Report
of the Expert Panel
on the Reaccreditation
of the University Postgraduate (Doctoral) Programmes:
Biomedicine
and
Health and Environmental Engineering
University of Rijeka Faculty of Medicine

Date of the visit:
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ESF UČINKOVITI LJUDSKI POTENCIJALI

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INTRODUCTION

The Expert Panel appointed by the Agency for Science and Higher Education (ASHE) created this Report on the Re-accreditation of the University Postgraduate (Doctoral) Programmes *Biomedicine* and *Health and Environmental Engineering* on the basis of the Self-Evaluation Report of the programmes, other documentation submitted and a visit to the University of Rijeka Faculty of Medicine.

The Agency for Science and Higher Education (ASHE), a public body listed in EQAR (European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education) and a full member of ENQA (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education), re-accredits higher education institutions (hereinafter: HEIs) and their study programmes in line with the Act on Quality Assurance in Science and Higher Education (Official Gazette 45/09) and the Ordinance on the Content of a Licence and Conditions for Issuing a Licence for Performing Higher Education Activity, Carrying out a Study Programme and Re-Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions (OG 24/10). In this procedure parts of activities of higher education institutions and university postgraduate study programmes are re-accredited.

Expert Panel is appointed by the Agency's Accreditation Council, an independent expert body, to carry out independent evaluation of post-graduate university study programmes.

The Report contains the following elements:

- Short description of the study programme,
- The recommendation of the Expert Panel to the Agency's Accreditation Council,
- Recommendations for institutional improvement and measures to be implemented in the following period (and checked within a follow-up procedure),
- A brief analysis of the institutional advantages and disadvantages,
- A list of good practices found at the institution,
- Conclusions on compliance with the prescribed conditions of delivery of a study programme,
- Conclusions on compliance with the criteria for quality assessment.

Members of the Expert Panel:

1. Prof. Michael Drinnen, Newcastle University/Freeman Hospital, UK
2. Prof. Albert Selva O'Callaghan, Autonomous University of Barcelona/ Hospital Universitari General Vall d'Hebron, Spain
3. Prof. Gernot Riedel, Aberdeen University, UK
4. Arturo Moncada Torres, doctoral student, KU Leuven, Belgium
5. Dr. Senthil.Kaniyappan, postdoctoral researcher, Max Planck Institute of Metabolism Research and DZNE (German Centre for Neurodegenerative Diseases), Germany

6. Dr. Patrycja Kozik, Group Leader, MRC Laboratory of Molecular Biology, Cambridge Biomedical Campus, Cambridge University, UK
7. Prof. Peter Hylands, King's College London, UK
8. Prof. Gonzalo Herradón, University CEU San Pablo, Spain
9. Marcin Ciszewski, doctoral student, Medical University of Łódź, Poland Prof. Gábor Gerber, Semmelweis University, Hungary
10. Prof. Gábor Gerber, Semmelweis University, Hungary
11. Prof. Robert Allaker, Barts and The London School of Medicine and Dentistry, Queen Mary University of London, UK
12. Prof. Pedro Sousa Gomes, University of Porto, Portugal
13. Prof. Daniel W Lambert, University of Sheffield, UK Prof. Zdenek Broukal, Charles University, Czech Republic
14. Nemanja Sarić, doctoral student, King's College London, UK
15. Prof. Suzanne Held, University of Bristol, UK
16. Prof. David Sargan, University of Cambridge, UK
17. Vitalina Drobnytska, doctoral student, University of Greenwich, UK.

The School of Medicine, University of Rijeka was visited by the following Expert Panel members:

- Prof. Daniel W. Lambert, University of Sheffield
- Prof. Gàbor Gerber, Semmelweis University, Budapest
- Prof. Albert Selva O'Callaghan, Autonomous University of Barcelona
- Arturo Moncada Torres, KU Leuven, doctoral candidate

In the analysis of the documentation, site visit and writing of the report the Panel was supported by:

- Davor Jurić, coordinator, ASHE
- Lida Lamza, interpreter at the site visit and translator of the Report, ASHE.

