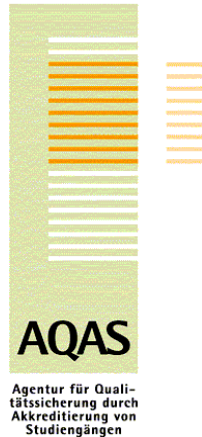# Decision of the Accreditation Commission of AQAS

on the Institutional Accreditation

of Universidad San Sebastián (USS), Chile

Based on the report of the expert panel, the comments of the university and the discussions of the Accreditation Commission, the Commission decides on 3rd/4th December 2018:

1. The **Universidad San Sebastián (Chile)** is accredited according to the AQAS criteria for Institutional Accreditation.

   The accreditation is **unconditional**.

   The university essentially complies with the requirements defined by the criteria and thus the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) and the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) in their current version.

2. The institutional accreditation is valid for the period of **six years** until **30th September 2025**.

In order to further develop the quality assurance system the Accreditation Commission gives the following recommendations.

1. To improve its internal QA procedures, USS should strengthen the focus on the qualitative dimension of QA.

2. Community outreach projects should be integrated into the curricula to strengthen the research-based learning and teaching elements of the curricula.

3. To allow students at USS to easily connect to study programmes abroad and vice versa, the existing ECTS pilot project should be extended.

4. USS should consider adding a defined level of English proficiency in graduation profiles.

5. An institutionalized feedback on evaluations to external stakeholders would be beneficial to enhance the link to the labour market.

6. To be more visible, the information on learning outcomes, workload and level should be made accessible externally.

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

Report for the

Institutional Accreditation

of Universidad de San Sebastián, Chile

Site visit on 1st to 6th October 2018

Panel of Experts:

Prof. Dr. Yvonne-Christin Bartel	University of Applied Sciences Ostwestfalen-Lippe (Germany),Vice-president, Faculty for Landscape Architecture and Environmental Planning
Prof. Dr. Francisco Javier Romero Gómez	Universidad Europea de Valencia (Spain), Faculty of Health Sciences
Prof. Dr. Heiner Schanz	Albert-Ludwigs-University Freiburg (Germany), former Vice-president, Faculty for Environment and Natural Resources (Chairman)
Dr. Ulrich Hoffmeister	Chamber of Commerce and Industry Lübeck (Germany), Managing Director for Education and Training (representative of the labour market)
Laura Witzenhausen	RWTH Aachen University (German) (student representative)

Coordination:

Ronny Heintze	AQAS, Cologne
Patrick Heinzer	AQAS, Cologne

I. Basis for accreditation

Approach and methodology

Within the institutional accreditation procedure by AQAS the quality assurance system of a university/faculty/college is assessed against the AQAS criteria for institutional accreditation which are aligned with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG, version 2015). The ESG are a set of standards and guidelines for internal and external quality assurance in higher education. The ESG are non-prescriptive while providing guidance, and covering the areas which are vital for successful quality provision and learning environments in higher education.

In line with the ESG the AQAS criteria for institutional accreditation are based on the following four principles for quality assurance:

- Higher education institutions have primary responsibility for the quality of their provision and its assurance;
- Quality assurance responds to the diversity of higher education systems, institutions, programmes and students;
- Quality assurance supports the development of a quality culture;
- Quality assurance considers the needs and expectations of students and all other stakeholders and society.

AQAS developed a set of criteria and indicators relevant for an institutional accreditation. Based on these accreditation criteria AQAS also provided the university with guidelines for writing a SER. AQAS follows the core idea that within an external assessment it should be assessed if the mechanisms the institution chose to secure the quality of its study programmes are appropriate. A procedure based on the ESG focussing an institutional accreditation is the quality of teaching and learning and the policies on which this quality is based on. Therefore, AQAS focusses on the overarching mechanisms to secure an adequate level of the learning process of Higher Education institutions. Beyond this, the aims formulated by the university in the self-evaluation report (SER) have an impact on the assessment of the panel of experts as applications need to be seen in light of the strategic goals of the institution. In the accreditation procedures AQAS follows the peer-review principle. Based on AQAS' long lasting experience with external quality assurance procedures and its involvement in international networks when working with experts AQAS acts according to the ECA Principles for the Selection of Experts.

II. Accreditation procedure

The accreditation procedure followed the predefined procedure of AQAS:

The university mandated AQAS to perform the accreditation procedure in November 2017.

In March 2018 representatives of Universidad de San Sebastián visited the AQAS office in Cologne (Germany) for an initial consultation which covered information on the accreditation procedure, on the requirements for the SER, and on the criteria. In April 2018 USS delivered a SER based on the AQAS guidelines for institutional SER.

Internal Phase/Basis for the assessment of the panel of experts

The Universidad de San Sebastián (USS) delivered an a self-evaluation report (SER) describing the main characteristics of USS. The SER explained how the quality management system works and how learning and teaching is organised. Additionally, USS sent appendices to provide more detailed material, to give evidence to the statements of the self-report, and to demonstrate how procedures are organized and put into practice.

The appendix included e.g. student retention rates, USS educational offers, undergraduate teaching and undergraduate admission regulations, quality assurance policies and mechanisms, information on graduate profiles or information on procedures for drafting and updating study plans.

AQAS scrutinized the application for sufficiency so that the final version of the SER was delivered in June 2018.

External phase/panel of experts

Following the AQAS principles for institutional accreditation the composition followed the basic principle that the panel consists of one expert from university management, one professor from one of the disciplines offered by the university under review, one expert for quality assurance, one representative from the labour market and one student expert. At least one panel member has experience in the region and speaks the local language.

AQAS informed the university about the members of the expert panel and USS had no objections.

On 17 August 2018 the expert panel selected the study programme "Physiotherapy" as a programme sample. The study programme was chosen considering that it is offered at each campus of USS as well as the fact that it is a long existing study programme. The additional information on the programme sample was provided in early September 2018. The information covered topics such as monitoring mechanisms, teaching staff, community outreach or improvement plans.

On 10 September 2018 the AQAS accreditation commission officially initialized the procedure.

The experts reviewed the application and submitted a short preliminary statement including open questions and potential needs for additional information. AQAS forwarded these preliminary statements to the university and the other panel members to increase transparency in the process and the discussions during the site visit.

During the five days of the site visit discussions were held with the university management, the head(s) of colleges and departments, the QA unit and study programme coordinators, lecturers and students. All five main campuses of USS were visited. At the end of the site visit the panel of experts presented a short feedback on the main findings to representatives of USS.

