Report
of the Expert Panel
on the Re-accreditation
of the University Postgraduate (Doctoral) Programme
Media and Communication
University North

Date of the visit:
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CONTENTS

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) Programme Media and Communication, North University on the basis of the Self-Evaluation Report of the Programme, other documentation submitted and a visit to the North University.

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 programme.

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:

- Doc. dr. sc. Dejan Jontes, Fakulteta za družbene vede Sveučilišta u Ljubljani, Slovenia
- Dr. sc. Monika Metykova, University of Sussex, United Kingdom
- Prof. dr. sc. Robert Wallace Vaagan, Oslo Metropolitan University, Norway (chair)
- Prof. dr. sc. Sofia Gaio, University Fernando Pessoa, Portugal
- Doctoral candidate Laura Marciano, Universita Della Svizzera Italiana, Switzerland

The higher education institution was visited by the following Expert Panel members:
- Doc. dr. sc. Dejan Jontes, Fakulteta za družbene vede Sveučilišta u Ljubljani, Slovenia
- Dr. sc. Monika Metykova, University of Sussex, United Kingdom
- Prof. dr. sc. Robert Wallace Vaagan, Oslo Metropolitan University, Norway (chair)
- Prof. dr. sc. Sofia Gaio, University Fernando Pessoa, Portugal
- Doctoral candidate Laura Marciano, Universita Della Svizzera Italiana, Switzerland

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

- Marina Grubišić, coordinator, ASHE
- Ivana Rončević and Lida Lamza, interpreter at the site visit, ASHE
- Marija Omazić, translator of the Report.

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

- Leadership and management
- Study programme coordinators
- Doctoral candidates
- Teachers and supervisors
- External stakeholders

The Expert Panel had a tour of University Center Koprivnica and University Center Varaždin and also had a tour of the library and media center.

SHORT DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY PROGRAMME

Name of the study programme contained in the licence: Postgraduate doctoral study programme "Media and Communication"

Institution providing the programme: University North

Institution delivering the programme: University North, Department for Media and Communication

Scientific area and field: Social sciences; Information and communication sciences

Place of delivery: University Center Koprivnica

Number of doctoral candidates (all): 32

Number of HEI funded doctoral candidates (assistants employed at that or another HEI or institute): 5

Number of self-funded doctoral candidates and employer-funded doctoral candidates: 24

Number of inactive doctoral candidates (did not enrol in a higher year of study but still have the right to study): During the writing the Self-Analysis report, classes and other activities are being delivered in the first year for the first generation of the doctoral study programme Media and Communication, so at this stage we cannot talk about inactive PhD students.

Number of teachers at the doctoral study programme (state the ones employed by the HEI as well as the external associates): 35

Number of supervisors (state the officially appointed supervisors, but also separately state other types of supervision, such as supervisor - advisor etc., as well as the number of doctoral candidates they supervise): Since the study programme is in its first year of delivery, and it is defined that students are assigned a mentor after the first year, at this time, no supervisors have been appointed to the PhD students yet. All PhD students were assigned a study advisor at enrolment.

Number of doctoral candidates to whom a supervisor was officially appointed: Since the study programme is in its first year of delivery, and it is defined that students are assigned a mentor after the first year, at this time, no supervisors have been appointed to the PhD students yet.

Learning outcomes of the programme:

LO 1: the ability to obtain information by critical evaluation (literature review, critical analysis

of the texts, detection bias, interview skills)

LO 2: the ability to design and implement research project (drafting research proposals,

organization of research processes, risk detection, budget planning, and research team

management)

LO 3: implementation of statistical packages for data analysis (interpretation base on analysis of

qualitative and quantitative data)

LO 4: the ability to implement appropriate research methods in scientific research

LO 5: to design and implement new theoretical paradigms based on original research in the field

LO 6: demonstrate skills in academic writing and communication (mastery in speaking and

listening skills, ability to promote achievements in the field to non-professional communities)

LO 7: respects ethical and professional principles in scientific research and professional

activities

LO 8: demonstrates awareness of social responsibility for the success of the research, the social

usefulness of the research results and the possible social consequences

LO 9: organizational competencies for scientific and professional efficiency

LO 10: organizational competencies for time management and career-building

Table with the learning outcomes: (for example the table with the learning outcomes of the programme and courses/other ways of achieving those learning outcomes, such as independent research work):

