

Joint Final Report

Audentes University

Programs Assessed

7343917	Business Administration
7343919	Business Administration

Visit Dates

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Expert Team

Prof. Heinrich Stremitzer
Head of the Dept for Insurance
and Risk Management
Wirtschaftsuniversität Wien
Augasse 2-6; A-1090 Vienna
Austria
Tel: 43-1-31336-4694
Fax: 43-1-31336-712
E-mail: Heinrich.Stremitzer@wu-wien.ac.at

Prof Ilkka Virtanen
Dean of the Faculty of Technology
University of Vaasa
PO Box 700
FIN-65101 Vaasa
Finland
Tel: 358-6-3248256
Fax: 358-6-3248557
E-mail: itv@uwasa.fi

Prof Juris Krumins
Vice Rector
University of Latvia
Raina bulv. 19
Riga, LV-1586
Latvia
Tel: 371-7034304
Fax: 371-7034422
E-mail: krumins@lanet.lv

Prof Kurt Pedersen
Dept of International Business
Aarhus School of Business
Fuglesangs Alle 4
DK-8210 Aarhus V
Denmark
Tel: 45-8948-6340
Fax: 45-8948-6125
E-mail: KUR@asb.dk

Prof Wim Meeusen
Dept of Economics
University of Antwerp
Prinsstraat 13
B-2000 Antwerp Belgium
Tel: 32-3-2204054
Fax: 32-3-2204033
E-mail: wim.meeusen@ua.ac.be

Part I

General Overview

THE ASSESSMENT OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION AND MANAGEMENT

The Higher Education Quality Assessment Centre of Estonia has invited a Team of experts to assess programs in Business Administration and Management at the Audentes University, Tallinn Commercial College, Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences and Estonian Business School.

The expert Team

- Prof. Heinrich Stremitzer, Wirtschaftsuniversität Wien, Austria;
- Prof. Ilkka Virtanen, University of Vaasa, Finland;
- Prof. Juris Kruminis, University of Latvia, Latvia;
- Prof. Kurt Pedersen, Aarhus School of Business, Denmark;
- Prof. Wim Meeusen, University of Antwerp, Belgium.

The assessed programmes:

AUDENTES UNIVERSITY

7343917 *Business Administration*

7343919 *Business Administration*

TALLINN COMMERCIAL COLLEGE

5343960 *Business Administration*

INSTITUTE OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

5343665 *Economics*

ESTONIAN BUSINESS SCHOOL

7343950 *Business Administration*

7343949 *Business Administration*

6343949 *Business Administration*

6343993 *IT Management*

6343992 *Entrepreneurship and Business Administration*

8343914 *Business Administration*

The programme of the visit

The assessments took place during the period October 19-26, 2003. Sunday evening 19 October, the Committee had a meeting with the managing director of the Accreditation Centre and member of Higher Education Quality Assessment Council. An outline was given of the task of the Committee and the general situation of Estonian Higher Education.

Monday 20 October the Committee visited the Audentes University, Tuesday 21 the Committee visited the Tallinn Commercial College, Wednesday 22 the Committee visited the Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences and Thursday 23 the Committee visited the Estonian Business School.

The programme and working method

Prior to the beginning of the visits, the Committee had a general discussion about the task as seen by the Committee, about the standards, formulated by the Accreditation Centre and the frame of reference for the assessment as seen by the Committee. At the same time the self-evaluation reports were discussed.

The program of the visit had the following format:

- meeting with the leaders/heads of the institutions
- discussion with the writers of the self-evaluation reports
- interviews with groups of students of the different programmes in small groups
- interview with academic staff of the different programmes in small groups
- interviews with important Committees
- on-site visits of facilities

During the major part of visit the Committee tried to assess especially the organisation of the programmes, the way the curricula had been designed, the way the quality is being assured, the qualification of the staff, the research activities and all other points the programmes had in common. The Committee formally had to report on 10 programmes.

What follows are the findings of the Team (Part II), its general recommendations (Part III), and its accreditation conclusions (Part IV). In Part II, the findings are relative to the “Requirements for accreditation of educational programme of university” (Approved by the regulation of the minister of Education No 34 of 14 December 1998 RTL* 1999, 9, 101).

Part II

Findings

GENERAL FINDINGS AT THE AUDENTES UNIVERSITY

First of all, the University should be commended on the self-evaluation report, which has been produced. It is at least fairly analytical, not only descriptive. The Team experienced it positive that also weak points and procedures needing improvement were presented. Naturally the report also raised questions among the Team and additional information was needed for preparing the report.