In November 2018 the expert panel drafted the assessment report including a recommendation to the accreditation commission for system accreditation. AQAS forwarded the report to USS providing the opportunity to comment on the report.

Based upon the report of the expert panel and the comments of the university the accreditation commission took a decision on the institutional accreditation. AQAS forwarded the decision to the university. The university had the right to appeal to the decision.

AQAS published the report and the result of the accreditation as well as the names of the panel of experts.

III. General Information

A. National Context

Education in Chile is organized on four levels: Pre-school, Primary (8 years); Secondary (4 years); and Higher Education. Higher Education Institutions in Chile include: 61 universities, 42 Professional Institutes, and 47 Technical Training Centres that focus on technical/vocational programmes (2-4 years' duration). Total enrolment in HEIs is close to 1.250,000 students which is approximately 60% of the population aged 18 to 24.

Most universities are organized in Faculties (Facultades), in turn comprising Schools and/or Departments, and there may also be Centres and Institutes that carry out studies or research in specific areas. University governance generally includes a Management Board (Directorio or Junta Directiva); a Rector (or Presidente) and Cabinet (Vice-Rectors and other leaders); an Academic or Higher Council (comprised of Faculty Deans and other senior officers); and directors of sectoral units (Schools, Departments, Centres, Institutes) in addition to central support units (Instruction, Postgraduate, Student Affairs, Personnel, Institutional Research, Admission, Library, and other services).

Universities award degrees enabling the practice of a profession (Physician – Surgeon, Engineer, Veterinary Surgeon, Pharmaceutical Chemist, Nurse, Psychologist, Journalist, Architect, etc.) which implies programme lasting 5–7 years, usually in the fourth year awarding a License Academic degree (similar to a Bachelors). The License degree and/or the professional degree allow continuing-on to graduate programmes (Masters', Doctorate) and medical or dental specialization.

Under the law, Chilean universities are non-profit institutions. In general, the sources of financing are the fees paid by students, competitive funds (research and development of teaching), donations, sale of services, and a direct contribution by the State for the so-called public institutions and some private institutions.

A national accreditation system was initiated in 2003 and is managed by the Comisión Nacional de Acreditación (CNA-Chile) (National Commission for Accreditation). Accreditation is awarded at institutional and undergraduate programme level (leading to a professional degree), Masters', Doctoral, and medical and dental specialization. Accreditation is mandatory for undergraduate programmes in Education, Medicine, and Dentistry. The National Education Council (CNED – Consejo Nacional de Educación) authorizes new private institutions to operate and then oversees them until they are awarded the status of an institution with full autonomy or their closure is agreed.

B. General Information on the university

Universidad San Sebastián (USS) was founded in 1989 and is a private institution, not linked to or dependent on organizations of a religious or ideological nature. Its Educational Project/Vision is described to be inspired by Christian Humanist values, and promotes cultivating knowledge and interacting with society, its primary and central function being the professional training and comprehensive development of students. USS aims to promote social integra-

tion, personal and professional advancement, and developing the members of the San Sebastian community, within a framework of values that highlight the pursuit of truth, justice, and solidarity.

According to the SER the strategic guidelines of USS emphasize: ensuring comprehensive development of the educational process focused on learning; continued advancement from a mainly teaching organization towards an organization more developed in research; upholding internal quality criteria and consistency with requirements of the external regulatory framework; maintaining the financial and economic sustainability of USS, and consolidating its position within the Chilean higher education.

USS operates with four branches in the cities of Concepción, Santiago (2 campuses), Puerto Montt, and Valdivia. It is organized in 11 Faculties and administrative units to support students and faculty members. The educational offering currently comprises of 46 undergraduate programmes, 21 Masters', 2 Doctorates, 5 medical specialties, 7 dental specialties, and 49 in continuous education offers (called Diploma courses).

As of March 2018 there were 29,341 students enrolled at USS (92% undergraduate; 8% graduate). At the same time there is a teaching staff of 5,972 faculty members of which 1/5 is called regular staff with open ended contracts (usually full time) and 4/5 part-time, contract for teaching services and student support, called adjunct staff. The functions of the academic body focus primarily on teaching and substantively on collaborative activities in the community. In addition, regular faculty members are increasingly encouraged to increase their research activities, USS also describes that they have progressed in the area of interaction with society. Since 2013 projects with various sectors of the community increased from three to 118 in the sphere of education, production, culture, services, etc.

IV. Policy and procedures for quality assurance

Institutions should have a policy for quality assurance that is made public and forms part of their strategic management. Internal stakeholders should develop and implement this policy through appropriate structures and processes, while involving external stakeholders.

The SER of USS describes its commitment to quality as also represented in it's Mission, Educational Project/Vision, and Institutional Development Plan. A quality assurance policy was established in 2011. At institutional level, quality is understood as the academic and administrative community´s ability to systematically and constantly move ahead towards the achievement of stated purposes, demonstrating its relevance at internal and external level. Quality assurance is conceived as a set of formal and systematic mechanisms that aim towards controlling, ensuring, facilitating, and promoting quality, in addition to efforts made to achieve increasingly higher levels of quality. This policy addresses specific areas of institutional activity (Professional Education; Community Outreach; Research; Personnel, Financial, Material and Resource Management), with guidelines that determine structures and mechanisms, assessment strategies and plans, and consequent adjustments for improvement.

The Office of the Vice-Rector for Quality Assurance (OVRQA) is established to facilitate the design and direction of the Quality Assurance System, analysing outcomes and communicating them accordingly. The office takes part and has responsibilities in the assessment strategies, improvement plans and quality adjustments.

OVRQA also provides training at academic units with regard to the tasks implied in reviewing teaching programmes and meeting assessment standards and criteria for improvement and accreditation purposes, in addition to facilitating the organization and working methodology.

The operation of the system is facilitated in turn by the Institutional Planning and Assessment and the Institutional Research units within the OVRQA that compile, analyse, and provide internal and external information.

