

The Assessment Decision of the EKKA Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education

12/10/2015

**A proposal to the Minister of Education of the Republic of
Moldova**

NOT TO ACCREDIT
**the Master's study programme "Customs Law" of the
Academy of Economic Studies of Moldova**

Acting in accordance with the authorization granted by the § 10 (4) of the Universities Act and sections 3.7.1 and 3.7.3 of the Statutes of the Estonian Quality Agency for Higher and Vocational Education (EKKA) and based on section 33.2 of the document "Requirements and Procedure for Accreditation of Study Programmes in Moldova", the EKKA Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education shall state the following.

1. On February 23, 2015, the Director of EKKA approved by her order the following composition of the

Assessment Committee:

Kristiina Tõnnisson – Chair	Director of European College, University of Tartu, Estonia
Adrian Ermurachi	Senior consultant, General Directorate for Policy Coordination, External Assistance and Central Public Administration Reform; PhD student; Moldova
Tanel Kerikmäe	Professor, Tallinn Law School, Faculty of Social Sciences, Tallinn University of Technology, Estonia
Yuliya Vashchenko	Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, Faculty of Law, Administrative Law Department, Associate Professor; Ukraine

2. The Assessment Visit to the Academy of Economic Studies of Moldova took place on May 4, 2015.
3. The Assessment Committee sent the preliminary report to EKKA on June 9, 2015. The Assessment Committee received the comments of the Academy of Economic Studies of Moldova on June 24, 2015 and approved the final version of the component assessments on July 3, 2015.
4. The Secretary of the Council forwarded the assessment report containing the component assessments to the members of the EKKA Quality Assessment Council for Higher Education on September 24. The assessment report forms an integral part of the assessment decision. The report will be made available on the EKKA website.

5. The component assessments were as follows:

Study programme and its development	Does not conform to requirements
Teaching and learning	Partially conforms to requirements
Teaching staff	Partially conforms to requirements
Students	Partially conforms to requirements
Resources	Conforms to requirements

6. The EKKA Quality Assessment Council discussed the assessment report along with the comments of Academy of Economic Studies of Moldova and other relevant materials at its session on October 12, 2015 with the participation of 9 Council members. The Council decided to point out the following strengths and areas of improvement of the Master's study programme "Customs Law":

6.1.

Study programme and its development	Does not conform to requirements
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Strengths

- The content of the programme provides the students with the opportunities to obtain both theoretical knowledge and practical skills.
- Strong practical approach within the programme.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- The title of a study programme is not consistent with its content. There are only 2 compulsory courses and 1 optional course directly devoted to the Customs Law_issues.

- The content of this MA programme is rather similar to the objectives, the content and the learning outcomes of the MA in Financial-Fiscal Law. It is recommended to incorporate the MA programme in Customs Law in the MA programme in Financial-Fiscal Law.
- The objectives, content and learning outcomes of this Master’s study programme are not clearly distinguishable from those of the Bachelor’s study programme. There are several courses within the MA Programme that seem to be the same or very similar to the courses from the 1st circle.
- The learning outcomes of the programme define the specialized knowledge in the field, however, the formulation of this knowledge does not reflect the aspects of critical awareness and original thinking and/or research. The objectives and learning outcomes of the study programme are not in coherence with the European Qualifications Framework. They need to be formulated in accordance with the EQF (level 7).
- The practical part of the master theses are often more developed than the scientific one. Partially it can be explained by the lack of active involvement of students in the scientific activity. Therefore it is recommended to improve the requirements to the scientific level of the master theses and to enhance the master thesis supervision in this part.

6.2.

Teaching and learning	Partially conforms to requirements
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Strengths

- General positive trend of fostering active teaching and learning methods.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- It is recommended to improve both teachers’ and students’ research knowledge and skills.
- It is recommended to reconsider the objectives and requirements of students’ internship in order to make it more efficient. The students usually find the place for internship by themselves. They usually opt for the institutions/companies in which they are employed. That is why the internship in reality might mean “just continuing the usual business at work”. There is not enough supervision during internship.
- It is recommended to update required reading lists by including more recent textbooks, monographs and most importantly - scientific articles.
- It is recommended to consider to include some required reading materials in English, to deliver some parts of the courses in English.
- It is recommended to include the information on teaching and learning methods in the syllabi of the courses.
- It is recommended to strengthen the requirements for MA theses and to monitor more closely the master theses preparation.
- It is recommended to pursue with the system for recognizing prior learning and work experience.

6.3.

Teaching staff	Partially conforms to requirements
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Strengths

- Teaching staff carries a “spirit of changes and youth”.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- By the time of the site visit the teaching staff was not involved in any medium or major national research project. Also no major involvement in international research was visible. The school does not have enough resources (qualified people, time, money) and clear understanding of solid academic research. Personal data/lists of publications of the teaching staff are referring mostly to various teaching manuals, textbooks, media articles, conference papers, etc. Since there is no common understanding of the concept of “research”, there is also no real research plan that could be followed and monitored. More focus should be put on promoting research activities and research skills among the staff.
- The programme’s teachers largely overlap with the teaching staff of those who teach on the Financial-Fiscal Law programme. Although the latter programme was mentioned as the priority, there is no clear strategy at managerial level to diversify the faculty in order to maintain the sustainability of both programmes. Taking into account just one programme, faculty members have sufficient time to instruct students in order to provide them with the knowledge. Taking into account that they cover two curricula, sufficient time resource is not so evident anymore.
- There is no systematic financial support for research activities offered by the school or the faculty. The school should focus more on familiarization of the faculty members with international grant applications schemes.
- Currently the members of full-time teaching staff of the AESM do not develop their skills at foreign higher education institutions nor participate in international networks. It is recommended to find more resources for staff development (including training abroad, time for research and publishing, etc.). At the same time also the foreign language skills among teaching staff could be improved before they would be ready to take full advantage of possible foreign trips.
- There is no evidence of foreign teaching staff being involved. It is recommended to invite foreign visiting professors to enrich the study environment in the master programme.

