishing a grading scheme and career paths for non-academic staff.

The experts consider the criterion to be **fulfilled**.

##### Staff

*2. The scientific staff or the artistic staff, respectively, is qualified according to the requirements of the activities provided for in the degree programme. The scientific and/or artistic staff envisaged for the supervision of thesis projects is authorised to teach (venia docendi) or has an equivalent qualification for the scientific or artistic subject, respectively. It is involved in the research and development or the advancement and appreciation of the arts of the respective subject and performs research and development activities which are in accordance with the university's approach and the respective subject culture. The majority of the scientific and/or artistic staff assigned to the supervision of theses has experience in this field.*

According to the application documents, all faculty members supervising PhD students have the rank of Assistant Professor or higher and have earned a PhD themselves. All members of faculty are obliged to do research and are expected to supervise PhD students. Furthermore, each faculty member has experience in such supervision. According to the draft of the doctoral handbook, all students have a primary and, depending on the research project, a secondary (associate) supervisor. The associate supervisor is not always part of the Department of Environmental Sciences and Policy. This implies that the Department of Environmental Sciences and Policy's faculty also act as second supervisors for PhD students in other departments of CEU PU.

In summary, the scientific staff is adequately qualified according to the requirements of the programme profile.

The experts consider the criterion to be **fulfilled**.

Staff
<i>3. The benchmark for an adequate tutoring ratio for the supervision of doctoral theses is eight doctoral students per supervisor (full-time equivalent).</i>

According to the interviews during the site visit, the maximum number of PhD students per supervisor that is allowed at CEU PU amounts to six students and is therefore even lower than the benchmark for an adequate ratio for the supervision as defined in the respective criterion.

The experts consider the criterion to be **fulfilled**.

Staff
<i>4. The prioritisation of the teaching, research, and administrative activities of the scientific and/or artistic staff in primary occupation at the private university ensures that there is sufficient time for research and development or the advancement and appreciation of the arts as well as the supervision of doctoral students.</i>

According to CEU PU's 'Academic Staff Handbook', all faculty are expected to teach post-graduate courses, to supervise PhD candidates and to conduct their own research. The teaching load in the Department of Environmental Sciences and Policy is low, the Faculty Student Ratio is about 5:1. Despite the intensive approach to teaching, there is sufficient time for research and for a strong supervision of PhD students.

The development and growth of future undergraduate programmes, without growth in faculty numbers, will impose a higher teaching workload in the future. The department understands that this needs to be kept under review. For example, each faculty staff is awarded 2,000 EUR per year for travel grants that allow them to participate in seminars to further develop and advance their research. However, the faculty already has time constraints in being able to spend their travel budget.

The experts consider the criterion to be **fulfilled**.

Recommendation:

It is recommended to regularly review the teaching workload in the future due to the growth of undergraduate programmes without a proportional growth in the number of faculty members.

Staff
<i>5. The private university provides for personnel development measures aimed at the supervision of doctoral students</i>

The Center for Teaching & Learning provides support for development of educational capabilities and support. According to information provided during the site visit, while there is no specific

training available for PhD supervision, a mentorship for junior faculty supervising PhD students supports the supervision of doctoral students.

The experts consider the criterion to be **fulfilled**.

Recommendation:

Consideration should be given to a formalised PhD supervision training programme for new faculty.

#### 4.6 Assessment criterion § 18 (6): Funding

##### Funding

*The degree programme's funding is secured. Provisions have also been made to fund expiring degree programmes.*

The application documents provide financial plans of the CEU PU as well as planned expenses and revenues of the Department Environmental Sciences and Policy. According to those documents, funding is secured. The funding of CEU PU is in many ways unique given that it is for the most part supported by an endowment. Tuition fees account only for [...] a relatively small proportion of income.

While there is now a strategy to increase the role of tuition fee income in the total budget, the overall picture will continue to be secure. The move to Vienna from Budapest has been enabled by significant new multi-year bridging funding [...]. There are generous PhD scholarships funded from CEU PU's own resources which are secured for the future. In addition there are several other grants available to PhD candidates for travelling and writing-up.

The experts consider the criterion to be **fulfilled**.

Recommendation:

The available PhD scholarships are for three years, despite the PhD programmes moving to a four year programme. Although there are additional grants provided to PhD candidates for the writing-up, this adds on an extra layer of stress. It is recommended to consider whether PhD candidates should be allowed to directly apply for four years of funding (including write-up grants) before the start of their PhD as to secure funding for the entire required duration of their programme.