The following chart shows the components of the USS Quality Assurance system:

Quality Assurance Institutional System
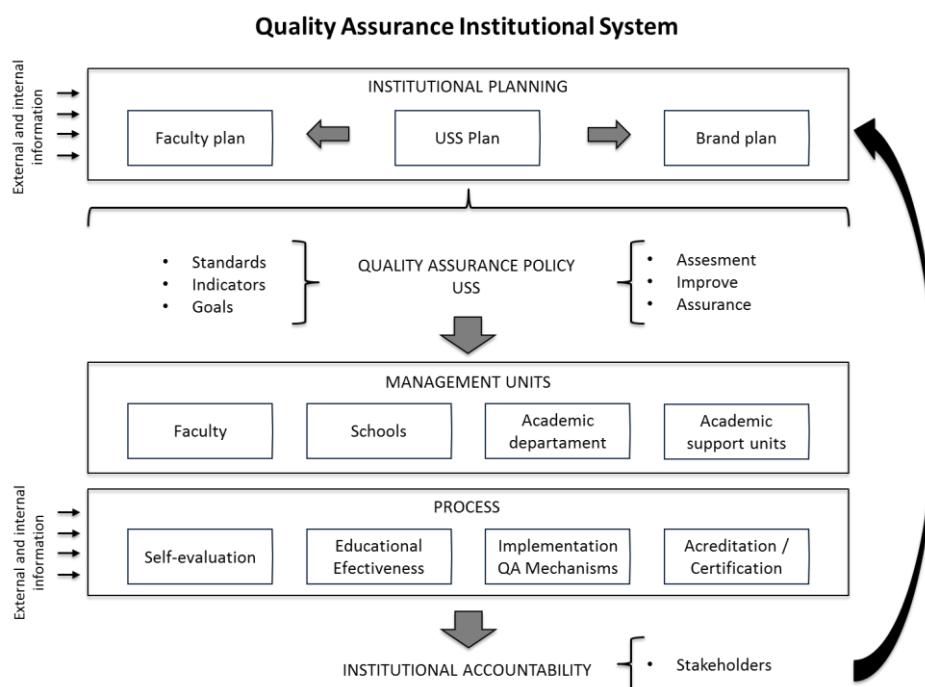
Among the main assessment and improvement strategies, especially with an impact on the teaching and learning process, USS highlights the following aspects:

- **Accreditation, undergraduate programme review, and improvement plans**. These mechanisms imply the commitment of management teams at faculties, schools, or programmes, especially the councils that include professor and student representatives.

- **Implementing Mechanisms for Quality Assurance (MQA).** Academic units implement internal processes on the basis of a model, as appropriate to their characteristics, which implies defining aims, formalising procedures, generating results, assessing achievements, and making adjustments in successive cycles tending towards continuous improvement. Critical factors for the establishment of MQAs are alignment with development plans, community outreach, internal leadership, and engagement by the academic community. Not all MQAs are cross-cuttingly observed by academic units; as part of the improvement plans, focus is on gathering greater evidence of the effectiveness of learning and initial inclusion of graduates in the field of work (employability).

- **Efficiency and effectiveness of the educational process**. The focus of this process is on monitoring student cohorts in programmes through pass rates, retention rate, graduation rate, and time to completion of the programme; likewise, as-

sessment of learning outcomes and graduation profiles. In this sense, MQA outcomes are included as well as other actions taken by the institution.

Experts' evaluation

Based on the self-evaluation report and impressions gained during the site-visit, the university proved to be a well-managed organization, both on operational and strategic level. The university demonstrated a very comprehensive, sophisticated and well-structured quality assurance system covering all relevant areas. Structures and procedures of quality assurance are in place, the quality cycle (PDCA) is complete and could demonstrate to function well with a continuous focus on further quality enhancement. On all levels of administration (Board (junta directiva), Rector, Vice-rectors, academic and administrative staff) and students, the university showed an impressive level of uniformity and understanding of visions, aims and quality assurances. Thanks to those factors the relevant procedures, instruments, and responsibilities are clear and comprehensible while being used adequately. This level of uniformity applies not only to the main campus but is clearly visible at the different branches of USS as the interviews on these sites demonstrated.

The panel was able to verify that QA processes are data-driven and that strategic implications for decisions are evidence-based. USS has a very detailed system for data collection and is able to successfully use all this information for decision taking and managing the academic process. This detailed system offers a very good variety of data to tackle different issues from different perspectives. Recognizing the structurally well stablished quantitative dimension of the system, existing qualitative measures could have a better impact when included in a more systematic way in the system (**Finding 1**). An outstanding example for the use of data are the so called "early Warning Reports" on low performance students, or the assessments to support students to achieve the study goals and reduce the drop-out rate. In addition, interviews on site showed that the students perceive these tools as very useful and helpful themselves.

The quality assurance system is applied appropriately on every campus of the university. The very small differences between the campuses are caused by regional conditions in terms of buildings, equipment, teaching staff or in combination of different study programmes and the cultural requirements of each region. Nevertheless, the university has a high level of equalization in their procedures at all branches in terms of curricula, methodologies, assessment, means for teaching and learning, faculty member training, regulations, and infrastructure over all campuses.

The experts confirm that USS ensures that internal stakeholders are involved in the QA system on different levels e.g. by colligate bodies such as board, higher council, faculty council, school council, programme committees and also by participation of student representatives. The internal and external stakeholders are not only informed about relevant QA measures, their processes and outcomes but are also involved as consultants and observers. Systematic information beyond the scope of individual contacts might need increased attention (**see Finding 5**). The evaluation results are shared with teaching staff and students and are published in appropriate form on the webpages of the USS.

The discussions with labour market representatives showed that a trustful and successful cooperation with the university is being lived on the basis of an equal partnership. The involvement of partners in quality assurance and improvements are expedient. In the field of lifelong learning, an expansion of offers can and should be expected and specializations will

be focussed. E-learning offers and evening courses are offered in addition which is a very good approach due to the regional context, and the panel of experts encourages USS to follow this path. Additionally, it would be beneficial to connect to the labour market by offering continuous learning by e-learning.

The QA system sets rules and points of contact that ensure an academic integrity and counteracts possible discrimination.

Conclusion:

The criterion is fulfilled. The QA system of USS can be considered as well-functioning and well established throughout all branches. The university shows a very impressive and uniform understanding of vision, aims and quality assurance. All relevant procedures, instruments and responsibilities are clear, comprehensible and are being used adequately.

V. Design and approval of study programmes

Institutions should have processes for the design and approval of their programmes. The programmes should be designed so that they meet the objectives set for them, including the intended learning outcomes. The qualification resulting from a programme should be clearly specified and communicated, and refer to the correct level of the national qualifications framework for higher education and, consequently, to the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area.