During the visit to the Institution the Expert Panel held meetings with the representatives of the following groups:

- Management
- Study programme coordinators
- Doctoral candidates
- Teachers and supervisors
- External stakeholders
- Alumni,

The Expert Panel also had a tour of the library, laboratory facilities, IT rooms, student register desk and the classrooms.

SHORT DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY PROGRAMMES

Name of the study programme contained in the licence: **Biomedicine**
Name of the study programme contained in the licence: **Health and Environmental Engineering (HEE)**
Institution providing the programmes: **University of Rijeka**
Education provider: **Faculty of Medicine**
Place of delivery: **Rijeka, Braće Branchetta 20**
Scientific area: **Biomedicine and Health**
Scientific fields: **Basic Medical Sciences, Public Health, Clinical Medical Sciences, Dental Medicine**
Learning outcomes of the study programme: **not defined in SER**
Number of doctoral candidates:
Biomedicine – **383**
Health and Environmental Engineering - **31**
Number of teachers:
Biomedicine – **100**
Health and Environmental Engineering - **74**
Number of supervisors:
Biomedicine – **161**
Health and Environmental Engineering - **24**

RECOMMENDATION BY THE EXPERT PANEL TO THE ASHE'S ACCREDITATION COUNCIL

It is the overarching opinion of the Expert Panel that this programme does not meet all the requirements stipulated by the Accreditation Council. While we feel that majority of the relevant laws and bylaws have been met, and although the Panel has identified some pockets of world-class research aiding the PhD programme, a number of critical issues have arisen, which the Faculty of Medicine and the PhD Programme(s) heads should seek to address over an extended period. We are content that changes may not be achievable overnight, require regular internal audits and a careful analysis of (what is noted as limited) finances and how they can creatively ring-fenced in an imaginative and more student friendly manner. A time frame of 3-5 years has been considered as appropriate to implement these changes and the Panel suggests at least one interim Expert Audit to monitor progress, provide support and further advice on the planned changes that are in progress. All improvements to be made should ideally become aligned with the new university wide standards of the Faculty/School of Postgraduate Studies.

Upon the completion of the re-accreditation procedure and the examination of the materials submitted (Self-Evaluation Report etc.), the visit to the higher education institution and interviews with HEI members in accordance with the visit protocol, the Expert Panel renders its opinion in which it recommends to the Accreditation Council of the Agency the following:
Issue a letter of expectation (for both Biomedicine & HEE programmes), for improvements identified to be made within three years.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF THE STUDY PROGRAMME

1. Seek to implement the proposal for a Faculty doctoral school within the next 2 years.
2. Rationalise the taught (part of the) programme to align more closely with the current and future needs of the candidates on the programme, allow more flexibility, and reduce the credit requirements (we suggest from 60 to 40) to allow more time for research and avoid courses being taken simply to accrue credits.
3. Improve the arrangements for monitoring progress of students and assessing performance of mentors. Ensure forms are considered by an appropriate body in the Faculty (ideally a sub-committee of the proposed doctoral school), and processes are instituted to ensure prompt feedback and action on problems identified.
4. Introduce more rigour to the candidate selection process to ensure suitability of candidates and reduce overall student number. This process should include face-to-face interviews.
5. Seek to improve output of clinical students by more rigorously recruiting (as outlined in recommendation 4) and ensuring PhD projects are well aligned to candidates' needs, mentor's capability and available funding (this should be done at the time of recruitment,

not subsequently).

ADVANTAGES OF THE STUDY PROGRAMME

1. Research of a very high standard (world-leading) is being carried out by PhD students in some, specific, research groups.
2. The existence of a number of external, international collaborations adds vibrancy to the PhD programme.
3. The successful acquisition of external (international) funding by some research groups undoubtedly benefits the programme.
4. Some of the laboratory facilities are excellent, again of benefit to the programme.
5. We were impressed by the students' perception of a supportive environment in the Health and Environmental Engineering programme.

DISADVANTAGES OF THE STUDY PROGRAMME

1. Extremely low completion rates.
2. Lack of a doctoral school for any of the faculties (although apparently it is in process of being created).
3. Imbalance of scientific output between clinical and basic branches of the program.