## 5 Summary and final evaluation

- **Development and quality assurance of the doctoral programme:** the PhD programme is well-founded and has a full-range of rules and procedures appropriate to such a programme.
- **Research environment:** the research environment and culture of the Department for Environmental Sciences and Policy are strong and dynamic. The research environment has recently been restructured following the 2016 Strategic Review. PhD candidates are fully integrated into the research clusters and participate in the life of the department.
- **Supervision and counselling services:** PhD supervision is shared by all of the Department for Environmental Sciences and Policy's academic staff. The faculty members have the requisite experience to provide individualised supervision in a supportive environment. Furthermore, there are independent grievance and counselling procedures.
- **Degree programme and degree programme management:** the structure of the degree programme follows a US-model and is well-supported. The PhD in Environmental Sciences and Policy programme follows CEU PU policies and regulations, which are well-established; the main phases of the PhD programme for a given student are well-supported and the cohort of PhD students appears to be well-integrated.
- **Staff:** The faculty is well-qualified, research active and in most cases, faculty members are making significant contributions to their academic fields. This forms a good basis for the research environment for PhD students.
- **Funding:** The funding of PhD students and of the department is at a high-level.

**The experts recommend the Board of the AQ Austria to accredit the doctoral programme in 'Environmental Sciences and Policy'.**

**The expert panel's recommendations to CEU PU:**

- 1) The expert panel recommends that further attention is given to methodological training of students, possibly through further methods training capacity in house and / or greater access to external courses and programmes.
- 2) The five research clusters (see criterion § 18 (2) 1) were introduced relatively recently and the department is still working to align and focus its research around them, including the connections between them. This process will take some time. The expert panel recommends that the department should continue to work on the (dynamic) focus of their research, with attention given to making distinctive international scientific contributions. For further developing the structure of the research clusters, CEU PU could benefit from information regarding the share of PhD students moving into academic research, teaching roles and other fields. An improved and/or extended alumni survey, alumni network or alumni club might deliver relevant data.
- 3) Environmental and sustainability research will increasingly draw on sophisticated data science methods, digital data collection and monitoring as well as databases. Therefore, collaboration with relevant experts at CEU PU will be important. It is also likely that for

a strong research environment and education, further investment by the Department of Environmental Sciences and Policy itself will be needed.

- 4) Given that many students might not be able to pursue an academic career, it is recommended that students are also provided a placement grant to give interested students the opportunity to network and gain experience outside the higher education area.
- 5) The expert panel recommends to continually review the growing importance of sophisticated methodological skills at the PhD level as the PhD programme should offer enhanced opportunities for development of these skills.
- 6) The expert panel recommends that further attention is given to methodological training of students, possibly through further methods training capacity in house and/or greater access to external courses and programmes.
- 7) It is recommended to regularly review the teaching workload in the future due to the growth of undergraduate programmes without a proportional growth in the number of faculty members.
- 8) Consideration should be given to a formalised PhD supervision training programme for new faculty.
- 9) The available PhD scholarships are for three years, despite the PhD programmes moving to a four year programme. Although there are additional grants provided to PhD candidates for the writing-up, this adds on an extra layer of stress. It is recommended to consider whether PhD candidates should be allowed to directly apply for four years of funding (including write-up grants) before the start of their PhD as to secure funding for the entire required duration of their programme.

## 6 Documents reviewed

- Application of the Central European Private University (CEU PU) submitted on 31.10.2019 in the version of 28.01.2020 for the accreditation of the PhD programme 'Environmental Sciences and Policy' and the master programme 'Environmental Sciences and Policy', to be offered in Vienna.
- Submission of further information prior to the site visit (via e-mail):
- CEU PU Non-academic Support Staff Positions, Head Count and FTE (03.02.2020)
- Documents Student feedback and QM (19.02.2020):
  - CEU Annual Review Checklist
  - CEU Course Evaluation Form
  - CEU Supervision Evaluation Form
  - ENVS Annual Report 2017-2018
  - ENVS Courseval Report 2017-2018
  - ENVS Courseval Report 2018-2019
  - ENVS Strategic Review 2016-2017
  - ENVS Student Exit Survey 2019
- Submission of further information from 26.02.2020 the site visit (via e-mail):

- ERC projects at CEU – list of active grants and the number and amount of all grants CEU ever hosted
- Projects at CEU- a document showing the proportion of ERC grants of the total incoming funding
- Projects at the Environmental Science Department – active projects at the department and a summary of all projects since 2010
- Total incoming external funding chart- shows the new incoming funding per academic year
- ENVS Graduation and Drop-out Rates 2019

## 'Environmental Sciences and Policy' master programme

### 7 Review and assessment based on the assessment criteria stipulated in the PU-AkkVO – 'Environmental Sciences and Policy' master programme

#### 7.1 Assessment criterion § 17 (1) 1 to 2: Development and quality assurance of the degree programme

##### Development and quality assurance of the degree programme

*1. The degree programme was developed using a predefined procedure for the development and establishment of degree programmes and involving the relevant stakeholder groups.*

The one-year MSc in Environmental Sciences and Policy programme (MESP) was launched in 1995, and initially accredited by the University of Manchester (UK). To this extent, the development of the programme followed the tradition and procedures of that university, which had been a pioneer in interdisciplinary MSc environmental sciences programmes. At a later stage, CEU began accrediting the MESP programme through the US Middle States system. The programme has been periodically reviewed on reaccreditation.

In Austria, CEU was institutionally accredited as Central European University Private University (CEU PU) in July 2019. The current transition of the MESP programme to Vienna is requiring a further programme accreditation process in the Austrian system.