The SER explains that USS has a regulated system for creating and redesigning programmes, their approval, and safeguarding their consistency with institutional policies. Undergraduate and graduate programmes are expected to be in line with overall institutional aims that in turn are derived from the Institutional Mission, the Educational Project/Vision and the Institutional Development Plan. This is supposed to be expressed in the so-called expected performances which are outlined in the graduation profiles of each teaching programme and in the learning outcomes associated to each subject area, course, or formal curricular activity that feed into the relevant graduate profile. For this purpose USS has developed a special regulation called *Graduation Profile: guidelines for drafting and updating*.

USS outlines that every new programme initiative or the redesign of an existing programme should be performed according to the USS Procedure for the Creation and Redesign of Study Plans process. Creating or reformulating graduate programmes is also regulated by guidelines and rules. In this way, there is a stage for diagnoses and substantiating the study plan, and which is supposed to show the associated needs and demands of the discipline. This is supposed to also imply internal validation (faculty members, students) and also external validation which includes employers, graduates and experts. Consequently, the process to create or design disciplines or programmes is supposed to include ample assessment of the labour market, economic and academic viewpoint, in order to safeguard the sustainability of the modification over time.

Periodic review of programmes is described to take place within the framework of the Quality Assurance System and is supposed to allow for their timely updating in terms of developing the discipline and profession as well as the demand and relevant political and trade signals, which implies consulting with the internal and external sectors described as part of the stakeholder involvement in the QA cycle.

Experts' evaluation

USS can point to remarkable successes within its core mission, teaching and education (e.g. attractiveness as documented by the number of undergraduate students, general feasibility of programmes, student satisfaction as documented by regular evaluations, and frequently renewed CNED full-autonomy-status). Also, first achievements in research as documented by a growing number of indexed publications and external projects are convincing facts. At the same time, USS has built up an impressive capacity for community outreach, which is highly valued by stakeholders and participating students as well. The expert panel encourages a multifaceted perspective towards the community outreach projects as they are a very strong plus of USS, due to the fact that they combine solving problems in the regions of the branches with research. As an add-up for USS, the panel encourages the university to stronger integrate those community outreach projects in the compulsory parts of its programmes and by thus strengthening systematically the research-based learning and teaching elements of the curricula (**Finding 2**).

Based on a broad range of disciplines, the university has developed a clear and effective system for setting up and designing study programmes. The underlying policy for developing study programmes is clear and applied in a similar manner at all four campuses. Designing new programmes is backed-up by a consistent institutional mission ("regional embedded", "obliged to social context", "value-oriented"), a consistent educational vision and a revolving, up-to-date institutional development plan at the central level. Equivalent implementation and application at all campuses is safeguarded through so-called "graduation profiles" for each study programme, explicitly indicating the intended learning outcomes and supported by equalization procedures across the campuses involved.

USS has more recently started to establish graduate and doctorate programmes. Also in this field the university demonstrated policy guidelines, for instance for the implementation of specific Master programmes, in order to get a critical mass in academic capacity at the different campuses, or the targeted promotion of specific research groups in selected subject areas (such as medicine, law or engineering). It became clear from conversations with students that the development of graduate profiles in the area of doctoral programmes was less established in the beginning, but that the university had made great efforts to deal with this and succeeded to establish graduation profiles that connect to those on undergraduate level.

In general, the curricula of the study programmes clearly cover subject-specific and cross-subject knowledge. This is ensured through the involvement of students and other stakeholders in designing the programmes, even though the expert panel got the impression that the selection of stakeholders to be involved in designing the programmes could be done more systematically. For the graduate and doctorate programmes this could also mean to include systematically international academic expertise and to allow for benchmarking with national and international developments.

The expert panel found it to be a definite strength of USS policies that placement opportunities are well established and that the link to the labour market and the social context are well taken into account during the course of studies.

Feasibility of the programmes, i.e. workload for students and support measures, are well taken into account in the design of the study programmes, even though there is no formal credit system that directly links student workload to credits. The expert panel strongly supports the considerations of the university to extend its ECTS-pilot project, to make the curriculum comparable according to international standards thus facilitating international exchange and mobility for incoming and outgoing students. This would allow students at USS to easily

connect to study programmes abroad and vice versa, increasing the inflow of international students to USS (in the sense of an "internal internationalization") allowing them to transfer the credits achieved to their original study programmes (**Finding 3**). Also external transparency would be increased.

The expert panel recognizes the efforts of USS to move ahead gradually and discerningly towards strengthening the academic capacity in general. Specifically, with regards to the academic degrees awarded, the expert panel believes that the academic level could simply be increased by systematically analysing the curricula for the links between research and teaching as outlined by Mick Healey's concept of the research-teaching nexus.

Given the programme sample of 'Physiotherapy', the curriculum reflects 'research-oriented' (particularly in the Área Formación Ciencias Básicas) and 'research-led' ('Área Formación Profesional), and to lesser extent 'research tutored' (courses 'Metodología de la Investigación I + II, Seminario de Investigación, as well as thesis) elements. At the same time, USS has built up a strong reputation for community outreach projects, highly valued by the relevant stakeholders. The expert panel is of the opinion that integrating community outreach projects as 'research-based' elements in the curriculum and providing students systematically with the required skills would strengthen the appropriate level according to the European Qualifications Framework. From the expert panel's view this would not contradict USS' general position that graduate and undergraduate programmes are mostly professionalizing, where an emphasis is placed on achieving greater professional skills in students and not the research capacity and USS efforts to strengthen the academic capacity of its teaching personal in general **(see Finding 1)**.

In line with this, and recognizing the before mentioned strategic intention to further develop research, the importance of English language proficiency should be strengthened not only in the curricula but also reflected in increased support offers for students and teachers. Thus, USS should consider adding a defined level of English proficiency in their graduation profiles (**Finding 4**).

Conclusion:

The criterion is fulfilled. USS' study programmes meet adequately the set objectives which includes clearly specified graduation profiles. The current effort of USS to internationalize on internal and external level clearly will be supported by using and transparently indicating a credit system that can be easily transferred into other systems.

VI. On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes

> *Institutions should monitor and periodically review their programmes to ensure that they achieve the objectives set for them and respond to the needs of students and society. These reviews should lead to continuous improvement of the programme. Any action planned or taken as a result should be communicated to all those concerned.*

As outlined in the SER the monitoring and assessment of the educational offer of each programme is periodically done by the university within the framework of the programme accreditation processes as well as internal improvement. It is shown in the SER that USS has several instances at university, faculty and programme level with described tasks, composition and meeting frequency. The university has determined policies to ensure that each faculty complies with the quality mechanisms developed for reviewing study programmes of the dif-

ferent branches. So called ad-hoc organizations regarding specific topics such as curricula, self-assessments or graduation profiles are additionally in place and consist of faculty leaders and members.