EXAMPLE OF GOOD PRACTICE

1. Close relationship between program coordinators/mentors and students.

COMPLIANCE WITH THE PRESCRIBED CONDITIONS FOR THE DELIVERY OF A STUDY PROGRAMME

Minimal legal conditions:	
1. Higher education institution (HEI) is listed in the Register of Scientific Organisations in the scientific area of the programme, and has a positive reaccreditation decision on performing higher education activities and scientific activity.	YES
2. HEI delivers programmes in the two cycles leading to the doctoral programme, i.e., first two cycles in the same area and field/fields (for interdisciplinary programmes), and employs a sufficient number of teachers as defined by Article 6 of the Ordinance on the Content of a Licence and Conditions for Issuing a Licence for Performing Higher Education Activity, Carrying out a Study Programme and Re-Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions (OG 24/10).	YES
HEI employs a sufficient number of researchers, as defined by Article 7 of the Ordinance on Conditions for Issuing Licence for Scientific Activity, Conditions for Re-Accreditation of Scientific Organisations and Content of Licence (OG 83/2010).	YES
3. At least 50% of teaching as expressed in norm-hours is delivered by teachers employed at the HEI (full-time, elected into scientific-teaching titles).	YES
4. Student: teacher ratio at the HEI is below 30:1.	YES
5. HEI ensures that doctoral theses are public.	YES
6. HEI launches the procedure of revoking the academic title if it is determined that it has been attained contrary to the conditions stipulated for its attainment, by severe violation of the studying rules or based on a doctoral thesis (dissertation) that has proved to be a plagiarism or a forgery according to provisions of the statute or other enactments.	YES
Additional/ recommended conditions of the ASHE Accreditation Council for passing a positive opinion	
1. HEI (or HEIs in joint programmes) has at least five teachers appointed to scientific-teaching titles in the field, or fields relevant for the programme involved in its delivery.	YES
2. In the most recent reaccreditation, HEI had the standard Scientific and Professional Activity marked as at least "partly implemented" (3).	YES
3. The doctoral programme is aligned with the HEI's research strategy.	YES
4. The candidate : supervisor ratio at the HEI is not above 3:1.	YES*
*Comment: Some supervisors have 10 or more PhD students (one has 16 PhD students and no projects), many have more than 5.	
5. All supervisors meet the following conditions: a) PhD, elected into a scientific title, holds a scientific or a scientific-teaching position and/or has at least two years of postdoctoral research experience; b) active researcher in the scientific area of the programme, as evidenced by	YES*

publications, participation in scientific conferences and/or projects in the past five years (table 2, Supervisors and candidates); c) confirms feasibility of the draft research plan upon admission of the candidate (or submission of the proposal); d) ensures the conditions (and funding) necessary to implement the candidate's research (in line with the draft research plan) as a research project leader, co-leader, participant, collaborator or in other ways; e) trained for the role before assuming it (through workshops, co-supervisions etc.); f) received a positive opinion of the HEI on previous supervisory work.	
*Comment: Some supervisors have no publications in last 5 years; many have no research project activity in past 5 years. In the future supervisors with no research activity should not be appointed.	
6. All teachers meet the following conditions: a) holds a scientific or a scientific-teaching position; b) active researcher, recognized in the field relevant for the course (table 1, Teachers).	YES*
*Comment: Some teachers have no research publications in last 5 years (see comment under point 5).	
7. The supervisor normally does not participate in the assessment committees.	NO
8. The programme ensures that all candidates spend at least three years doing independent research (while studying, individually, within or outside courses), which includes writing the thesis, publishing, participating in international conferences, field work, attending courses relevant for research etc.	YES
9. For joint programmes and doctoral schools (at the university level): cooperation between HEIs is based on adequate contracts; joint programmes are delivered in cooperation with accredited HEIs; the HEI delivers the programme within a doctoral school in line with the regulations and ensures good coordination aimed at supporting the candidates; at least 80% of courses are delivered by teachers employed at HEIs within the consortium.	N/A