The experts were provided with a document outlining CEU PU's Institutional Assessment and Quality Assurance (IAQA) Policy. This document describes the procedure for the development and establishment of CEU PU's programmes and how relevant stakeholders are involved in the quality assurance of the programmes. Every five years, the university undertakes a strategic review (most recently in 2016), which is a significant input in the programme development.

This is complemented by internal programme monitoring instruments and data. Student satisfaction regarding courses and the programme and learning outcomes of courses are carefully monitored. Refinement of the course programme is led by the Masters Programs Committee and ultimately involves all resident teaching staff.

The experts consider the criterion to be **fulfilled**.

##### Development and quality assurance of the degree programme

*2. Following its accreditation, the degree programme is incorporated into the private university's quality management system.*

The MESP programme is fully integrated into CEU PU's quality management system which sets out overall goals, standards and procedures. In this regard, the expert panel was provided with

a document outlining how the Department of Environmental Sciences and Policy's quality assurance measures align with CEU PU's Institutional Assessment and Quality Assurance (IAQA) Policy.

The key elements of the quality assurance measures are:

- programme-reviews (strategic/extraordinary/annual reviews of degree programmes);
- faculty reviews (individual academic activity reports and annual department-level assessments);
- student input (through course evaluations by students, town-hall meetings and an open-door policy).

This is a sophisticated and balanced system, which has evolved in accordance with sectoral and regulatory change. It has undergone several previous accreditations by a UK university and by a US agency. All of these processes are fully described in the 'Master's Program Handbook' and the document on Quality Assurance at the Department of Environmental Sciences and Policy and meet international standards.

The experts consider the criterion to be **fulfilled**.

## 7.2 Assessment criterion § 17 (2) 1 to 11: Degree programme and degree programme management

### Degree programme and degree programme management

*1. The degree programme is oriented towards the profile and the objectives of the private university and is clearly in line with the development plan.*

From the outset, the CEU has been committed to research and teaching related to the environment and sustainability. During the site visit, CEU PU's leadership insisted that the MESP programme continues to hold a central position in the rationale and mission of the private university. The programme is delivered by the Department of Environmental Science and Policy and is aligned with the research strategy of the department, in particular the five research clusters which are mirrored in the structure of the MSc programme, representing the research interests of the Department of Environmental Science and Policy's academic staff.

Together with the 2-year sister programme Masters of Environmental Sciences, Policy and Management (MESPOM), 40-50 students are enrolled per year. This is viewed as a sustainable level by the department, making it one of the larger and best-known programmes at CEU PU. The maximum intake for MESP has been 25 students. The current student staff ratio is approximately 4:1, which is exceptionally good.

The programme structure was stable in recent years with course syllabi being revised continuously in response to student feedback, strategic evaluations and on-going reviews by course convenors. The courses are cross-listed and can also be chosen by students from other CEU PU departments. This practice offers plenty of opportunity for MESP students to learn from other disciplines. The foundation courses in term 1 are meant to offer coherence and integration. In term 2, students follow electives in one or two clusters, while in the final phase



there is a thesis research project. During the strategic review, the programme leadership undertook a curriculum mapping exercise. The expert panel learned from discussions during the site visit that the tension between the breadth and integration of the programme as well as the complexity of available course choices remains a challenge.

As part of the relocation to Austria, CEU PU is undertaking a review of the programme to adapt from the US credit based system to the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), which is likely to reduce the number of hours taught in the program.

The experts consider the criterion to be **fulfilled**.

Recommendations:

The expert panel suggests that in future reviews of the programme a special emphasis is given on the further consolidation of courses in the different clusters and subsequently, the reduction of available course choices. An increased consolidation of courses could lead to a strengthened coherence between the achieved competencies in different courses and over the programme as a whole to ensure that each student achieves an equivalent level of learning outcomes.

Another option the expert panel suggests, is to consider different areas of specialisation, perhaps following the already existing cluster structure. A reduction of the complexity of course choices might be considered with special care in light of the strategic goals of CEU PU to increase the student-staff ratio, since currently students are mainly assisted through individual coaching by resident staff. A higher student-staff ratio might make this more difficult. Fewer options of course choices or a less complex structure of choice might be helpful to reduce staff time needed. Another approach could be to develop less time-consuming and more staff-independent coaching structures.

#### Degree programme and degree programme management

*2. The profile and the intended learning outcomes of the degree programme have been clearly defined. They include scientific as well as artistic, personal, and social competences, they meet the professional requirements and are in accordance with the respective level of the National Qualification Framework. As regards regulated professions, the private university shall describe, if and under which preconditions access to those professions can be ensured.*

The programme aims at offering “a combination of scientific, policy, management and technical training”. Additional learning outcomes are set out for each of the individual courses. There is a high level of choice in the courses across the five cluster pathways, with most courses comprising 4 ECTS credits. The faculty supports students in making course choices in small tutoring groups and in individual discussions.