Audentes University is “a University in transition”, as seem almost all the HEI’s in Estonia today to be. Audentes University especially, is increasing its student body and its market share on the Estonian education market by buying other private universities and merging with them.

The findings at the University will be presented at relevant points in the list of accreditation criteria below.

I. THE CURRICULUM

1. Aims and objectives, their correspondence to university’s goals and educational policy.

The aims and objectives of the two master’s programmes are well in concert with the goals and educational policy of the University in its endeavours towards a university offering education at all academic degree levels. The owners and management of this private University seem to be very committed to develop the University. The University shall especially be commended on this.

2. Curriculum design, accomplishment and development. The role of various structural units.

The Team noticed no serious problems or deficiencies in curriculum design, accomplishment and development. It became clear to the Team that during the transition period also the 40 CP programme (as a part of the 4 + 1 system) is needed. It seems, however, evident that in the course of time its demand is vanishing.

3. Subject structure, group balance, options and diversity of curriculum. Correspondence to international standards.

All the relevant subjects of a master’s programme in business administration (economics, management, accounting and finance, marketing) together with general methodological subject matter and a collection of elective courses are included in the programme in a balanced way. A 20 CP master’s thesis is an essential part of the degree programme. An interesting speciality is the University’s new opening to offer the students the possibility to specialise in engineering (fuels and lubricants already started, engineering materials

and cars and trucks in the plans). On the other hand it should be said that these technological options concern the 'old' industries, and that high-tech options are missing.

The Team wants to commend the University for its efforts to offer education also for the Russian-speaking students.

There is no international component in the curriculum as far as student and teacher exchange is concerned. As the International University (former Concordia University) is now a part of the Audentes University, the faculty should utilize the existing international contacts of this university in its programmes.

4. Intake and graduation requirements.

Intake of the students is based on bachelor's degree or on an equivalent level of academic education (the self-evaluation report). The 80 CP programme is intended for bachelors having 120 CP degree and the 40 CP programme for those having a bachelor's degree of 160 CP. In discussions with the students the Team experienced, however, that admission is possible also for students having only a (three or four years) diploma (and no additional studies were required before entering the master's programme). The University should take its entrance requirements into careful consideration. The graduation requirements (including the master's thesis) are clear and according to the standards defined.

5. Compatibility of bachelor, master and doctor study programmes.

There are no compatibility problems between the bachelor and master programmes. The University does not have a PhD programme (although it is striving towards it). Taking into account the already existing Estonian PhD programmes in Business Administration, the size of the country and the non-existing research tradition in the University, the University should carefully consider the realism to start such a programme (at least a programme of its own) in the present development phase of the university.

CONCLUSIONS

The criteria I:1-5 are fulfilled. Attention should be paid, however, to the conformity of entrance requirements with the general HE regulations. The Team also encourages the faculty to strengthen its international activities.

II THE EDUCATIONAL PROCESS

1. Classroom and individual study organisation. Use of computer methods. Developments of teaching methods.

The division of study between classroom and individual work is according to the standards. The adopted trimester system for organizing the study year in three months periods seemed to work well. The students are either full-time (day-time), evening or distance students. The programme for evening and distance students is planned to be half a year longer than for day students. The University is equipped with satisfactory computer equipment and the computers are used both in teaching and for having access to library databases (to make up deficiencies in the clearly undeveloped library). The development of teaching and learning process is organized to be done in co-operation with the management of the faculty, teachers and students. Requirement and expectations of the

business world and society are assumed to be taken into account via the employment background of the student.

2. Study load planning and monitoring; factors inhibiting progress.

Planning and monitoring of the study load make it possible to graduate in due time. It is, however, evident (and the discussion with the students gave evidence on this) that full-time working during the studies is a delaying factor for the progress of the studies.

3. Conditions for laboratory and practical work and individual learning.

The Team did not register any deficiencies in this respect.

4. Assessment of student achievements and examination methods. Progress analysis.

The University has clear and detailed by the University Council affirmed regulations for assessing the students' achievements and progress.

5. Organisation of final examinations. Educational level of graduation thesis.

The (planned) system for organizing the final examinations is included in the regulations mentioned above. The Team was, however, unable to check its working in practise because the programme was started only a year ago. For the same reason, the Team can not assess the educational level of master's theses (in the lack of any finished thesis).