6.4.

Students	Partially conforms to requirements
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Strengths

- School’s antiplagiarism system.
- There is a good student representation in the Senate of 12 elected students’ representatives among 56 members. There are also two elected students’ representatives both in the Board of Directors and the Coordinating Council of the AESM.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- The admission exam for places with tuition fees is applied only when the number of applicants is higher than the number of actually available places. In order to ensure the equal treatment, it is necessary to apply the same admission procedures for all incoming students.
- In 2014 the school is informed about the employment status of 7 graduates out of 20. It is recommended to improve the institutional monitoring system of career development of graduates and obtain regular feedback from graduates and employers regarding the possibilities of employment.
- The counselling system is not effective enough. For a fruitful progress of the school it is vital that the new Career Guidance Centre will start functioning as soon as possible and start covering all the activities for which it was created. It would be very useful that the activities of the centre will be promoted/shared among all students.
- Nobody from the Customs Law programme has ever participated in any international mobility programmes. It is recommended to encourage international student exchange and short studies abroad.
- The expert committee did not witness enough clear evidences on the consideration of the needs of the labour market regarding this specific MA programme. According to the information provided by the Academy, from 7 graduates of the Customs Law programme 5 are employed and only 2 of them are employed on the obtained qualification. It is recommended to pay more attention to labour market needs/statistics.
- The drop-out rate in Customs Law specialty is especially high when compared to other specialties. It is suggested for the school to pay more attention to the issue.

6.5.

Resources	Conforms to requirements
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Strengths

- General trends in the total number of students and graduates as well as the general budget of the AESM indicate institutional sustainability.
- Studies and other academic activities are supported by well-functioning information technology solutions, including the study information system, e-learning opportunities and communication portals for students and teaching staff.

Areas of improvement and recommendations

- The trends in the number of students and graduates in the law programmes are challenging. There is a general decreasing trend of the number of the students of the programme. It is recommended to establish a clear vision and strategy to ensure financial sustainability specifically for the law programmes.
 - A concrete action plan should be adopted for tackling the problems deriving from the consequences of declining number of students and to increase the attractiveness of the given master programmes.
 - There could be more entrepreneurial spirit in the fund-raising activities (not only university-oriented but also related to the field of specific studies, e.g. law).
 - The management should encourage academic staff to participate in international grant application schemes and tenders, find technical and administrative support, as well as provide possibilities for self-financing when necessary.
 - Further steps should be taken to seek for internal synergy among three master's programmes in law under review in order to administer these programmes more efficiently.
 - It is recommended to pay more attention to the career development model of the faculty members and clearly plan the costs for improving the quality of teaching and research.
 - The academy should develop a realistic strategy to attract more high quality students and minimise the drop-out rate.
 - The number of personal computers is very limited and the fact that the teachers have to share laptops makes research and teaching process rather complicated.
 - The library includes a collection of books, majority of them are published in Romanian/Russian. The English language literature is mainly available for economic studies. Concerning to the journals there is only one English language journal related to law. Databases are not too often used by students.
- 7.** According to section 33.2 of the document "Requirements and Procedure for Accreditation of Study Programmes in Moldova", if at least one of the component assessments is "does not conform to requirements", the Quality Assessment Council shall decide to make a proposal to the Minister of Education not to accredit the study programme.
- 8.** Taking into account the component assessments referred to in clause 5 and that:
- The title of a study programme is not consistent with its content. There are only 2 compulsory courses and 1 optional course directly devoted to the Customs Law issues.
 - The content of this MA programme is rather similar to the objectives, the content and the learning outcomes of the MA in Financial-Fiscal Law.
 - The objectives, content and learning outcomes of this Master's study programme are not clearly distinguishable from those of the Bachelor's study programme.

- The objectives and learning outcomes of the study programme are not in coherence with the European Qualifications Framework.
- The programme's teachers largely overlap with the teaching staff of those who teach Financial-Fiscal Law programme. The teachers don't have sufficient time resources to cover two curricula.
- The drop-out rate in Customs Law specialty is specially high when compared to other specialties.

the Council DECIDED

To make a proposal to the Minister of Education of the Republic of Moldova not to accredit the Master's study programme "Customs Law" of the Academy of Economic Studies of Moldova.

The decision was adopted by 9 votes in favour and 0 votes against.

9. Contestation:

- 9.1.** Evaluation proceedings conducted by EKKA may be disputed if the proceedings do not comply with the procedure provided for in this document. The challenge is filed with the Management Board of the Archimedes Foundation within 30 working days after the person filing the challenge became or should have become aware of the contested finding.
- 9.2.** The assessment decision by the EKKA Quality Assessment Council may be disputed after adoption of the corresponding administrative decision by the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Moldova.

Tõnu Meidla
Chair of the Council

Hillar Bauman
Secretary of the Council