The challenge of pedagogic integration is to achieve similar overall learning outcomes on the basis of highly differentiated educational experiences, which students gain through the coursework. The great benefit of small student cohorts and a low staff-student ratios is a bespoke educational experience, which students appreciate as per the interviews with the students during the site visit. But this differentiation is also a potential drawback in an academic

programme aiming to graduate all its students with equivalent theoretical, methodological and practical competencies.

The programme's learning outcomes have been clearly defined and cover dimensions of knowledge, skills and values as well as attitudes. They meet the scientific and professional requirements and are in accordance with the Master level of the qualification framework of the European Union Higher Education Area (Bologna Working Group 2005).

The experts consider the criterion to be **fulfilled**.

Recommendations:

Corresponding recommendations can be found above (see criterion § 17 (2) 1).

#### Degree programme and degree programme management

*3. The name of the degree programme and the academic degree correspond to the degree programme's profile.*

The name of the degree programme, which indicates a combination of natural science and social science components, aptly reflects the structure and elements of the programme. In the interviews during the site visit, it was credibly communicated that the scientific, policy, management and technical components are integrated in a manner that the name of the degree programme and the academic degree correspond to the degree programme's profile. The programme description offers "a combination of scientific, policy, management and technical training", which is broad and, in the opinion of the expert panel, could be hard to be fully achieved in one year.

In the interviews, it became clear that in each course and cluster, policy issues play a role. It was also clarified how the degree awarded for this programme (Master of Science) has historically evolved and how it is still justified. In this regard, the panel learned during the site visit that students are still able to do natural sciences. Furthermore, some of the faculty members have a natural science background and supervisory capacity.

The experts consider the criterion to be **fulfilled**.

Recommendation:

The panel recommends to consider in future reviews how the policy issues in all clusters and courses could be emphasised a bit more to underline the structure of the programme.

#### Degree programme and degree programme management

*4. The contents and structure of the curriculum ensure that the intended learning outcomes are achieved, while combining research (research and development and/or advancement and appreciation of the arts) and teaching.*

The syllabi are well developed and give detailed information to the students. 40 ECTS credits are taught and 20 ECTS credits are achieved through submitting the master's thesis. This is in line with international standards, representing an appropriate balance for a research postgraduate degree. The intended learning outcomes of each course are well described. On the basis of a review of graduation performance, the description of the learning activities, teaching methods and assessments as well as the discussions with faculty and students during the site visit, the expert panel believes that the intended learning outcomes are being achieved. The expert panel was also reassured during the interviews that students receive a detailed version of the course information prior to choosing their courses.

In the course of the site visit, the expert panel also learned that the MESP programme has a significant research element and is taught in a research-intensive academic environment, with masters students mixing and collaborating with PhD students in the department and across CEU PU.

The experts consider the criterion to be **fulfilled**.

Recommendation:

As already mentioned above, due to the high level of course choice and the complexity of the respective pathways, the expert panel feels that there is a risk that the overall learning outcomes might not be ensured on an equivalent level for all students. Corresponding recommendations can be found above (see criterion § 17 (2) 1). Furthermore, the choice of foundation courses might be considered to be prescribed rather than just encouraged. This would ensure that students possess at least basic knowledge and competencies in all fields taught in the programme.

#### Degree programme and degree programme management

*5. The didactic conception of the degree programme's modules shall ensure that the intended learning outcomes can be achieved and promotes the students' active contribution in the learning process.*

A variety of instructional approaches are used in the courses. Even though larger courses are delivered using a lecture-based format, most courses provide much opportunity for interaction, peer learning and exchange amongst students and faculty. The diversity of the instructional approaches is adequate. During the site visit, the students communicated that the varied approaches to teaching and assessment are beneficial to achieving the intended learning outcomes. Together, these approaches are therefore suitable to deliver the learning outcomes of the programme's modules.

To further develop and ensure an adequate quality, the CEU PU's Centre for Learning and Teaching supports the faculty in developing didactical and pedagogical aspects of courses. These services appear to be intensively used by academic staff. This is mirrored in the variety of teaching and evaluation methods employed.

The experts consider the criterion to be **fulfilled**.

#### Degree programme and degree programme management

*6. The workload related to the individual modules ensures that the intended learning outcomes can be achieved within the stipulated duration of studies, and in case of part-time degree programmes takes into account any professional activity. The ECTS is applied correctly.*

The expert panel is of the opinion that the workload for students is high. The expert panel learned during the site visit that students find the programme challenging. It is only with intensive support from faculty that the intended learning outcomes can be achieved. However, the expert panel positively noted that the programme management regularly reviews the students' workload in response to feedback from student representatives. The ECTS evaluation of course components has been critically assessed and adjusted. The expert panel is of the opinion that the ECTS is applied correctly.

The experts consider the criterion to be **fulfilled**.

Recommendations:

Corresponding recommendations can be found above (see criterion § 17 (2) 1).

#### Degree programme and degree programme management

*7. The private university has adopted examination rules. The examination methods are suitable to assess whether and to what extent the intended learning outcomes have been achieved.*

CEU PU has clear regulations concerning assessment approaches and rules, which are detailed in the 'Master's Program Handbook'. The type of examination and weighting of examination components is set by course convenors in conformance with an overall assessment of rubrics and a policy to diversify assessments. Written feedback within two weeks is required for all courses. The faculty is aware that this deadline is not always met. The department's representatives mentioned measures to optimise this.