CONCLUSIONS

The criteria II:1-4 are fulfilled. Having said this, the Team must point out that the library of the University does not fulfil, by far, the criteria of the library of an institution giving education at the master's level. **Fulfilment of the criterion II:5 remains an open question** due to the University's early (according to the opinion of the Team, too early) application for getting accreditation for the master programmes.

III. ORGANISATION OF STUDIES

1. Rationality of study organisation. Co-operation of academic institutions with university services.

Organization of the studies is on a rational basis. The adopted trimester system makes it possible to allocate the study load evenly over the academic year. The studies are organized on day, evening and distance basis.

2. Attainability and quality of information about studies' organisation. Academic calendar.

Information concerning studies is available to the students on the Intranet and on the notice board; additional information is delivered by e-mail. The academic year consists of three 11 weeks trimesters each followed by an examination period (7 weeks in total).

3. Counselling and registration for studies and examinations. Analysis of participation rates, failures and suspensions from studies.

Students may obtain counselling by the lecturers and by the counsellors of the Study Department. The University and the faculty are aware of the reasons for failures in examinations and drop-outs. Statistics concerning failures and drop-outs has not been cumulated yet due to the youth of the master programme.

4. Existence of recreational facilities and other non-educational services (food, housing, mental, medical et al).

The University offers exceptionally high-level recreational facilities (indoor sports hall, trimming equipment, saunas etc.) and many supporting extra services (hostel accommodation, medical centre, restaurant services) for the students.

CONCLUSIONS

The criteria III:1-4 are fulfilled. It must be noted, however, that analysis of failures and drop-outs in master studies is not yet possible due to the non-existence of cumulated data.

IV RESOURCES

1. Adequacy of the infrastructure of the institution, laboratory facilities and learning resources.

The infrastructure of the institution is for the most part at a satisfactory, even at a good or very good (the adjacent conference and training centres International University and Audentes Ariko) level. The main deficiency is the lack of offices for personal use of the full-time teaching staff (library facilities are considered later). The existing office capacity does not provide satisfactory conditions for research of the staff, individual master's thesis guidance etc.

2. Library organisation and usage. Availability of textbooks, learning materials, scientific literature, special (professional) issues.

The Team observed the library insufficient for master level studies. The collection of textbooks and professional magazines may be sufficient but the lack of scientific literature, especially of international scientific periodicals, is not acceptable in an institution offering master level education. This deficiency is partly, but only partly compensated through the access to electronic databases (e.g. EBSCO). Efficient usage of library databases presupposes a computerized reading hall which the University does not have.

3. Access to information networks and resources.

The University has an access to main relevant information networks but the resources for their adequate utilization is still underdeveloped (see comments above).

4. Financial policy of institution. Development of physical and information resources. Resource limits per student.

The finance of the University is based on tuition fees. They seem to be on an average level of Estonian private higher education institutions (27000 crowns per year). There is a plan for continuous development of the resources.

5. Resource management efficiency.

The Team experienced the resource management as efficient. The owners and management of the University were very committed to develop the University.

CONCLUSIONS

The criteria IV:1-2 are fulfilled only partly due to the notable deficiencies described above. **The criteria IV:3-5 are fulfilled.**

V. ACADEMIC STAFF

1. Quantity, qualification and experience of academic staff. Full-time and part-time personnel rate. Teaching workload. Qualification enhancement.

The academic staff of the University fulfils the formal criteria (in respect to quantity, qualification and experience) set for teachers at master level education. The proportion of full-time teachers should be higher because according to the Team's observation many of the part-time teachers seemed to be very busy and have tight commitments elsewhere. The University's efforts for enhancing the qualification of the staff seemed to be quite vague.

2. Research and other scholarly activities of academic staff.

The University does not have any notable research tradition. The Team was not provided with information of any substantial internationally recognized research activities or contributions. Plans for creating resources for research via external funding, for example, do not exist.

3. Staff election policy and regulations. Assessment of teaching staff. Staff review arrangement.

The University has an official "Policy of Open Competitive Search for Academic Personnel". The Team got, however, the impression that external expertise is perhaps used not enough in filling the vacancies. The University should consider foundation of a specific scientific committee for assessing the candidates' qualifications and making a proposal to the University Council for filling the post.

4. Sufficiency of teaching staff for curriculum accomplishment and development. Adequacy of complementary staff.

The University owns sufficiency in both teaching and administrative staff. Above the Team have expressed some reservations concerning the research qualifications of the teaching staff and commitment of some part-time teachers to the University.