Modules	Courses	Learning outcomes									
		LO 1	LO 2	LO 3	LO 4	LO 5	LO 6	LO 7	LO 8	LO 9	LO 10
Methodology	Obligatory courses	x	x	x	x	x					
	Elective courses	x	x	x	x				x		
Theory	Obligatory courses	x	x		x	x			x		
	Elective courses	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		
Research activity	Research seminars	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		
Scientific colloquium	Transferable skills workshops						x			x	x
	Discussion groups						x				
	Doctoral conference	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Research and other activities	Published works	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		
	Mentorship or project team collaboration	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
	Mobility experience on international university				x		x	x	x	x	x
	Thesis writing and thesis defense	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x

Structure of programme

Short doctoral study programme outline by years (ECTS and other conditions required for advancement through the study):

Minimal conditions for enrolling into the second year of the study are accumulation of at least 23
ECTS credits:
• student must accumulate at least 8 ECTS in the module Methodology
• student must accumulate at least 5 ECTS in the module Theory
• student must accumulate at least 10 ECTS in the module Research seminar.

Minimal conditions for enrolling into the third year of the study are the accumulation of at least
43 ECTS credits, or 20 new ECTS credits:
• student must accumulate at least 5 ECTS in the module Methodology
• student must accumulate at least 5 ECTS in the module Theory
• student must accumulate at least 5 ECTS in the module Research seminar
• student must accumulate at least 5 ECTS through research and other activities.

In order to submit the PhD topic, the doctoral candidate must have completed all obligatory courses from the modules Theory and Methodology, and he/she has to collect at least 60 ECTS credits. The PhD candidate prepares the draft of doctoral research with his/her supervisor.
Workflow of the study programme is described in the following document: https://medcom.unin.hr/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Course-of-the-doctoral-study-at-the-University-North.pdf

Conditions for completing the study:
The doctoral candidate can submit and defend the PhD dissertation if he or she has completed all obligations required by the study. In order to complete the study, the students are required to:
• accumulate credits in the module Theory: 15 ECTS
• accumulate credits in the module Methodology: 13 ECTS
• accumulate credits in the module Research: 20 ECTS
• create a personal development plan (positively evaluated and accepted): 5 ECTS
• work with the supervisor on research topics and projects: 20 ECTS
• publish a scientific paper: 10 ECTS
• participate in discussion groups: 5 ECTS
• develop and publicly defend the PhD dissertation topic: 20 ECTS
• stay at a foreign university: 5 ECTS
• participate in the work of the doctoral conference: 4 ECTS
• participate in the workshops aimed to improve transferable skills: 3 ECTS
• accumulate other ECTS credits at their own choice: 5 ECTS

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

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 the period up to one (1) year in which period the higher education institution should make the necessary improvements.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF THE STUDY PROGRAMME

1. Improve the alignment of the study programme with the research strategy developed specifically for doctoral programmes 2019-2023 (The Scientific Research Strategy of the Postgraduate University Doctoral Study in Media and Communication of University North for the period 2019 - 2023) and with the University's overall research strategy Scientific Research Strategy of the University of North for the period 2015 – 2020 (the current one which will expire in 2020). This requires greater clarification of key performance indicators and the operationalization of the term internationalization for the University's purposes (internationalization is a broad term and depending on the University's decision, the concrete measures can include courses in English, co-supervision with foreign experts, publishing in English, international conference attendance etc.).
2. Improve the curriculum, particularly in relation to methodology. Rather than introducing additional methodological training ad hoc, a re-structuring of the curriculum would be desirable. The study programme does not offer any courses in English, and lack of involvement of international professors is acknowledged as a weakness in the SWOT analysis in the research strategy 2019-2023 (see details below).
3. Invest in staff development, particularly in facilitating international publishing and attendance at international conferences, these represent ways of improving the quality of the study programme. This also applies to increased efforts to internationalize the programme and improve integration of the humanities.

ADVANTAGES OF THE STUDY PROGRAMME
1. The study programme is embedded in close co-operation with a variety of stakeholders from the local public and private sectors and the academic staff is dedicated and motivated
2. The communication and overall culture that characterize the study programme are inclusive and supportive.
3. The availability of training for mentors and the support that they can avail of.
4. The study programme is only in its first year (few supervisors have so far been appointed and no PhD dissertations are yet available) so this offers flexibility for necessary changes.