It is CEU PU's policy to sample a small number of best, medium-range and worst exams, which are double marked. The diversity of assessment approaches arises from the course convenors' preferences. Master theses are always double marked by faculty of the same cluster and, if appropriate, by faculty from other departments. In cases of divergence, a third marker gives input. Course characteristics emerge from the class size, not from programme structure or university policy.

Individual and group tasks are combined and there is a cap on the contribution of shared group grades to the individual students' marks. Formative and summative assessment is not systematically implemented. There is probably a danger of over-assessment, which is mostly due to the large number of courses with few credit hours. However, the issue has been discussed in the strategic review and the faculty is aware of this challenge and communicated a will to review this aspect.

The experts consider the criterion to be **fulfilled**.

Recommendation:

The expert panel strongly encourages to regularly review the assessment load and the diversity of assessment practices to avoid over-assessment.

#### Degree programme and degree programme management

*8. A "Diploma Supplement" that complies with the requirements laid down in Annex 1 to § 6 of the University and Higher Education Statistics and Education Documentation Decree (Universitäts- und Hochschulstatistik- und Bildungsdokumentationsverordnung, UHSBV), original version: F. L. G. II no. 216/2019, will be issued.*<sup>4</sup>

The diploma supplement provided by CEU PU follows the model developed by the European Commission, Council of Europe and UNESCO/CEPES. It provides a description of the nature, level, context, content and status of the study programme and the requirements for its successful completion. The diploma supplement is in line with Annex 1 to § 6 of the University and Higher Education Statistics and Education Documentation Decree (Universitäts- und Hochschulstatistik- und Bildungsdokumentationsverordnung, UHSBV).

The experts consider the criterion to be **fulfilled**.

#### Degree programme and degree programme management

*9. The admission requirements have been clearly defined. In terms of the qualification level, they correspond at least to the provisions provided by the Universities Act (UG).*

The admissions requirements and the admissions procedure have been clearly defined and are described in the 'Admissions Policy and Procedures' of CEU PU. Eligible applicants must have earned a first degree (Bachelor's or equivalent; not less than 4 years of full-time studies) and demonstrate proficiency in English.

Students who have completed a three-year bachelor programme can enrol in two-year master programmes at CEU PU, such as the MESPOM programme. The one-year master programme is only open to graduates of four-year bachelor programmes, therefore excluding those with bachelor's degrees from most European countries. Under the provisions provided by the Universities Act (UG), while it is possible for private universities to admit students with 3-year bachelor's degrees to a 1-year master programme, these students cannot be admitted to a PhD programme at a public Austrian university. These complexities justify the 2-year/1-year MESPOM/MESP programme that CEU PU offers.

Acceptance on the basis of an equivalent number of credits is possible in principle, although this is rarely exercised. Candidates holding a three-year bachelor's degree are only admitted in exceptional cases upon recommendation of the head of the department and with the endorsement by the Provost to the US/Austrian accredited one-year master's programmes.

The experts consider the criterion to be **fulfilled**.

<sup>4</sup> The PU Accreditation Regulation 2019 refers to Annex 2 of the UniStEV 2004. This ordinance was amended and therefore the text of the assessment criterion in the expert report was adapted accordingly.



#### Degree programme and degree programme management

*10. The admission procedure has been clearly defined and ensures a fair and transparent selection of the applicants according to the admission requirements and the required competences.*

The admission procedure has been clearly defined and is outlined in the 'Admissions Policy and Procedures' of CEU PU. According to CEU PU's application documents, students are recruited on the basis of criteria such as academic and intellectual excellence, career promise as well as contribution to course diversity. According to CEU PU's policy, students are admitted not only based on their qualifications, but also to insure geographical and gender diversity. Evidence to assess these criteria encompass CVs, degree(s) completed, GPA, letters of motivation and letters of recommendation. Furthermore, applicants must demonstrate proficiency in English. Those applicants, whose first language is not English, must submit standardised English language test scores, e.g. the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL). After an initial evaluation of all application materials, applicants may undergo testing and interviews. In stage three, subsequently, candidates are ranked based on the application materials and, if applicable, the programme-specific exams or interviews. Once students are admitted, they have access to all courses without any additional pre-requisites.

The experts consider the criterion to be **fulfilled**.

#### Degree programme and degree programme management

*11. The recognition procedures for higher education competences and, if applicable, competences acquired outside higher education in terms of crediting towards examinations or parts of a degree programme have been clearly and transparently defined. When recognising or crediting higher education competences, the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region (Lisbon Recognition Convention) shall be considered.*

CEU PU has a credit recognition policy, which is outlined in the 'Student Rights, Rules, and Academic Regulations'. Credits transfers are possible in the MESP programme, but do not play an important role. If students want to include another course credit, they need to inform the department ahead of time and the department decides on a case by case basis whether to accept the credit transfer. In addition, CEU PU provided the document 'Policy on Recognition of Qualifications held by Refugees and Asylum-seekers with a legal right to live and study in Hungary', which can be seen as an example for the consideration of the Lisbon Recognition Convention by CEU in Hungary.