It is stated that the Academic Vice-Rector Office has several instruments and methods implemented to monitor, assess and update the programmes of the different branches. Those instruments examine for instance study plans with their subject areas, demands of the societal needs or the expectations of key informers. In order to track those topics, USS defines the support mechanisms for on-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes on the part of the Academic Vice-Rector Office such as participation in national professional associations of faculty members, agreements with public and private agencies and institutions or validating surveys for the graduation profiles. On institutional level, the curricular progress and the effectiveness of the programmes in terms of learning is another relevant task for the monitoring. The Universidad de San Sebastián uses external peer reviews for programme assessments and comprehensive analyses of internal consistency of content on course and programme level or academic tutoring outcomes to measure the progress of each branch and each faculty of USS.

The results of the above-mentioned monitoring assessments include for instance the implementation of student progress indicators, the harmonisation of the curricula or the diversification of assessment indicators for the specific learning outcomes. The results of monitoring and assessment are communicated within the academic units in different ways (circulars, self-assessment events, team meetings or faculty meetings). Occasionally USS states that results are also shared with external stakeholders such as labour market representatives or graduates.

Experts' evaluation

The expert panel was very much impressed by the clear and transparent procedures for evaluation of study programmes and their implementation in practice.

In general, the expert panel is of the opinion that the procedures and tools to evaluate the programmes at USS meet the requirements provided by the ESG. They are at least comparable, if not exceeding currently practiced standards of universities in Europe. This might be also a consequence of the extensive experience with accreditation of USS in the context of the Chilean Higher Education System but definitely also reflects the strong competences of the Office of the Academic Vice-Rector as well as the Vice-Rector for QA on operational level.

Available instruments and methods to monitor, assess and update the programmes at the different campuses are up-to-date, concisely and effectively applied, ensuring equal programme offerings at different campuses.

The expert panel found it impressive to see that "equalization" procedures based on the 'graduation profiles', such as teacher trainings and programme evaluations, have been installed to ensure same quality standards and educational levels for undergraduate programmes at all four campuses. "Equalization" is thereby in no way oriented to the least common denominator between the campuses but on the general requirements as set in the graduation profile and reflected in the curriculum. Thereby, relatively weaker performances in comparison with the different campuses, such as observed on one campus in the case of the Physiotherapy programme, are made obvious and are actively addressed.

Based on discussions with the labour market representatives, the expert panel learned that the integration of stakeholders in further programme development or curricular modification,

as well as feedback to stakeholders is taking place in a satisfactory manner at the different campuses, but could be improved substantially by a more systematic and consistent way of selecting and including stakeholders. Labour market representatives at all campuses unanimously reported about the necessity to strengthen the research capacities and specializations in the programmes. At the same time, the labour market representatives reported that contact to study programmes is mainly established on personal basis and related to community outreach projects. Thus, the expert panel suggests to discuss feedback on evaluations with external stakeholders in a more systematic and strategic manner, e.g. through communication with external members in programme advisory boards (**Finding 5**).

Conclusion:

The criterion is fulfilled. The monitoring mechanisms are very well established and are crucial for the further development of the programmes.

VII. Learning, teaching and assessment of students

Institutions should ensure that the programmes are delivered in a way that encourages students to take an active role in creating the learning process, and that the assessment of students reflects this approach.

According to the submitted report, each programme at USS has its own methodical implementation and can be adjusted to the requirements and possibilities of students. Having in mind that there are four different branches throughout the country, the harmonisation and equalisation of teaching is of utmost importance for the university. To ensure that this process is in place, the university has decided to implement so-called academic communities, area coordination, faculty member training and tutoring of students. Furthermore, the university states that specific innovative activities have been implemented in the health study programmes. These kind of clinical simulation activities are designed to impart a guided practice in the field of health sciences and it is aimed that these kinds of activities will be implemented continuously in other study fields at USS.

The teaching methodology at USS is supposed to support an active learner perspective and includes case studies, group work, bibliographic research projects or roleplays amongst others. It is stated that the university supports their teaching staff with ad-hoc training to foster the knowledge in those methodologies. Additionally, the university states that special methodologies for evening undergraduate programmes are applied due to the specifics of those study programmes. The university states that the effectiveness of their teaching methodology depends highly on the functioning between the student body and the faculty members of USS. Therefore, the university has implemented rules regarding these aspects which determine the rights and responsibilities of students and faculty members as well as specific mechanisms to address disputes at USS.

Following the statements in the self-evaluation report, USS has implemented mechanisms to monitor educational achievement. Student progress is assessed with specification tables, guidelines for assessing attitudes, rubrics for assessment and feedback on global and partial exams. By doing this, the university aims to assess the student's learning outcomes at each branch equally. Assessments are regulated by student normatives and guidelines for designing assessment instruments. The university states that specific assessment methods such as objective structured clinical examination, focussing more on practical aspects, are in place in some of the study programmes offered (most of it is implemented in the health disciplines).

The university provides an academic schedule which is distributed to both academic units and students, indicates the assessment dates for each semester. Likewise, students will be informed about the type of assessment they will undergo in each subject at the beginning of the semester. The faculty members are admonished to report the results as soon as possible and to provide students with the correction guidelines, noting all the most usual and relevant errors and shortcomings.

Experts' evaluation

The university offers a great variety of methods to teach theoretical as well as practical content to its students. These methods are very well adjusted and appropriate to the learning outcomes. Referring to the programme sample (Physiotherapy) there are different levels of practical experience. Students start out at the clinical campus with a relationship of 1:1 or 1:2 in supervision in the first two semesters which is replaced by a proper internship with one coordinator dealing with a cohort of 28 participants at different clinics.

Not only the different requirements of the semesters but also of the campuses are taken into account. It has to be pointed out that an identical minimum level of learning outcome is defined and there is a common level of assessment due to exams being coordinated between campuses and held at the same time with the same methods and tools. This does not contradict the flexibility of teachers using their own strengths and include these along the requirements specific to the campus. This strengthens the USS in being a regional university while ensuring an equal standard at all branches.