DISADVANTAGES OF THE STUDY PROGRAMME

1. The study programme is characterized as interdisciplinary, yet in some parts (e.g. the curriculum, provision of methodological training) lacks synthesis and internal coherence (e.g. integrating the humanities, according to information provided by the management board at the site visit) and therefore appears to be more multidisciplinary than interdisciplinary.
2. There is a high proportion of self-financing students in Year 1 (24 out of the total of 32 enrolled students).
3. The research strategy specified in Scientific Research Strategy of the University of North for the period 2015 – 2020 expires in 2020 and it has certain deficiencies - in this respect see Recommendations.
4. There is space for improvement in terms of the quality of staff's scientific work.
5. Not clear that all courses are PhD level according to learning outcomes for individual courses.
6. Weak internationalization of the programme as there are no courses in English and only 2 professors from the UK have been recruited, according to information provided by the management board at the site visit and the limitations were explained as "internationalization at home".
7. Lack of interaction with key international organizations such as the International Communication Association (ICA), The European Communication and Research Association (ECREA) and the International Association for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR)

EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE

1. The ratios of mentors/advisors and students are more than satisfactory.
2. Close co-operation with a variety of local public and private stakeholders

As per 3 December 2019, the PhD programme only has PhD candidates in the 1st year of the programme and there are no doctoral dissertations available. Based on The Scientific Research Strategy of the Postgraduate University Doctoral Study in Media and Communication of University North for the period 2019-2023 (hereafter referred to as HEI research strategy 2019-23) meetings with staff and visits to the Varaždin and Koprivnica campuses, the expert panel has concluded that sufficient resources (teachers, supervisors, research capacities and infrastructure) seem to be in place for the programme to continue enrolment and implement necessary improvements within 1 year.

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

Minimal legal conditions:	YES/NO notes
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
3. 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
4. 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
5. Student: teacher ratio at the HEI is below 30:1.	YES
6. HEI ensures that doctoral theses are public.	YES
7. 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	**YES/NO notes**
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.	No (See 4.1)
4. The candidate : supervisor ratio at the HEI is not above 3:1.	YES
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;	The PhD programme is only in its first

b) active researcher in the scientific area of the programme, as evidenced by 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.	year and the study advisors fulfil this criterion. However, the expert panel is not in a position to comment on supervisors[1].
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
7. The supervisor normally does not participate in the assessment committees.	N/A The study programme is only in its first year, so the expert panel was not able to check minutes of assessment committees and confirm their standing. HEI Regulations on Postgraduate University Studies state (p.8) that the supervisor cannot be member of the Committee for Evaluation of the Doctoral Dissertation.
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	YES

[1] The term *supervisor* is used in the HEI Regulations on the Postgraduate University Studies. But elsewhere the term *mentor* is used. A unified terminology is desirable.

relevant for research etc.	
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

	Quality assessment ("high level of quality" or "improvements are necessary") and the explanation of the Expert Panel
1. RESOURCES: TEACHERS, SUPERVISORS, RESEARCH CAPACITIES AND INFRASTRUCTURE	
1.1. HEI is distinguished by its scientific/ artistic achievements in the discipline in which the doctoral study programme is delivered.	**IMPROVEMENTS ARE NECESSARY** HEI research strategy 2019-23 notes in its SWOT analysis 4 weaknesses (insufficient number of approved scientific projects, more part-time PhD candidates than full-time, absence of own journal of information and communication and insufficient involvement of international professors and professionals in implementing the teaching process on the PhD programme) as well as 4 threats (limited funding, reliance on student financing, limited employment possibilities for PhDs and insufficient awareness in society of the importance of information and communication). These weaknesses and threats need to be addressed. For instance, the expert panel visited the printing press at Varaždin campus and saw the journal *Technical Journal/Tehnicki Glasnik*, so launching a scientific journal should be fully possible within a 1-year timespan.
1.2. The number and workload of teachers involved in the study programme ensure quality doctoral education.	**HIGH LEVEL OF QUALITY** The expert panel finds that the minimum criterion is fulfilled (at least 50% of the programme is delivered by its own faculty, with appropriate attention given to their total teaching workload).
1.3. The teachers are highly qualified researchers who actively engage with the topics they teach, providing a quality doctoral programme.	**IMPROVEMENTS ARE NECESSARY** International scientific publishing must be intensified and improved.
1.4. The number of supervisors and their qualifications provide for quality in producing the doctoral thesis.	**IMPROVEMENTS ARE NECESSARY** The expert panel finds that the programme employs a sufficient number of supervisors (candidate : supervisor*