The experts consider the criterion to be **fulfilled**.

Recommendation:

In line with the move to Austria, the expert panel recommends that CEU PU revises its 'Policy on Recognition of Qualifications held by Refugees and Asylum-seekers' to fit the Austrian context/situation.

### 7.3 Assessment criterion § 17 (3) 1 to 5: Staff

#### Staff

*1. The private university shall provide for sufficient scientific and/or artistic staff as well as sufficient non-academic staff for operating the degree programme.*

The 40 students in both the one- and two-year programmes MESP and MESPOM are taught by 12 faculty members on the level of Assistant Professor, Associate Professor and Full Professor. The whole programme is managed by a committee consisting of selected faculty and staff, and overviewed by a programme director. The programme is taught by 90% CEU PU faculty, with some inputs by staff from other CEU PU departments. About 10% of courses are taught by visiting faculty, who offer specialist knowledge and training and practical experience.

The CEU PU's resident faculty provides a diverse and multi-disciplinary teaching team of well-qualified scientists. Together with occasional visiting faculty, this offers a solid basis for operating the programme. There is an adequate support from non-academic administrative staff with 4 FTE for the department.

The move from Budapest to Vienna is challenging for the host department and CEU PU. However, the majority of faculty and staff will move together with the support of the Open Society Foundations. Salaries are being adapted to reflect the level of living expenses in Vienna. Staff development and staff promotion, including equal opportunity, is codified in the 'CEU PU Staff Handbook' and pay scales (mostly for administrative staff) are currently being refined and adapted to the Austrian system. The programme governance is shared between the Masters Programmes Director, the Masters Programmes Committee and the Head of Department.

The experts consider the criterion to be **fulfilled**.

#### Staff

*2. The relation between scientific and/or artistic staff in primary occupation at the private university and students shall be in accordance with the profiles of the respective degree programmes. Primary occupation here means working at least 50% of one's total working hours in salaried employment at the private university.*

The programme consists of courses that are closely aligned with the faculty's research interests. During the interviews, it was explained that at CEU PU, most faculty teach at least one course per semester in their research area. According to CEU PU's application documents, the 12 faculty members at the Department of Environmental Sciences and Policy delivering the programme are fully employed. The student-staff ratio is about 4:1. This provides formidable conditions for students.

The experts consider the criterion to be **fulfilled**.

#### Staff

*3. The subject-specific core competences of the degree programme are covered by professors in primary occupation at the private university*

Currently, as per information provided during the interviews and in the CEU PU's application documents, the faculty members are employed full-time by CEU PU. 10% of courses are offered by visiting faculty. However, due to the wide range of fields taught and the small number of faculty members, only one faculty member is hired per taught field topic. This makes outside cooperation a key element to maintain quality in research and teaching.

The experts consider the criterion to be **fulfilled**.

Recommendation:

It might be considered to institutionalise regular exchange with peers from the various fields taught at the department. If additional faculty is recruited, it is recommended to carefully consider the strengths and weaknesses of the current faculty in research areas.

#### Staff

*4. The scientific staff or the artistic staff, respectively, is qualified according to the requirements of the activities provided for in the degree programme.*

The faculty in the department has appropriate academic qualifications from a range of European and North American universities.

With the exception of two research fellows, all faculty members are Professors, Assistant Professors or Associate Professors. Teaching assistants are closely coached and educated PhD students. In summary, the scientific staff is adequately qualified according to the requirements of the programme profile.

The experts consider the criterion to be **fulfilled**.

#### Staff

*5. The prioritisation of the teaching, research, and administrative activities of the scientific or artistic staff in primary occupation at the private university ensures adequate participation in teaching in degree programmes and leaves sufficient time for research and development or the advancement and appreciation of the arts.*

CEU requires faculty to self-report the amount of time they spend on research, teaching and administrative activities in their annual faculty reviews. The expert panel is of the opinion that the current teaching load gives the faculty sufficient time for pursuing their research interests. CEU PU does offer waivers to give more time for research. The waivers are restricted to a teaching reduction up to half of the teaching load.

However, the expert panel learned during the site visit that faculty members are encouraged to regularly teach courses in their research area. Since teaching in the fields of research is strongly encouraged, teaching can also significantly contribute to research.

The development and growth of future undergraduate programmes, without growth in faculty numbers, will impose a higher teaching workload in the future. The department understands that this needs to be kept under review. For example, each faculty staff is awarded 2,000 EUR per year for travel grants that allow them to participate in seminars to further develop and advance their research. However, the faculty already has time constraints in being able to spend their travel budget.

The experts consider the criterion to be **fulfilled**.

## 7.4 Assessment criterion § 17 (4): Funding

### Funding

*The degree programme's funding is secured. Provisions have also been made to fund expiring degree programmes.*

The application documents provide financial plans of the CEU PU, as well as planned expenses and revenues of the Department Environmental Sciences and Policy. According to those, funding is secured.