The processes concerning learning, teaching and assessment are well structured and organized. Teaching staff is well aware of relevant procedures and is linked between the campuses in a very well-functioning way. There is room for improvement concerning the information which is accessible to the students before the beginning of a semester (**see Finding 6**). This might even help the USS to improve its visibility.

Additionally the community outreach projects have to be highlighted not only as a way of research but also as a method of student-centred learning, e.g. in case of Physiotherapy the projects are part of the teaching process although they are not assessed separately. The content is linked to learning outcomes and can be subject of an assessment in an exam. A direct connection between the community outreach projects and the curricula would be nonetheless beneficial. Regarding the link between research and teaching, the distinction between research-based, research-oriented, research-tutored and research-led teaching might be pointed out, and the importance of the community outreach project as a subject of research should be pointed out. Thus, they should be integrated into the curricula (**see Finding 2)**.

The presence and visibility of the graduation profiles is remarkable as an instrument to visualise the learning outcomes to all stakeholders. This instrument can be used to point out new targets within the future development of USS.

Student profiles are created when students enter the university and professors are familiarized with the profile of each cohort. So there is a constant monitoring of the development of the students and assistance can be offered. At the same time there are different offers that can be chosen by the students themselves.

In general, there is an induction process for new staff. All teaching staff is linked over the campuses including a matrix of curricular implementation aiming at equalization between the different campuses and a university wide internal staff meeting (claustro) takes place once a year. So staff is well supported concerning matters of process and equalization. Additionally, opportunities to participate in professional advance and pedagogical training are given.

The regulations and procedures of assessment are clear to a required extend as they are part of "national" exams. But there is also information which is known by the students at the beginning of a semester.

In Physiotherapy simulations of examines which are followed by a written feedback take place during the semester to prepare students for the final exams. Thereby there is a clear link between feedback and assessment which aims at the learning process. In general, the university has a clear and strong effort regarding inclusion.

Assessors are familiar with current testing and examination methods and receive support in developing their own skills by the above-mentioned way of training, and the exchange between the campuses is well structured. The consistence of the assessment is ensured by equalization over the campuses.

In case of student complaints, USS pointed out the open door policy of teachers/directors and students which was confirmed in the respective interviews also by students. Additionally, students commented to be well represented by the president of the student body.

Conclusion:

The criterion is fulfilled. The university has developed very good instruments to support the learning process of its students in a very good and adequate way.

VIII.   Student admission, progression, recognition and certification

Institutions should consistently apply pre-defined and published regulations covering all phases of the student "life cycle", e.g. student admission, progression, recognition and certification.

USS explains in its SER that it takes part in the so-called Single Admission System (known by the Spanish acronym SUA) for undergraduate programmes offered in daytime and face-to-face modality. The system includes all universities that receive direct contributions by the state plus some of the new private universities that meet defined requirements. The system considers the grades achieved in Secondary Education and the score achieved in core subjects (Mathematics, Language and Communication, Science, etc.) in the University Selection Test (known by the Spanish acronym PSU) which is taken countrywide. Each university assigns weightings to these grades and scores for the various programmes/disciplines. Student applications allow a certain order of preference for institutions and programmes.

For some programmes USS explains to have special admission requirements in place, e.g. Secondary Education graduates from abroad or that have an International Baccalaureate; outstanding in sports; special disabilities; special artistic or scientific talent; etc. Special circumstances are also recognised, such as re-entry to USS; internal transfer or from other institutions, Chilean or foreign; and graduates in branches of the armed forces. USS explains that there are rules covering the relevant admission processes at USS, and the USS Admission and Dissemination unit manages the processes.

The Institutional Research Unit monitors student progress in their curriculum in each academic semester, and drafts reports with indicators per cohort, and monthly Early Warning Reports on low performance students by subject. This is supposed to allow Faculties and Schools to anticipate actions and mitigate major fail rates and/or dropping-out of the programme or institution.

In addition, USS explains that parameters are systematically created with rates on retention per year, by programme, academic unit, branch and institution; overall passing rate of subjects/courses; graduation rate; employability rate of students (one year from graduation); and the time from entry to timely completion/graduation.

Experts' evaluation

The admission process is well defined and transparent. It is set in place according to Chilean law and is applied consistently. Special admission can be granted to certain students under well-defined circumstances. These processes are transparent and known by the students as interviews showed. During their first weeks at USS, staff and "student buddies" introduce new students to the university. Here, students are drawn to different aspects of studying at the institution. The experts recognize that students are well prepared and informed. Systems supporting student progression and its monitoring are particularly well established and work well.

The internal QA system monitors all statistics concerning the student lifecycle. The institution uses a highly sophisticated model with numerous data sets and key indicators such as completion rate and course assessment. This data is used to track the programme performance outlined in the annual performance report. A specially designed early warning system prevents drop outs and failures. Students in special situation are supported by programmes and policies. The expert panel used the interviews to particularly ask students about their perception and learned that mechanisms are well established and also put in practice. They also allow for individuality as they make sure that progression is then also reflected based on the specific situation of the individual student.

Mobility on an international level is currently less developed. Students fear the additional time to their studies and therefore additional costs. Programmes to support internationalization are existent, however maybe not as effective as they could be. The recognition of courses passed at foreign universities is not yet institutionalized and transparently shared with the students. Therefore, the documentation and recognition of student's achievements should be further developed and institutionalized. The university should therefore strive to make their study programmes more comparative to international standards (e.g. ECTS) to establish a system of "internal internationalization" as mentioned above and to create in the end more incentives for their own students to go abroad (**see Finding 3**). It is important to differentiate that this proposed comparability is not aimed at the level of content or outcomes but much more on publicly available curricular documentation that facilitates recognition e.g. by proving structural information on how the locally used credit system relates to the ECTS and to student workload.

Conclusion:

The criterion is fulfilled. The life cycle of students is supported in a very good, detailed and well established way.

IX. Teaching staff

Institutions should assure themselves of the competence of their academic staff. They should apply fair and transparent processes for the recruitment and development of the staff.

