

# Summary report on the accreditation of the bachelor study programme „Strategic Communication (BA)“ of the Webster Vienna Private University at the study location in Vienna

Upon the application for the accreditation of the bachelor study programme „Strategic Communication (BA)“ of the Webster Vienna Private University at the study location in Vienna from 5<sup>th</sup> November 2018, in the version of 10<sup>th</sup> December 2018, AQ Austria conducted the accreditation procedure according to para. 24 Act on Quality Assurance in Higher Education (HS-QSG) in conjunction with para. 2 Private Universities Act (PUG) in conjunction with Decree on Accreditation of Private Universities (PU-AkkVO). In accordance with § 21 HS-QSG AQ Austria publishes the following summary report:

## 1 Accreditation decision

At its 55<sup>th</sup> meeting on 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2019 the Board of AQ Austria decided to grant accreditation to the bachelor study programme „Strategic Communication (BA)“ according to para. 24 Act on Quality Assurance in Higher Education (HS-QSG) section 4 and 5 in conjunction with para. 2 Private Universities Act (PUG) in conjunction with para. 9 section 1 Decree on Accreditation of Private Universities (PU-AkkVO).

The decision was approved by the Federal Minister for Science, Research and Economy on 11<sup>th</sup> July 2019. The decision entered into force on 17<sup>th</sup> July 2019.

## 2 Short information on the application for accreditation

Information on the applicant institution	
Applicant institution	Webster Vienna Private University
Legal form	Association
Initial accreditation	09.01.2001
Last renewal of accreditation	09.01.2016
Site	Vienna
Number of students	575
Accredited studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Business Administration (BSc)</li> <li>• Management (BA)</li> <li>• Management with an emphasis in International Business (BA)</li> <li>• Management with an emphasis in Marketing (BA)</li> <li>• International Relations (BA)</li> <li>• Psychology (BA)</li> <li>• Media Communications (BA)</li> <li>• Finance (MSc)</li> <li>• Marketing (MSc)</li> <li>• Master of Business Administration (MBA)</li> <li>• International Relations (MA)</li> <li>• Psychology with an Emphasis in Counseling Psychology (MA)</li> </ul>
Information on the study programme	
Name of study programme	Strategic Communication
Type of study programme	Bachelor degree programme
ECTS	240
Regular study period in semester	8
Maximum intake per year	max. 25
Academic degree	Bachelor of Arts (BA or B.A.)
Study formate	Full time
Language	English
Site	Vienna
Tuition fee	Total of 80.640 €, 10.080,- per Semester

## 3 Short information on the accreditation procedure

Webster Vienna Private University submitted an application for accreditation of the study programme „Strategic Communication (BA)“ on 5<sup>th</sup> November 2018.

On 16<sup>th</sup> January 2019, the Board of AQ Austria decided on the expert panel members and appointed the following experts for the review and assessment:

Name	Institution	Role within the expert panel
Priv.-Doz. <sup>in</sup> Dr. <sup>in</sup> habil. Stephanie Geise	Westfälische Wilhelms- Universität Münster	Expert with scientific qualification and chairing member
Dr. Jan Niklas Kocks	Freie Universität Berlin	Expert with scientific qualification
Mag. (FH) Roland Mayrl	Metrum Communications GmbH	Expert with professional qualification
Tessina Koch	Universität Wien	Student expert

A site visit at the Webster Vienna Private University took place on 21<sup>st</sup> March 2019, which was attended by the expert panel and the project coordinator from AQ Austria.

The Board of AQ Austria took the accreditation decision in its 55<sup>th</sup> meeting on 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2019.