QUALITY ASSESSMENT

1. RESOURCES: TEACHERS, SUPERVISORS, RESEARCH CAPACITIES AND INFRASTRUCTURE	Quality assessment ("high level of quality" or "improvements are necessary") and the explanation of the Expert Panel
1.1. HEI is distinguished by its scientific/ artistic achievements in the discipline in which the doctoral study programme is delivered.	**High level of quality** The study programme is distinguished by the high quality of research being undertaken. Some of the research groups are truly world-class and have world class facilities and an excellent publication record. The Panel had some concerns about how even the quality of research is across the two programmes, with excellence clearly existing in pockets, but not available to students outside those research groups.
1.2. The number and workload of teachers involved in the study programme ensure quality doctoral education.	**High level of quality** The number of teachers involved in the programme is appropriate.
1.3. The teachers are highly qualified researchers who actively engage with the topics they teach, providing a quality doctoral programme.	**Biomedicine - Improvements are necessary** Not all of the teachers are actively engaged in research, as evidenced by research publications within the last 5 years. **HEE - High level of quality** No concerns.
1.4. The number of supervisors and their qualifications provide for quality in producing the doctoral thesis.	**Improvements are necessary (Biomedicine & HEE)** The mentor-doctoral student ratio is 1:2.4 which is not bad, but we recommend to increase to 2:1 (2 mentors for each student) as other centres of excellence have.
1.5. The HEI has developed methods of assessing the qualifications and competencies of teachers and supervisors.	**Improvements are necessary (Biomedicine & HEE)** **The Panel recommends the introduction of a robust feedback system to** improve the arrangements for assessing performance of mentors & teachers. This feedback process should include a mechanism to ensure forms are considered by an appropriate body in the Faculty (ideally a sub-committee of the proposed doctoral school), and processes are instituted to ensure prompt feedback and action on problems identified.
1.6. The HEI has access to high-quality resources for research, as required by the programme discipline.	**High level of quality (Biomedicine & HEE)** Students in both Biomedicine and HEE have access, albeit not uniformly, to excellent research resources appropriate to the discipline.
2. INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE OF THE PROGRAMME	

2.1. The HEI has established and accepted effective procedures for proposing, approving and delivering doctoral education. The procedures include identification of scientific/ artistic, cultural, social and economic needs.	**Improvements are necessary (Biomedicine & HEE)** The Panel recommends the introduction of more rigour to the candidate selection process to ensure suitability of candidates and reduce overall student number. This process should include face-to-face interviews.
2.2. The programme is aligned with the HEI research mission and vision, i.e. research strategy.	**High level of quality** Both programmes are well aligned with the research strategy of the HEI.
2.3. The HEI systematically monitors the success of the programmes through periodic reviews, and implements improvements.	**High level of quality** The HEI has previously sought an external review and has generated proposals for a doctoral school at least in part based on the recommendations made in this report. One major recommendation the Panel makes is for this plan to be implemented at the earliest possible opportunity.
2.4. HEI continuously monitors supervisors' performance and has mechanisms for evaluating supervisors, and, if necessary, changing them and mediating between the supervisors and the candidates.	**Improvements are necessary (Biomedicine & HEE)** The Panel recommends improvements to the arrangements for monitoring progress of students and assessing performance of mentors. Ensure feedback forms are considered by an appropriate body in the Faculty (ideally a sub-committee of the proposed doctoral school), and processes are instituted to ensure prompt feedback and action on problems identified.
2.5. HEI assures academic integrity and freedom.	**High level of quality (Biomedicine & HEE)** The Panel was satisfied with the arrangements in place.
2.6. The process of developing and defending the thesis proposal is transparent and objective, and includes a public presentation.	**High level of quality (Biomedicine & HEE)** A robust and transparent process is in place for both programmes with regards to defending the thesis proposal.
2.7. Thesis assessment results from a scientifically sound assessment of an independent committee.	**High level of quality (Biomedicine & HEE)** The Panel were satisfied with the arrangements in place for thesis assessment, which is in line with international standards.
2.8. The HEI publishes all necessary information on the study programme, admissions, delivery and conditions for progression and completion, in accessible outlets and media.	**High level of quality (Biomedicine & HEE)** The Panel was satisfied with the arrangements in place at the HEI for publishing information regarding the programmes.
2.9. Funds collected for the needs of doctoral education are distributed	**High level of quality (Biomedicine & HEE)** The Panel finds this criterion compliant.