As stated in the self-evaluation report, the university aims at continuing the development as a teaching institution by increasing research activities, implementing new Master and Ph.D. study programmes and focusing more on the community outreach. USS is aware of the fact that this implies also the transformation of the current teaching body in terms of credentials and proven experience in research as well as undergraduate and graduate teaching. The latest numbers indicate that USS had 1,108 regular faculty members and 4,864 part-time faculty members (adjunct faculty members) in 2017. It is stated that the Chilean system uses a so-called Equivalent Full-Time day (EFD) to measure the availability of teaching staff to students. It is shown that the EFD number has been increasing since 2012 for both regular and adjunct faculty members, which is supposed to lead to an improvement of student-teacher ratio. According to the information given by USS approximately 70% of all faculty members have a Ph.D., a Master's degree or a Medical title and/or are certified in pedagogical areas. Referring to these numbers, the university highlights the academic development in the last five years. As stated, USS succeeded to drop the percentage of academic staff members without ranking as tenured lecturers, associate professors, assistant professors or instructor from 61% to 28%. The ranking processes are directed by two committees (Faculty Hierarchy Committee and Institutional Hierarchy Committee) who assess the background of the faculty members and make recommendations to the Institutional Committee for appointments or promotion based on their analysis.

Requirements for recruiting new faculty members teaching at undergraduate level stem from the faculties, schools and study programmes and will be selected by Faculty and School Councils, programme committees and the general academic management teams. New faculty members at graduate level are selected analogously. Only the academic committee of the respective programmes replaces the programme committees. The recruitment processes are carried out according to institutional guidelines considering programming and faculty member management, lines of research and community outreach projects.

It is stated that the organizational responsibilities are divided within the different faculties. Different academic tasks such as research, teaching, community outreach, academic extension, professional development or organisational tasks will be distributed between the regular academic members. As a constant incentive to improve activities carried out by the regular staff, academic assessments, aiming at measuring staff performances, are carried out regularly. Those assessments include the academic commitment, self-assessment, students' evaluation and the academic curriculum.

The university describes that it supports its faculty staff to develop professionally and has implemented a policy and specific mechanisms to conduct this on institutional level. Professional development in the field of pedagogy is in the purview of the Teacher Development unit, where strategies for teaching and assessing learning are focused. This unit offers free workshops and courses with different topics such as "Course Planning", "Assessment of Classroom Learning Outcomes" or "Using Technology in Undergraduate Teaching" to the academic staff member. USS states that in the last five years 39 different pedagogical workshops and development programmes have been carried out. Furthermore, it is stated in the self-evaluation report that the university tries to support improvements in the areas of research, postgraduate and community outreach by providing funds for financing postgraduate scholarships, research support (incentives for publications and congresses) or an internal fund for community projects.

Following the statements of the university, innovation in teaching is especially focused through a Pedagogical Experience Meeting which is carried out annually since 2015. Hereby USS aims to provide support to faculty members with initiatives related to innovation in teaching. USS states that in the last three years 131 innovative projects have been selected involving 201 faculty members. Additionally, a web platform has been established to provide additional material such as notes, surveys and study guides for faculty members.

Experts' evaluation

The visit to the different USS campuses has proven to be very positive in terms of procedures to ensure qualified staff involvement in teaching and learning. In general terms, the meetings with the teaching staff were useful to clarify and confirm the different aspects mentioned in the self-evaluation USS report. It is worth mentioning that the faculty met by the panel was, without exception, satisfied with their role. USS is aware that an engaged teaching staff is the basic requirement to fulfil its mission and set up structures supporting staff motivation. The interviewed staff in general, and in particular the Physiotherapy faculty, confirmed the importance of teaching for them and also for the institution. This is in line with a historically strong focus on teaching at USS that marks an impressively strong characteristic of the institution until today.

USS provides its teaching staff with the necessary tools to improve pedagogic abilities and especially with the coordinating mechanisms to guarantee that at all four campuses the students receive the similar, if not identical, materials and lectures. The entire faculty interviewed admitted that they dedicate a relevant part of their working time to coordination activities. Being part of the necessary strategic mechanisms of homogenization of the learning outcomes between campuses, it represents an amenable issue. Considering the teaching hours of an average staff member, the hours devoted to coordination also impact the time available for engaging in research activities. Undoubtedly, promotion and professional development is considered by the institution and it implies having achieved certain hallmarks in teaching skills but more importantly in research results and publications. The institution has explained its plan to reduce teaching assignments to allow researchers to progress in their career. On the long run, USS will have to find a way to balance teaching responsibilities and time available for research in order to achieve the strategic goal of strengthening the research output. It is obvious that the currently high teaching responsibility of most staff members limits the time available to engage in research.

The expert panel clearly underlines the strong potential in the links between community outreach projects and research and positively acknowledges the intention of USS to extend research in that direction. In those terms, the participation of students in research activities, with the exception of doctoral students, would level up this and needs to be improved. One way to develop this could be to engage students during their Bachelor and Master thesis in research groups with an overall research focus.

Regarding the community outreach projects, faculty members engaged in these activities may clearly profit out of them, if they have the consideration of research activities. It has been clearly established by USS that it wants to be present in the communities in which the campuses are placed. In the experts' point of view, there is no need to separate these projects from research activities since, in most cases, they are providing answers to specific questions raised in the communities that could be communicated to the research community.

In the interviews with different faculty members, the panel learned that USS is providing the necessary opportunities to start and continue using new technologies for teaching methods and the panel encourages USS to continue this path and intensify its efforts in this field. This is especially true when considering the simulation laboratories developed in all four campuses.

Conclusion:

This criterion is fulfilled. USS comprises of dedicated, motivated and highly qualified staff which assures a good and adequate learning process of students. Additionally, a strong plus is the well-established link to the community in terms of external outreach projects which benefit the society.

X. Learning Resources and student support

> *Institutions should have appropriate funding for learning and teaching activities and ensure that adequate and readily accessible learning resources and student support are provided.*

According to the information provided by USS, resource requirements for carrying out academic functions are determined in the Faculties and Schools, implying updating the programmes involved and innovating or changes framed within the Five-Year Academic Plan and the development plans of the units. These requirements are described to be subsequently analysed and adjusted as appropriate by vice-rector level committees, subsequently included in the institutional budget process, and lastly approved by the Higher Council and the Board (Junta Directiva).

USS builds and maintains physical infrastructure according to a plan that considers the growth of activities, especially teaching related activities, respecting the standards of the Ministry of Housing and Urbanism in Chile. Current infrastructure exceeds 210,000 m^2 and – according to USS,- all branch campuses are fully enabled to fulfil the teaching programmes offered by the university. Information technology resources are acquired, maintained, and updated following established policies and procedures.

Assessment of resources and services implies compiling the opinions of users (students and faculty members) through regular surveys. USS explains that according to recent surveys, students consider available support materials as sufficient and of a good level (audio-visual equipment, computers, mobile apps, etc.).