	ratio below 3 : 1), several with scientific publications relevant for the programme area and field. However, as noted above, supervisor involvement in actively leading and/or participating in international research projects is limited.
1.5. The HEI has developed methods of assessing the qualifications and competencies of teachers and supervisors.	**IMPROVEMENTS ARE NECESSARY** Some procedures and documents seem to be in place, but the expert panel was e.g. not shown the report of the Quality Assurance Committee, and did not meet representatives of this committee.
1.6. The HEI has access to high-quality resources for research, as required by the programme discipline.	**HIGH LEVEL OF QUALITY** The expert panel finds that PhD candidates are provided with sufficiently modern equipment and laboratories, including library resources, access to relevant databases and also an incubator of venture industries.
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.	**HIGH LEVEL OF QUALITY** The programme is in line with regulations and is aligned with formal HEI procedures for proposing, approving and implementing education at the doctoral level. In the programme design and development process, HEI showed great attention to the different regional stakeholder needs, as well as to learning outcomes from previous experiences of same nature.
2.2. The programme is aligned with the HEI research mission and vision, i.e. research strategy.	**IMPROVEMENTS ARE NECESSARY** There is a clear vision of HEI's role in regional economic development and the programme is aligned with HEI's vision and mission. However, the HEI research strategy 2019-23 should be more clear and detailed on how general strategic goals, namely strategic goal 4 (teaching transferable skills and cooperation with economy) relate with scientific research areas and topics of the programme.

2.3.	The HEI systematically monitors the success of the programmes through periodic reviews, and implements improvements.	**IMPROVEMENTS ARE NECESSARY** HEI applies surveys in order to monitor quality and success of the teaching process and student satisfaction. Through doctoral candidates and advisors or mentors' annual reports, HEI monitors productivity and level of satisfaction. HEI shows adequate processing of information and changes implemented on the basis of these procedures, like adjustments of courses based on the student feedback in the first year experience of the PhD programme. E.g. HEI promptly offered students extra workshops in methodology when this was asked for. HEI should implement more systematic and formal procedures for collecting and analysing feedback from other stakeholders such as employers and partners, as well as more systematic mechanisms for periodical international and national programme reviews. Mechanisms for formally monitoring these dimensions should be included in the 'Procedure for Internal Quality Assurance of the Doctoral Programme Media and Communication' and followed up by the Quality Assurance Committee.
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.	**N/A** In this early phase of the doctoral study programme (first year of study), monitoring of supervision performance cannot be verified. Nevertheless, HEI shows formal procedures for future evaluation as well as procedures for dealing with conflict situations and procedures for mentor change.
2.5.	HEI assures academic integrity and freedom.	**HIGH LEVEL OF QUALITY** HEI has procedures that assure academic integrity through the University Committee and Code of Ethics. HEI has in place software to detect plagiarism and also organizes workshops for promoting the ethics of scientific and research work. HEI procedures and documentation seem to reinforce the principle of freedom of scientific research and opinions.
2.6.	The process of developing and defending the thesis proposal is	**This point is only partly applicable and in those respects it is high level of quality**

	transparent and objective, and includes a public presentation.	In this early phase of the doctoral study programme (first year of study) it is not possible to verify dissertation proposals. Still, it is possible to verify an adequate process design for this purpose in the HEI Regulations on Postgraduate Doctoral Study Programs, as well as evidence of adequate forms, templates, protocols and guidelines regarding dissertation proposal processes of assessment.
2.7.	Thesis assessment results from a scientifically sound assessment of an independent committee.	**N/A** In this early phase of the doctoral study programme (first year of study) it is not possible to verify dissertation assessments. Records regarding the defense of doctoral dissertations could not be attached to the self-analysis report. Still, it was possible to verify the procedures for future assessments in which HEI shows attention to the independence of the assessment committee, namely by not allowing the supervisor be part of it (cf. point 7 above under Additional/recommended conditions of the ASHE Accreditation Council for passing a positive opinion) and ensuring that at least one of the members of the assessment committee must be outside the staff of the university.
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** HEI shows attention to publication of relevant information. Study programme, evaluation criteria for applicants, internal quality procedures, and procedures regarding progression and completion are all available online. Also, HEI promotes regular meetings with PhD students.