The majority of funding is secured by the endowment [...]. [...] % of funding comes from grant income. Only [...] % of the funding comes from tuition fees as most students do not pay full tuition fees. Salaries and student stipends will be increased in response to the move to Vienna. These additional costs as well as costs of moving are covered by an extra budget [...].

The experts consider the criterion to be **fulfilled**.

## 7.5 Assessment criterion § 17 (5): Infrastructure

### Infrastructure

*Quantitatively and qualitatively adequate facilities and equipment are provided for the degree programme. In the case that the private university draws on external resources, their authorisation to use them has been contractually secured.*

The expert panel toured the extremely spacious and well-appointed university building. This guided tour during the site visit showed the expert panel that CEU PU's facilities and equipment in Quellenstraße are quantitatively and qualitatively adequate for the study programme and include excellent library facilities. There are computer lab facilities, but no wet labs. This is appropriate to the range of research conducted by the department. The expert panel assumes that the university will be able to establish further IT laboratories if additional space should be needed.

The sub-lease of the Vienna campus is contractually secured through the 'Sublease Agreement', which was enclosed in the application documents. Concerning the aforementioned wet labs, CEU PU pointed out, that the private university will pursue working partnerships with Austrian universities and research institutions to allow some components of the programme to include hands-on exposure to such facilities.

The experts consider the criterion to be **fulfilled**.

Recommendation:

The expert panel recommends to supervise developments in the installation of labs to guarantee that all students have access and teaching does not run into logistical problems.

## 7.6 Assessment criterion § 17 (6) 1 to 2: Research and development and/or the advancement and appreciation of the arts

### Research and development and/or the advancement and appreciation of the arts

*1. The scientific and/or artistic staff in primary occupation at the private university assigned to the degree programme is involved in the private university's relevant research and development activities.*

The MESP programme consists of courses that are closely aligned with the faculty's research interests. CEU PU encourages faculty to teach regularly in their research area. The scientific staff in primary occupation at CEU PU assigned to MESP is thus involved in the private university's relevant research. This ensures a stimulating environment for MSc research and potential future collaborations between faculty and post-graduates in joint projects.

The experts consider the criterion to be **fulfilled**.

### Research and development and/or the advancement and appreciation of the arts

*2. The (planned) research performance of the scientific or artistic staff in primary occupation at the private university assigned to the degree programme are in accordance with the university's approach and the respective subject culture.*

CEU PU is a research-intensive university with the majority of faculty operating on an internationally competitive level. As supporting evidence, CEU PU provided the expert panel with a document listing various grants, e.g. five EU/H2020/RIA grants, awarded to the Department of Environmental sciences and Policy. On the institutional level, the research environment is also fostered through 18 European Research Council (ERC) projects, including three major Synergy grants.

The aforementioned grants as well as the publication records of the faculty of the Department of Environmental Sciences and Policy are relevant indicators that the research performance of the scientific staff in primary occupation assigned to the MESP programme are in accordance with the university's approach and the respective subject culture.

The experts consider the criterion to be **fulfilled**.

## 7.7 Assessment criterion § 17 (7): Co-operation

### Co-operation

*The private university has envisaged co-operation projects with higher education partners and, if applicable, partners outside the higher education area in Austria and abroad which match the degree programme's profile and furthermore promote the mobility of students and staff.*

CEU PU is already well networked with universities worldwide. Several ongoing H2020 and other research projects are formalised co-operations. Furthermore, many of the faculty staff have secondary affiliations at other academic and research institutions.

Additionally, the joint Masters programme MESPOM shares courses with MESP. The Masters of Environmental Sciences, Policy and Management (MESPOM) programme is a long-standing Erasmus-funded programme involving four leading European universities with support from two universities in the USA and Canada and 18 partners around the world.

The expert panel learned during the site visit that there also exist well-established co-operations with universities as well as partners outside the higher education sector in Austria.

According to CEU PU's application documents, the private university has also established co-operations with partners outside the higher education at international level, including UNEP and FAO. As per the site visit interviews, these co-operations are developed by the head of the department and other faculty to provide internship opportunities for students that render them course credit. However, due to the short nature of the semester course, these co-operations are limited and the department is looking for further possibilities.

As for the mobility of staff, according to the application documents, CEU PU offers a conference travel annual allowance for each faculty member as well as Erasmus staff exchange opportunities. Both academic and administrative staff can participate in exchange opportunities provided by the ERASMUS scheme.

In summary, CEU PU maintains adequate institutionally anchored co-operation projects to promote the mobility of students and staff.

The experts consider the criterion to be **fulfilled**.

Recommendation:

In order to increase the opportunities for students to pursue a career outside academia, the expert panel recommends to foresee a 4-6 months internship by integrating the thesis with a practical course.