CONCLUSIONS

The criteria V:1-2 are only partially fulfilled. The criteria V:3-4 are formally fulfilled but the practise should be made more transparent.

VI. STUDENTS

1. Size and structure of student intake; average admission level; deficiencies of pre-university education

The admission rate to the programme is 0.87 meaning that in practice all eligible students are admitted. As stated earlier, more transparency is needed also in student admission.

2. Students' motivation, expectations, guidance, counselling services, progress level.

According to the Team's observation, motivation and especially commitment to the University might be higher; the University clearly had difficulties in finding students for the meeting with the Team. The University should take into careful consideration its guidance and counselling services for guaranteeing the progress of the studies especially in the case of part-time (evening and distance) students.

3. Study load and learning conditions. Monitoring of Achievements

No new items to add here.

4. Activity of student bodies. Students' role in academic councils and in self-assessment.

The students are represented in the University Council. The students were also involved in the compiling of the self-evaluation report (a representative in the working group, feedback asked and utilized).

CONCLUSIONS

In spite of some remarks, **the criteria VI:1-4 can be regarded as fulfilled.**

VII. FEEDBACK AND QUALITY ASSURANCE

1. Existence of quality assurance system and its efficiency. Role of student feedback.

The University's quality assurance system is quite traditional. It consists of the annual planning process of the curriculum and feedback collected from students via questionnaires. A special attention is given to the reasons of exiting the University without graduation.

2. Contacts with potential employers' representatives and professional associations. Contacts with alumni. Analysis of obtained information.

These contacts seem to be more or less on an ad hoc basis.

3. Publication of adequate information about scientific and educational activity. Investigation of public opinion about university and study programme.

Information about scientific and educational activity of the University does exist but can not be regarded as very impressive. The Team was not provided with any information concerning investigations of public opinion about the University.

CONCLUSIONS

From the formal point of view, **the criteria VII:1-3 are fulfilled**. It is, however, clear that much can and shall be done on the way towards an established and transparent quality assurance system.

VIII. RESEARCH CONDITIONS AND LEVEL

The Team's unanimous opinion is that research, conditions for carrying out research and achievements in research are the points where the University should pay much more attention in the future. Only then will the use of the name 'University' be fully warranted. Basically Audentes University is this an 'applied higher education institution'. The main findings concerning the deficiencies and weak points in the research and stated earlier may be summarized as follows:

- University's general attitude towards research is not very strong
- Lack of infrastructure (library resources, personal offices for professors and other research staff)
- Lack of special funding (including from external sources) for research
- More attention should be paid on research qualification in filling the vacancies (a formal expert-based procedure is strongly recommended), and the procedure for the selection of the staff should become more transparent.

Part III

General Recommendations

In writing the report the Team has already given several recommendations for further improvement of the University's operation. They need not to be repeated here in detail but a conclusive list may still be listed:

- The University should pay more attention on the conformity of entrance requirements with the general HE regulations
- The University should start special measures for developing its library (collections, especially research-oriented material, reading room for students etc.)
- The University should create a plan for providing the full-time staff better working conditions (offices) at the University
- The Human Resource Management needs improvement and more transparency
- There is a need for a more developed Quality Assurance System
- There is an acute need to create a culture of research in the University
- The faculty being responsible for organizing the programmes in Business Administration should be called the Faculty of Business Administration instead of the name Faculty of Economics as used in the self-evaluation report (the Team became during the site visit convinced that the University is ready to do this).

Part IV

Accreditation Conclusions

Audentes University can be regarded as an established university (in the framework of an economy and educational markets in transition as is the case in Estonia today) when the education of bachelor degree and diploma students is concerned. Striving towards accredited education at the master level is a natural and even necessary phase for an institution of university status.

Audentes University has potential to become a real university offering accredited education at the master level. The implementation of the two master programmes (80 CP and 40 CP) is so recent that it is not yet the right time to make any final judgement for the University's ability to successfully and in a qualified way run these programmes. This is even more true when the reservations of the Team given above are taken into account. Therefore, the Team can recommend accreditation only on the conditional basis.

Part V

Recommendations

ADVICE ABOUT ACCREDITATION

The Committee assessed two programmes at the Audentes University.

In the opinion of the Committee the following accreditation advice is unanimously given:

7343917 Business Administration: Conditional accreditation

7343919 Business Administration: Conditional accreditation