transparently and in a way that ensures sustainability and further development of doctoral education (ensures that candidates' research is carried out and supported, so that doctoral education can be completed successfully).	
2.10. Tuition fees are determined on the basis of transparent criteria (and real costs of studying).	**High level of quality** The tuition fee and costs of studying are transparent for both programmes.
3. **SUPPORT TO DOCTORAL CANDIDATES AND THEIR PROGRESSION**	
3.1. The HEI establishes admission quotas with respect to its teaching and supervision capacities.	**Biomedicine - Improvements are necessary** Both management as well as the head of the program recognize that the number of admitted students to the program is too high based on their mentoring capacities. Furthermore, although on paper the mentor : student ratio (1:3) is kept in most cases (reported 80%), in practice this is not effective. Interviews with the students revealed that in some cases, mentors are appointed as such only for the paperwork and are not actively involved in student supervision. This role is taken by an unofficial mentor. The latter has, then, more than the recommended number of students under his/her supervision. **Health and Environmental Engineering – High level of quality** The number of admitted students in the program remains small and thus it is capable of keeping the mentor : student ratio of 1:3.
3.2. The HEI establishes admission quotas on the basis of scientific/ artistic, cultural, social, economic and other needs.	**Biomedicine - Improvements are necessary** Although there is still a modest interest in BM PhDs for research and innovation, the number of admitted students is still quite large. This is reflected in the fact that the majority of the graduate PhDs have a job in the clinical field (which was confirmed with interviews with the alumni). **Health and Environmental Engineering – High level of quality** Currently, the need for HEE PhD is low and thus admission is limited (together with the mentoring capabilities of the program - see 3.1). However, this is expected to change in the coming years,

	since there is a considerable expected growth of the research and development fields (see Development Strategy of the University of Rijeka). As this sector increases its size, so will the number of admitted candidates (and thus, theoretically, of formed PhDs).
3.3. The HEI establishes the admission quotas taking into account the funding available to the candidates, that is, on the basis of the absorption potentials of research projects or other sources of funding.	**Biomedicine - Improvements are necessary** Admission quotas do not take into account available funding. In many cases, funding is insufficient. In some cases, the clinics partially support their students (usually with ⅓ of the total needed amount). This has to be complemented with additional sources. In very few projects, the mentor provides the funding (which is project specific). In most cases, this leads to dropouts (which is reflected in poor completion rates). **Health and Environmental Engineering - Improvements are necessary** Idem.
3.4. The HEI should pay attention to the number of candidates admitted as to provide each with an advisor (a potential supervisor). From the point of admission to the end of doctoral education, efforts are invested so that each candidate has a sustainable research plan and is able to complete doctoral research successfully.	**Biomedicine - Improvements are necessary** The HEI assigns a mentor to each student from beginning to end of their studies. During the first year, the appointed mentor is temporary ("study advisor"). If the students decides to stay on that line of research, the mentor is then assigned for the rest of the project. However, there is very little contact between some mentors and their students before topic defence and during the first year. This gives the impression that some mentors are not so involved in their role while they are "study advisors". This leads to a heterogeneous level of the students after their first year, since some students are guided towards making progress on their projects while others are encouraged to focus on the clinics. It was reported by students and alumni that this diminishes the quality of the PhD project in the long term. See 3.10. **Health and Environmental Engineering – High level of quality** The programme assigns a mentor to each student from beginning to end of their studies. During the first year, the appointed mentor is temporary ("study advisor"). If the students decides to stay on that line of research, the mentor is then assigned for the rest of the project.