2.9. Funds collected for the needs of doctoral education are distributed 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).	**IMPROVEMENTS ARE NECESSARY** Distribution of funds is managed in accordance with the Ordinance on Financial Management of the University. HEI's Senate passed a decision in 2019 to increase grants for supervisors. Students and scientific research reflect HEI's investment in the programme development. Still, taking into consideration that no funds for the doctoral study programme are obtained from the Ministry of Science and Education and that the limited funding and the excessive reliance of the programme on student financing are threats identified by HEI in the SWOT analysis, HEI should reinforce strategy to solve economic challenges. This would facilitate funding of the programme and the candidates in a sustainable and long-term perspective. Applications to calls for co-funding programmes and the co-funding of students through partnerships with economic stakeholders should increase.
2.10. Tuition fees are determined on the basis of transparent criteria (and real costs of studying).	**IMPROVEMENTS ARE NECESSARY** Tuition fees are determined by the University Senate. HEI should provide more evidence and detailed information on how the cost of the doctoral study programme is taken into account for the establishment of tuition fees, as well as how the determination of tuition fees is guided by the need for the sustainability of the study program and the need of achieving the teaching and students standards.
3. SUPPORT TO DOCTORAL CANDIDATES AND THEIR PROGRESSION	
3.1. The HEI establishes admission quotas with respect to its teaching and supervision capacities.	**HIGH LEVEL OF QUALITY** The PhD programme's admissions policy takes into account the number of available supervisors and their teaching workload. At the moment there are more potential supervisors available than students currently enrolled. The documents submitted and the further information gained in meetings with stakeholders confirmed that the potential supervisors' competencies are in line with the research interests of enrolled PhD students. There are limitations on the number of advisees/supervisees, advisors can have up to 5 students and mentors up to 3. The teaching workload of

	supervisors does not exceed the existing legal thresholds. The obligations of supervisors and co-supervisors, candidates and research teams are stipulated in Regulations on the Postgraduate University Studies.
3.2. The HEI establishes admission quotas on the basis of scientific/ artistic, cultural, social, economic and other needs.	**IMPROVEMENTS ARE NECESSARY** The admissions quota - as stipulated in the self-evaluation report and clarified in the meetings with representatives of the HEI - is largely based on the availability of mentors and supervisors and on perceived economic needs of the region. The latter point has also been confirmed in meetings with stakeholders - public and private employers in the region - who expressed a need for employees with doctoral qualifications. Indeed, some of these actors plan to potentially subsidize the doctoral education of select employees but currently only 3 candidates - out of the total of 32 enrolled in Year 1 - are funded by employees. At the moment the HEI's admission quota does not sufficiently consider wider scientific/ artistic, cultural and social needs.
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.	**IMPROVEMENTS ARE NECESSARY** In the academic year 2018/2019, 32 students were enrolled, of these 3 are financed by employers, 24 are self-financed and 5 are financed by the University. From the information available in the call for applications for 2019/20 on the HEI website it appears that the number of places on the doctoral programme has been limited to 15. The HEI should make efforts to increase the number of students fully funded or co-funded by research projects.
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.	**This point is only partly applicable and in those respects it is at a high level of quality.** It has already been mentioned that there are no issues with the availability of mentors/supervisors at the moment. Yet the recruitment strategy relies on a high ratio of self-funded students and is lacking in terms of criteria other than the availability of mentors/supervisors and - to some extent - economic needs in the region. The reduction in the number of places available to doctoral students - as per information on the HEI website - is a move in the right direction.
3.5. The HEI ensures that interested, talented and highly motivated candidates are recruited internationally.	**IMPROVEMENTS ARE NECESSARY** The call for applications on the HEI website is published in English, however, international recruitment is not a priority