## 4 Subject matter of the application

The bachelor degree programme combines „*communication, persuasion, and campaign skills necessary to succeed in the modern media landscape. The graduates of our new Strategic Communication (BA) will enter this volatile market with the theoretical and practical skill set that enables them to pursue a professional career as well as continuing their academic education. In this vein, introducing a new program at the undergraduate level is reflective of a prudent strategy: we are aiming at full-time students to first cater to an entirely new and extremely fast-paced market.*“

*“The proposed Strategic Communication (BA) program serves as an example of VVPU's mission to offer degree programs on a global scale addressing the needs of a profession in rapid change and illustrates how to develop new degree programs that enable students to enter the labor market of tomorrow; and doing so with a unique research-based skill set designed to succeed in a fast and substantively changing environment. Indeed, there is great demand in its focus area and WVPU is most competent to offer this new program. This competence is based on the research and teaching foci of VVPU's Media Communications department's faculty.”*

*“The Strategic Communication (BA) combines courses in public relations, speech communication, media communication, advertising, political science, psychology, marketing, and anthropology. Together, the academic rigor of the proposed program is evidenced by the proportion of carefully chosen required courses amounting to 75% of a total of 240 ECTP. The remaining 25% is designated for elective courses of which 44 ECTS are pre-approved Global Citizenship Program courses that will support the core focus of the degree program.”*

## 5 Grounds for the accreditation decision

The Board of AQ Austria based its decision on the application documentation, the supplements to the application and the submissions to the application documentation by the Webster Vienna Private University (WVPU) as well as the review report of the expert panel. The expert panel assessed **all criteria** of the Decree on Accreditation of Private Universities (PU-AkkVO) **to be met** for this degree programme.

### Summarizing results from the assessments of the expert panel

#### **(1) Degree programme and degree programme management**

The expert panel states in the review report that the planned degree programme - "Strategic Communication (BA)" - *"is aligned with the objectives of the institution and is logically connected with the plan for its development."* (Review report, p.6) The qualification objectives and learning outcomes are clearly defined and correspond to subject-related, scientific, professional requirements and the respective levels of the qualification framework of the European Higher Education Area. *"In addition, the designation of the degree programme corresponds to the qualification profile. Moreover, the expert panel considers the programme adequate to reach the stated learning goals and find these in accordance with academic standards in the field of political communication."* (Review report, p.19) The academic degree is internationally comparable and the degree title corresponds to the qualification profile. The application of ECTS is comprehensible and *"[t]he students' workload required is devised in a way so as to allow them to reach the aspired qualification objectives in the study period specified."* (Review report, p.19)

*"Regarding the students appropriate involvement in shaping the teaching and learning processes, the students are actively encouraged to be involved in the learning process. Amongst others, students at WVPU are represented in the University Senate and the Student Government Association, evaluate the faculty, the teaching methods and learning outcomes with an anonymous online course evaluation and can get active through their course assignment."* (ibid.) In general, the expert panel perceives a well-established feedback culture and high level of involvement of the students in the teaching-learning process at Webster Vienna Private University. *"For students seeking advice on scientific, specialist, study-related organisational, or socio-psychological matters, adequate support structures are available: More precisely, the students at WVPU benefit from the extensive system of support structures available for students seeking advice on scientific, specialist, study-related, organizational or socio-psychological matters."* (ibid.) In addition, students receive support in the "Language Center" and for quantitative statistical research methods through "Quant Center". The expert panel states, that *"[a]ll in all, the students studying at WVPU are in really good hands and receive all the help they need to bring out the best in them."* (ibid.)

#### **(2) Staff**

The expert panel considers all criteria concerning the staff of the WVPU for the planned degree programme as fulfilled. The WVPU not only has a sufficient number of teaching and research staff, but also *"[a]ll of them have an excellent scientific track record, are authors of numerous publications and have many years of research expertise. The planned programme fulfils the requirement that at least 50% of the teaching workload is carried out by employed scientific staff and the expert panel finds the student-teacher ratio as adequate."* (Review report, p.19)