	Still, the Panel got the impression that HEE programme cherishes a close, positive relationship between mentors and students from the beginning of the students' project. Mentors try to keep their students focused in their projects. For improvements, see 3.10.
3.5. The HEI ensures that interested, talented and highly motivated candidates are recruited internationally.	**Biomedicine - Improvements are necessary** Ever since Croatia's adhesion to the EU, recruitment has been extended greatly for international students. However, it was pointed out that the use of English in the program restricted the teaching and supervising capacities of some mentors (e.g., very little support is provided if a student decides to write his/her thesis in English). Mentors should really make an effort to use English if they wish to attract candidates from a broader pool. **Health and Environmental Engineering - Improvements are necessary** Idem.
3.6. The selection process is public and based on choosing the best applicants.	**Biomedicine - Improvements are necessary** Calls are open and selection is done based on a point base, depending on different criteria such as GPA, previous experience, academic background, publication track, participation in national and international conferences, etc. However, an interview is not carried out as part of the admission process due to the high number of applicants. This already is a barrier between the mentor and the student, which could be one of the causes of the disconnection between them especially during the first year (see 3.4). We strongly recommend including an interview, as well as research proposal, as part of the recruiting process of candidates. **Health and Environmental Engineering – High level of quality** Calls are open and selection is done based on a point base, depending on different criteria such as GPA, previous experience, academic background, publication track, participation in national and international conferences, etc. Interviews are carried out as part of the admission process, which improves the chances of making an appropriate mentor/student match.
3.7. The HEI ensures that the selection procedure is transparent and in line	**High level of quality** A list of accepted candidates is made public. Rejected

with published criteria, and that there is a transparent complaints procedure.	candidates can get feedback on their application (including comments and guidelines on possible improvements for further applications), but only if requested (on time).
3.8. There is a possibility to recognize applicants' and candidates' prior learning.	**High level of quality** This we found compliant, according to University regulations.
3.9. Candidates' rights and obligations are defined in relevant HEI regulations and a contract on studying that provides for a high level of supervisory and institutional support to the candidates.	**Biomedicine - High level of quality** The HEI provides the mentors and the students with all the relevant documentation describing their rights and obligations. However, students do not give this proper importance and see it only as part of the paperwork for their enrolment to the program. The student and the mentor should go through these documents during their first weeks (this could also help reinforcing the mentor-student relationship during the first year). **Health and Environmental Engineering - High level of quality** The HEI provides the mentors and the students with all the relevant documentation describing their rights and obligations.
3.10. There are institutional support mechanisms for candidates' successful progression.	**Biomedicine - Improvements are necessary** There is no formal follow-up mechanism to track the students' progress. There has been an initiative to create a Doctoral School for the Faculty. However, it has been delayed by university administration. It is expected to start functioning in 2017. This Doctoral School should present a plan on how to track students' progress through their studies with concrete milestones and contingency plans in case these are not achieved. Progress tracking is left mostly to the mentor. Although the mentor is indeed the person more familiarized with the students' work, this limits the available resources that a student can use to improve, correct, or evaluate its progress. The HEI do supports its students for the publication of their work (i.e., journal papers) and attendance to international conferences. **Health and Environmental Engineering - Improvements are necessary** Idem.
4. **PROGRAMME AND OUTCOMES**	

4.1. The content and quality of the doctoral programme are aligned with internationally recognized standards.	**High level of quality** The programme produces high quality work of international standard. Opportunities for interdisciplinarity exist and some world class facilities are available, although this is concentrated in specific research groups.
4.2. Programme learning outcomes, as well as the learning outcomes of modules and subject units, are aligned with the level 8.2 of the CroQF. They clearly describe the competencies the candidates will develop during the doctoral programme, including the ethical requirements of doing research.	**Improvements are necessary** The learning outcomes should be clearly defined for the programme and in each course.
4.3. Programme learning outcomes are logically and clearly connected with teaching contents, as well as the contents included in supervision and research.	**Improvements are necessary** Students taking courses just for the sake of credits should be avoided by reducing obligatory course credit requirements.
4.4. The doctoral programme ensures the achievement of learning outcomes and competencies aligned with the level 8.2 of the CroQF.	**High level of quality** We found this compliant. However, theses and publications are located on a large scale from a high international standard to simply acceptable.
4.5. Teaching methods (and ECTS, if applicable) are appropriate for level 8.2 of the CroQF and assure achievement of clearly defined learning outcomes.	**High level of quality** The teaching methods are appropriate for both programmes.
4.6. The programme enables acquisition of general (transferable) skills.	**High level of quality** Sufficiently wide range of courses are offered to acquire general skills.
4.7. Teaching content is adapted to the needs of current and future research and candidates' training (individual course plans, generic skills etc.).	**Improvements are necessary** See 4.3.
4.8. The programme ensures quality through international connections and teacher and candidate mobility.	**High level of quality** Teacher and candidate mobility is encouraged and supported by distributing the necessary information and covering travel expenses. There is a mandatory part in the doctoral program to acquire 30 ECTS in other research organisation, which can be