## 8 Summary and final evaluation

- **Development and quality assurance of the degree programme:** The MSc in Environmental Sciences and Policy (MESP) programme has a nearly 30 year history having grown out of a co-operation with the University of Manchester. Since then it has evolved through several accreditations by different national authorities, forming a mature and well-renowned programme attracting students from all around the world. Every five years, the university undertakes a strategic review (most recently in 2016), which is a significant input in the programme development. This is complemented by internal programme monitoring instruments and data. Student satisfaction regarding courses and the programme and learning outcomes of courses are carefully monitored.
- **Degree programme and degree programme management:** The programme is well-structured and offers students a wide range of mandatory and elective courses, the complexity of which is well-supported and managed by academic and non-academic staff in the department and the private university. However, reducing complexity and enhancing consolidation of the different clusters and courses is much recommended.
- **Staff:** The academic and non-academic staff are well qualified and experienced professionals forming a stable team, highly committed to providing an excellent learning and student experience, leading to valued learning outcomes and employable graduates.
- **Funding:** The programme and its students are generously funded, with low staff-student ratios and financial assistance for most students providing the basis for a diverse international student community benefiting the educational quality and experience.
- **Infrastructure:** The new facilities in Vienna are excellent, including computer labs and library facilities.
- **Research and development:** The programme has a significant research element and is taught within a research-intensive academic environment. Master students are mixing with and collaborating with PhD students in the department and across CEU PU. The scientific staff in primary occupation at CEU PU assigned to MESP is involved in the private university's relevant research.
- **Co-operation:** The department has a wide range of educational and research collaborations as well as co-operations with partners outside of the higher education sector, which also feed into the evolution and delivery of the MESP programme.

**The experts recommend the Board of the AQ Austria to accredit the master programme 'Environmental Science and Policy'.**

The expert panel's recommendations to CEU PU:

- 1) The expert panel suggests that in future reviews of the programme a special emphasis is given on the further consolidation of courses in the different clusters and subsequently, the reduction of available course choices. An increased consolidation of courses could lead to a strengthened coherence between the achieved competencies in different courses and over the programme as a whole to ensure that each student achieves an equivalent level of learning outcomes.

- 2) Another option the expert panel suggests, is to consider different areas of specialisation, perhaps following the already existing cluster structure. Reduction of complexity of course choices might be considered with special care in light of the strategic goals of CEU PU to increase the student-staff ratio, since currently students are mainly assisted through individual coaching by resident staff. A higher student-staff ratio might make this more difficult. Fewer options of course choices or a less complex structure of choice might be helpful to reduce staff time needed. Another approach could be to develop less time-consuming and more staff-independent coaching structures.
- 3) The panel recommends to consider in future reviews how the policy issues in all clusters and courses could be emphasised a bit more to underline the structure of the programme.
- 4) As already mentioned above, due to the high level of course choice and the complexity of the respective pathways, the expert panel feels that there is a risk that the overall learning outcomes might not be ensured on an equivalent level for all students. Corresponding recommendations can be found above (see criterion § 17 (2) 1). Furthermore, the choice of foundation courses might be considered to be prescribed rather than just encouraged. This would ensure that students possess at least basic knowledge and competencies in all fields taught in the programme.
- 5) The expert panel strongly encourages to regularly review the assessment load and the diversity of assessment practices to avoid over-assessment.
- 6) In line with the move to Austria, the expert panel recommends that CEU PU revises its 'Policy on Recognition of Qualifications held by Refugees and Asylum-seekers' to fit the Austrian context/situation.
- 7) It might be considered to institutionalise regular exchange with peers from the various fields taught at the department. If additional faculty is recruited, it is recommended to carefully consider the strengths and weaknesses of the current faculty in research areas.
- 8) The expert panel recommends to supervise developments in the installation of labs to guarantee that all students have access and teaching does not run into logistical problems.
- 9) In order to increase the opportunities for students to pursue a career outside academia, the expert panel recommends to foresee a 4-6 months internship by integrating the thesis with a practical course.

## 9 Documents reviewed

- Application of the Central European Private University (CEU PU) submitted on 31.10.2019 in the version of 28.01.2020 for the accreditation of the PhD programme 'Environmental Sciences and Policy' and the Master's programme 'Environmental Sciences and Policy', to be offered in Vienna.
- Submission of further information prior to the site visit (via e-mail):
  - CEU PU Non-academic Support Staff Positions, Head Count and FTE (03.02.2020)
  - Documents Student feedback and QM (19.02.2020):
    - CEU Annual Review Checklist
    - CEU Course Evaluation Form
    - CEU Supervision Evaluation Form

- ENVS Annual Report 2017-2018
  - ENVS Courseval Report 2017-2018
  - ENVS Courseval Report 2018-2019
  - ENVS Strategic Review 2016-2017
  - ENVS Student Exit Survey 2019
- Submission of further information from 26.02.2020 the site visit (via e-mail):
    - ERC projects at CEU – list of active grants and the number and amount of all grants CEU ever hosted
    - Projects at CEU- a document showing the proportion of ERC grants of the total incoming funding
    - Projects at the Environmental Science Department – active projects at the department and a summary of all projects since 2010
    - Total incoming external funding chart- shows the new incoming funding per academic year
    - ENVS Graduation and Drop-out Rates 2019