	for the HEI, according to information provided by the management board at the site visit. The HEI is working on a doctoral programme in English jointly with other universities in the broader geographical region - Hungary, Slovakia, Austria, Czech Republic. The report has already highlighted the lack of a clearly defined and operationalized internationalization strategy.
3.6. The selection process is public and based on choosing the best applicants.	**HIGH LEVEL OF QUALITY** The HEI publishes a call for applications on its website in Croatian and in English and the criteria for the selection of applicants are clearly defined. There has been a change in the application criteria between the academic years 2018/19 and 2019/20. In the first recruitment cycle the prior academic achievements - expressed in the form of GPA - were not prioritized, however, this has changed for the most recent recruitment cycle and the GPA has been set at the minimum of 3.5. This change will ensure a higher quality of accepted candidates.
3.7. The HEI ensures that the selection procedure is transparent and in line with published criteria, and that there is a transparent complaints procedure.	**HIGH LEVEL OF QUALITY** Regulations on the Postgraduate University Studies stipulate the process of recruitment and selection in detail. The selection is clear and applicants have a right to complain, there is a time limit and clear procedure for dealing with complaints. However, the self-analysis report and the documents submitted do not refer to a complainant's right to review the strengths and weaknesses of their application.
3.8. There is a possibility to recognize applicants' and candidates' prior learning.	**IMPROVEMENTS ARE NECESSARY** The submitted self-analysis report and other paperwork do not outline in detail how prior learning and achievements are recognized. Some indications of such recognition are found, for example, in the admissions criteria that take into account publications. Therefore, greater clarity of the formal procedure is desirable.
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.	**HIGH LEVEL OF QUALITY** Candidates' rights and obligations are stipulated in Regulations on the Postgraduate University Studies. Apart from formal procedures and stipulations, the expert panel has also learnt about more informal forms of institutional support that the candidates can avail of, the current

	students who met with the expert panel were highly satisfied with the level of available support.
3.10. There are institutional support mechanisms for candidates' successful progression.	**N/A** The expert panel is not able to comment fully on this point in the early phase of the programme (only first year candidates). However, the self-analysis report and also accounts by representatives of the HEI and stakeholders confirmed that a significant effort is being made to listen to students' voices, for example in relation to additional methodological workshops.
4. PROGRAMME AND OUTCOMES	
4.1. The content and quality of the doctoral programme are aligned with internationally recognized standards.	**IMPROVEMENTS ARE NECESSARY** In general, the programme is aligned with international standards and is focused on the candidate's independent work as courses to research ratio is optimal. There are, however, some significant shortcomings. The alignment of the study programme with the research strategy developed specifically for the doctoral programme (The Scientific Research Strategy of the Postgraduate University Doctoral Study in Media and Communication of University North for the period 2019 - 2023) and with the HEI's overall research strategy for 2019-2023 (the current one - Scientific Research Strategy of the University North for the period 2015 – 2020 - will expire in 2020) could be improved. This requires greater clarification of key performance indicators and the operationalization of the term internationalization for the HEI's purposes (internationalization is a broad term and depending on the HEI's decision, the concrete measures can include courses in English, co-supervision with foreign experts, publishing in English, international conference attendance etc.). The curriculum could be improved, particularly in relation to methodology. Rather than introducing additional methodological training ad hoc, a re-structuring of the curriculum would be desirable. Specific methodological courses for communication sciences could be introduced as mandatory instead of general methodology for social sciences. A lack of qualitative methods is also evident and introduction of those should be reconsidered The internal logic of the curriculum is unclear and some