	substituted by international collaboration.

*** NOTE: RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE EXPERT PANEL TO THE ASHE'S ACCREDITATION COUNCIL AND QUALITY LABEL**

The role of the Expert Panel in the re-accreditation of doctoral study programmes is manifold. The Expert Panel or part of the Expert Panel visiting a higher education institution drafts a report on the basis of a self-evaluation report, the accompanying relevant documentation, and a site visit to HEI. The draft report is adopted by all members of the Cluster Expert Panel, while the president of the Cluster Expert Panel is responsible for coordinating the assessment levels.

The report contains an assessment on whether a doctoral study programme delivered at a higher education institution complies with the prescribed laws and by-laws, as well as any additional/recommended requirements defined by the Agency's Accreditation Council, and whether a higher education institution can obtain a positive, i.e. satisfactory quality assessment according to the criteria set out in this document. Moreover, the Expert Panel must make recommendations for quality improvement.
Based on the assessment of all these elements, the Expert Panel may propose to the Accreditation Council of the Agency to issue either a confirmation on compliance, a letter of expectation for the period up to three (3) years in which period the higher education institution should eliminate the identified deficiencies, or to deny the license.

If the Expert Panel has assessed that a doctoral study programme delivered by a higher education institution does not meet legal and other requirements or that the quality of a study programme is not ensured (i.e. that HEI does not meet additional requirements or recommendations made by the Accreditation Council, or has a very poor quality assessment), they should propose to the Accreditation Council to deny the license.

If the Expert Panel considers that the relevant laws and bylaws have been met by a higher education institution, but that certain elements mentioned above do not meet the quality requirements, while they consider that the identified shortcomings can be corrected within a time frame of three years, they should issue a letter of expectation.

If the Expert Panel considers that all legal and additional/recommended requirements have been met and the quality assessment is satisfactory, i.e. that a study programme fulfils the learning outcomes appropriately defined for that level and scientific area, they may propose the issuance of a certificate and have a HEI commit to quality improvement and reporting to the Agency during the follow-up period.

Finally, if the Expert Panel has, in accordance with the criteria mentioned above, proposed issuing the certificate of compliance and assessed that, in addition to meeting the minimum quality requirements – i.e. the qualification framework level - for a study programme, the programme should be identified as a doctoral programme of a 'high level of quality', the Expert Panel may propose to the Agency's Accreditation Council that such a doctoral study programme be awarded the 'high quality label'. Thus the Agency, with the consent of the Accreditation Council, grants a higher education institution the right to use the label for their academic and promotional purposes.

The 'high quality label' cannot be proposed or awarded to a programme or a higher education institution that does not comply with the requirements laid down by the laws and bylaws mentioned in this document, and any additional requirements recommended by the Accreditation Council. Moreover, the quality assessment awarded to a study programme should reflect a high level of quality inasmuch that at least half of the sub-criteria in each of the quality assessment criteria are assessed as being of high quality. The Accreditation Council of the Agency issues a final opinion on the label awarded. The content and form of the quality labels shall be prescribed by the Agency in a relevant general act.

The Accreditation Council of the Agency discusses the final report with all recommendations and suggestions, and issues their opinion on the report. Based on a prior opinion of the Accreditation Council, the Agency issues an Accreditation Recommendation to the minister responsible for science and higher education, and upon receipt of the minister's final decision on the outcome of the procedure, awards the 'high quality label" to a higher education institution.