The unit for Student Support and Financing offers counselling and assistance to receive financial benefits awarded by USS and advice for those who on account of academic reasons are at risk of losing a benefit. The unit also coordinates job offerings within the campus through the USS work programme, *Trabajando USS*.

Financial support for students may be associated to the discipline fee or be additional for totally or partly financing other spending related to their studies (meals, transport, special materials, etc.). This contribution may be given as a grant, discount, or credit. USS explains that currently 89% of daytime undergraduate students benefit from one of these financial support mechanisms.

Experts' evaluation

Based on the information provided in the SER, its annexes as well as in the interviews the panel concludes that students are provided with a comprehensive and well-managed offering

of USS services. Both, the implemented consultancy and assistance services for students as well as the active quality culture and the support of academic staff with regard to students' needs and interests are highly appreciated by the peer group. Students in special situations (e.g. with children) are considered in the allocation of seminars and classes. There are further programmes which students are being informed about regularly. These measures are reflected in the spirit of staff as well as policies.

Apart from existing comprehensive services for students at USS (e.g. library system and services, computer labs, IT infrastructure for course and examination management, student advisory service, evaluation activities, participation in study programme and governance committees, facilities and extra-curricular activities, etc.), students significantly showed strong appreciation for the open-door policy at USS. Lecturers are available for any issues and students' needs. The institution assured the availability of material resources for the study programmes through an online platform and computers available in the different libraries. The extent of the USS libraries in both online and offline range is very impressive. Journals, literature and other information are all accessible during reasonable opening hours.

The internal QA mechanisms are in place and show appropriate effectiveness. Perceived shortcomings with regard to resources could also be identified by the established quality assurance mechanisms and appropriate action was initialized. In addition to the student support services, the early warning system is an effective tool to monitor the student's progression.

Conclusion:

This criterion is fulfilled. The university provides appropriate quality learning resources at every branch.

XI. Information management and public information

Institutions should ensure that they collect, analyse and use relevant information for the effective management of their programmes and other activities.

Institutions should publish information about their activities, including programmes, which is clear, accurate, objective, up-to date and readily accessible.

USS states that a system has been established to compile, analyse and gain information to facilitate planning and decision making on different levels of the institution. One of the key tools is the Institutional Management System which offers a series of planning tools and tools regarding the control and assessment in the areas of management, teaching, research or community outreach. By using this system, a regular monitoring of all branches shall be enabled for USS and shall allow monitoring different areas which are important for the constant improvement process of the university. Being a decentralised system, each branch is responsible to control and, if needed, adjust their activities to meet the institutional aims. Additionally, faculties and the Office of the Vice-Rectors have determined several indicators including overall retention rates, percentage of academic load achievement, student satisfaction or ratio of students per EFD.

Relevant information for specific study programmes are collected from various sources and stakeholders such as students, faculty members, collaborators, graduates or employers. As stated in the SER, the university has an integrated platform that allows the collection of data for the various faculties, schools or study programmes. The results of the data collection is

described in the SER as a constant follow-up report regarding benchmarking (inter-, intra- and inter-institutional), the analysis of student satisfaction or information on the progress of community outreach.

The Office of the Vice-Rectors for Community Outreach and Communications is responsible for both internal and external USS communications. The university announces its educational offering and informs of its services, the organizational processes or responsible authorities within USS. Prospective students can get this kind of information as hard copy printed versions or on the USS web site. The university highlights the fact that those kind of information must be given annually to the national admission and student selection system.

Experts' evaluation

The process for the collection of information especially quality information is well organized. The collected information is available to members of the USS within the Institutional Management System. An individual analysis of these sources is possible for different emphases such as the different programmes, campuses, semesters. This tool is effectively used for the management and continuous enhancement of the programmes. In addition, there is transparency within the USS concerning the current development of its field in comparison to other educational institutions.

Within this process an impressive amount of data is collected, which cover not only the requested main-data, and the indicators are based on OECD indicators. Out of these 450 indicators USS selected 100 that appeared to be of meaning and out of these the focus is on 10 indicators. Provision of data and analysing them are set up appropriately and enable the management as well as key staff to implement required adjustments. Furthermore, the individual progression of students is monitored with an early warning system.

Students and staff are well involved in the collection of information in terms of evaluations and talks. There is a high level of contentment among the students on their share in the development of the quality assessment. In an even more progressive approach, the discussion between the teaching-staff and the students following an evaluation on its results might be further emphasised.

The staff is permanently part of the processes of enhancement by e.g. means of active feedback session with the programme director, coordination between the campuses or the university wide internal staff meeting (claustro).

All relevant information is available to the students as soon as they are part of USS. There is a well-structured platform which works as an app also and which includes e.g. the content of courses, data of assessments and even the possibility to get information on job opportunities at USS. Thus, the information of students is highly sophisticated. However, critical refection should be given to the fact that major information regarding the programmes is only available to the internal public. Students who are interested to spend a semester at USS as incoming students heavily depend on individual information exchange as information such as Intended Learning Outcomes of courses, their workload and level is not available online. At the same time the panel recognizes that all this information is at hand and available in the internal information system to enrolled students. In light of external transparency the panel strongly recommends to publish this key information to the external public. This particularly includes level and learning outcomes of courses and course extent (workload) (**Finding 6**). Information about the content of programmes as well as working opportunities and support would be helpful for those who are interested in studying at USS (if they are first in their families to

study as well as foreign students). This could include the learning resources available and their costs. Aiming at increasing the visibility and reputation of USS the existing information could be used also externally by being published at the homepage. To reach even larger community selected information (e.g. the course and study programmes) could be published in English as well. This might strengthen the scientific network as well as international relations.

Conclusion:

The criterion is fulfilled. The collection of quality information and the analyses of the information are on a high level. There are various platforms and ways to share information with different stakeholders.

XII. General remarks and conclusion

1. USS should focus not only on the quantitative but also on the qualitative dimension to improve the internal QA processes.

2. Community outreach projects should be integrated into the curricula to strengthen the research-based learning and teaching elements of the curricula.

3. To allow students at USS to easily connect to study programmes abroad and vice versa, the consideration of an ECTS pilot project is highly encouraged.

4. USS should consider adding a defined level of English proficiency in their graduation profiles.

5. An institutionalized feedback on evaluations to external stakeholders would be beneficial to enhance the link to the labour market.

6. To be more visible, the information on learning outcomes, workload and level should be made accessible externally.