	important areas, such as for example, visual culture, are neglected. The programme as a whole is too much directed towards information sciences at the expense of cultural aspects of communication (cf. disadvantages of the programme, points 1 and 6). In some cases, the mandatory literature and also content of some individual courses is outdated in terms of international comparison.
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** Learning outcomes of some individual courses do not always meet the criteria for 3rd cycle, such as, for example, that applying knowledge and understanding extends the frontier of knowledge by developing a substantial body of work, some of which merits national or international refereed publication. As the programme is only in its first year, the expert panel was not able to assess whether skills and competencies such as specific research competencies which are usually evaluated through submitted dissertations are acquired and if learning outcomes of all subject units are clearly connected with learning outcomes of the programme as a whole.
4.3. Programme learning outcomes are logically and clearly connected with teaching contents, as well as the contents included in supervision and research.	**This point is only partly applicable and in those respects it is at a high level of quality.** According to the self evaluation report and interviews with candidates, the expert panel can conclude that in the first year the programme LOs are logically and clearly aligned with individual courses, supervisory work and research. As the programme is only in its first year, the expert panel was however not able to assess the inter-connectedness of courses and other research activities with the doctoral dissertation. Moreover, it is not possible to conclude at this point how, for example, LO 5**:** "to design and implement new theoretical paradigms based on original research in the field" will be achieved as some mandatory courses and teaching content that are connected with this LO according to the Table with the learning outcomes in SER (p.6) are too general and not positioned at a high enough level.
4.4. The doctoral programme ensures the achievement of learning outcomes and competencies aligned with the level 8.2	**N/A** The expert panel is not able to comment fully on this point as the study programme is only at an early stage and no

of the CroQF.	dissertations were submitted, there were also no candidates' publications or seminar papers to view.
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.	**IMPROVEMENTS ARE NECESSARY** Most of the courses have appropriate teaching activities and clearly defined learning outcomes. The expert panel would, however, suggest that credits should not be given for passive attendance at lectures, which is listed as one of the teaching methods by many courses, as this is not appropriate level 8.2. of the CroQF. Number of ECTS for some activities is also inadequate and too high, and in some cases not specified enough. For example, instead of just attending a foreign university (for which 5 ECTS can be gained) it should be clearly specified what kind of activities during that visit are required.
4.6. The programme enables acquisition of general (transferable) skills.	**HIGH LEVEL OF QUALITY** The programme provides acquisition of generic (transferable) skills through specially provided workshops, which are an integral part of the study programme. Transferable skills workshops are divided into two sub-groups: a) Business, Organizational and Communication Skills Workshops: The workshops are intended to further examine topics and issues in the fields of media, communication and publishing. The goal is to influence the increase of scientific, business and communication skills of doctoral students and to enable them to apply the acquired knowledge in the real sector. Workshops cover the following topics: creativity, problem solving and intellectual curiosity (acquiring professional efficiency skills); project management (acquisition of room and time management skills); teamwork (acquisition of leadership and communication support skills); developing professional networking and networking skills (gaining career building skills). b) Academic Skills Workshops and Research Ethics Workshops: The workshops are designed to further prepare PhD students for the requirements, obligations and expectations in the context of research work - reviews and peer review, scientific integrity, search for scientific information, academic writing, popularization of science,

	understanding of intellectual property and copyright, plagiarism, etc. The expert panel finds it positive that with participation in these workshops students can obtain credit points. However, it is not completely clear how the amount of ECTS within the range of a minimum of 3 ECTS and a maximum of 15 ECTS is determined. Also, a maximum of 15 ECTS for participation in the workshop is too high in comparison to, for example, 20 ECTS for writing and defending doctoral dissertation topic.
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** The expert panel finds that the content is adapted to candidates' future needs and can, to a large extent, be individualized through personal development plans. On the other hand, we find the number of credits (5 ECTS) for drawing up a personal development plan to be excessive as this is the equivalent of credits for an obligatory course.
4.8. The programme ensures quality through international connections and teacher and candidate mobility.	**IMPROVEMENTS ARE NECESSARY** The programme has been active in creating an international network and international contacts that result in agreements and implementation of specific Erasmus + projects. Since only the first generation of PhD students was enrolled, no doctoral student mobility was achieved, but according to the self evaluation report "a significant number of teacher / staff mobility was realized". Doctoral students are also required to obtain a mobility at an international university for which they can get from 5 to 15 ECTS. The same table shows that PhD students must earn part of their ECTS credits by publishing papers, i.e. by participating in international scientific conferences, which can be achieved through grants for scientific research for doctoral students, as well as grants for scientific research for supervisors and PhD students. On the other hand "internationalization at home" is weak as there are no courses in English and only 2 professors from the UK have been recruited (according to information provided by the management board at the site visit). There were also no international reviews of the programme and there is a lack of interaction with key international

	organizations such as the International Communication Association (ICA), European Communication Research and Education Association (ECREA) and the International Association for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR).

* 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.