### **(3) Quality assurance**

*"The "Strategic Communication (BA)" programme fulfils the quality assurance requirements amongst others with its integration into the extensive quality management system and WVPU's global network. [...] The quality assurance of teaching is carried out by and through the study commission, the study and examination regulations, through evaluations of the courses. Further input is provided by general student feedback, university rankings, feedback from accrediting bodies and advice from partner organizations and alumnae."* (Review report, p. 19) The expert panel also notes that an *"extensive, multi-tiered, internal system of quality assurance and programme review"* (ibid.) is planned for the degree programme. Feedback and student evaluation are the central elements of the quality assurance at the WVPU. In addition, the students are represented in the bodies of the private university: *"the University Senate guarantees the representation of the interests of faculty staff and students and enables their participation in the quality assurance process."* (ibid.)

The undergraduate programme "Strategic Communication (BA)" is both integrated into the extensive quality management system of the WVPU and, via its curricular planning platform, into the curriculum of the private university. The WVPU will implement a homepage for the planned degree programme and integrate it into the marketing strategy. In addition, the quality management system is intended to ensure the sustainable implementation of the university's mission statement and to serve quality control in teaching and research. There are three levels of annual performance agreements - individual, departmental and management. Reports from all three levels are handed quarterly to the university council to ensure the control of the executive board operations and the necessary discussions of strategic objectives. The executive board and the university council conclude a performance agreement, which serves for the WVPU's strategic planning, self-evaluation purposes and enhances the functioning of individual departments and administrative units. Furthermore, programme reviews and assessments are conducted on an annual and bi-annual basis across the WVPU's global network, including syllabi, faculty, qualifications, student reviews etc. WVPU considers student feedback as an essential part of maintaining high quality - this is why the WVPU has an anonymous online course evaluation. The faculty input is guaranteed by the university senate representing the interest of faculty, staff and students and like this, enabling participation in matters of strategy development and quality management relevant for teaching, research and service. Students at the WVPU participate in formal and informal exchange with the staff and the faculty on various curricular matters, are represented by the Student Government Association (SGA) and are part of the university senate.

### **(4) Funding and infrastructure**

The financing of the planned degree programme is presented in a financial plan and assessed by the evaluators as comprehensible and clear. *"The study financing of the planned degree programme consists of the tuition fees and the basic funds of the WVPU. Furthermore, it was stated in the application that the financial situation of the WVPU guarantees a teach-out for all students and that a comfort letter from the parent university - Webster University (St. Louis, USA) - offers additional funding security."* (Review report, p.19) The criterion regarding the infrastructure is assessed by the expert panel as fulfilled. *"Both in the application for accreditation and during the site visit, the WVPU stated that the necessary facilities and equipment is available for the implementation of the planned degree programme. The WVPU has the necessary premises for the holding of courses and exercises as well as sufficient recreation and learning rooms, libraries, etc."* (Review report, p.15)

### **(5) Research and development**

The planned research and development, the involvement of teaching staff and students as well as the conditions for the implementation of research at the private university are assessed positively by the expert panel. The expert panel finds that "[t]he planned research for the degree programme complies with international standards." (Review report, P.19) "The expert panel finds that the faculty is well focused and demonstrates a record of producing research on an internationally competitive level. In addition, WVPU also has efficiently worked on the implementation of an appropriate research infrastructure as well as evaluation and quality assurance procedure." (Review report, p.16)

### **(6) National and international co-operation**

The WVPU provides for a series of cooperations, which both promote the mobility of students and staff and support the further development of the degree programme. "The private university offers student exchange and faculty mobility, visiting professorships and scholar-in-residence-programme. Faculty mobility is offered in form of a "sabbatical" but actively encouraged, WVPU supports faculty in working at partner universities abroad. Active and regular exchange of both students and faculty ensures an adequate level of international co-operation here." (Review report, p.19)

Webster Vienna Private University did not submit a statement to the review report of the expert panel.

## **6 Annex**

- Review report of the expert panel, 20<sup>th</sup> May 2019