

Report on the outcome of the procedure for the extension of the institutional accreditation (re-accreditation) of the Webster Vienna Private University

1 Subject of the application

The Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation Austria (AQ Austria) conducted a procedure on the extension of the institutional accreditation of the Webster Vienna Private University in accordance with § 24 Act on Quality Assurance in Higher Education (HS-QSG) BGBl I Nr. 74/2011 as amended in conjunction with § 2 Private Universities Act (PUG) BGBl. I Nr. 74/2011 as amended and § 16 of the Decree Accreditation of Private Universities 2019 (PU-AkkVO) as amended. In accordance with § 21 HS-QSG, AQ Austria publishes the following report on the outcome of the accreditation procedure:

2 Procedural steps

The accreditation procedure included the following procedural steps:

Procedural steps	Time
Application filed	30.03.2021
Formal examination of the application by the Secretariat	22.06.2021
Revised application received on	07.07.2021
Notification of applicant on completion of formal examination	04.08.2021
Appointment of experts by the Board	01.09.2021
Notification of applicant on appointment of experts	08.09.2021
Objection of applicant to decision on appointment of experts	09.09.2021
Decision of the Board on objection by the applicant to appointment of experts	22.09.2021
Appointment of a substitute expert	22.09.2021
Notification of applicant on appointment of a substitute expert	24.09.2021

First virtual preparatory meeting with expert group	22.10.2021
Second virtual preparatory meeting with expert group	07.12.2021
Submission of additional information by applicant before site-visit	07.12.2021
Site visit	07.-09.02.2022
Submission of additional information by applicant after site-visit	09.02.2022
Report of the expert group	10.06.2022
Expert report to applicant for comment	10.06.2022
Statement of costs sent to applicant	15.06.2022
Comment of applicant on expert report	24.06.2022
Comment of applicant on the expert report sent to the expert group	27.06.2022
Comment of applicant on cost statement	-
Experts' response to the comments on report by applicant	19.07.2022
Notification of applicant on unchanged expert report	02.08.2022

3 Accreditation decision

The Board of AQ Austria has decided to grant the application for extension of the institutional accreditation of the Webster Vienna Private University as private university for its location in Vienna for the duration of six years, as the accreditation requirements according to § 24 HS-QSG in conjunction with § 2 PUG and § 16 der PU-AkkVO 2019 are fulfilled under the condition of deficiencies to be emended.

The extension of the accreditation of the Webster Vienna Private University is granted according to § 24 (7) HS-QSG for another six years. The accreditation period ends with 13.01.2029. The accreditation includes following degree programmes:

Designation of degree programme	Type of programme	Study format	Total number of ECTS-credit	Length	Language of the programme	Academic Degree	Location	Student enrolment per cohort
Business Administration	Bachelor	VZ/BB	240	8	English	Bachelor of Science, BSc	Vienna	35
Management	Bachelor	VZ/BB	240	8	English	Bachelor of Arts, BA	Vienna	35
Management with an Emphasis in International Business	Bachelor	VZ/BB	240	8	English	Bachelor of Arts, BA	Vienna	35
Management with an Emphasis in Marketing	Bachelor	VZ/BB	240	8	English	Bachelor of Arts, BA	Vienna	35
International Relations	Bachelor	VZ/BB	240	8	English	Bachelor of Arts, BA	Wien	35

Psychology	Bachelor	VZ/BB	240	8	English	Bachelor of Arts, BA	Wien	35
Strategic Communication	Bachelor	VZ/BB	240	8	English	Bachelor of Arts, BA	Wien	35
Media Communication	Bachelor	VZ/BB	240	8	Englisch	Bachelor of Arts, BA	Vienna	-
Marketing	Master	VZ/BB	90	3	Englisch	Master of Science, MSc	Vienna	25
International Relations	Master	VZ/BB	90	3	English	Master of Arts, MA	Vienna	25
Business Administration	Master	VZ/BB	90	3	English	Master of Business Administration, MBA	Vienna	25
Psychology with an Emphasis in Counseling Psychology	Master	VZ/BB	120	4	English	Master of Arts, MA	Vienna	25
Finance	Master	VZ/BB	90	3	Englisch	Master of Science, MSc	Vienna	-

The bachelor degree programme „Media Communication“ and the master degree programme „Finance“ are due for teach-out and will be terminated as soon as the last enrolled students graduate. For the bachelor degree programme enrolments have been suspended by February 2020 and the programme will be definitively closed by the summer term 2023. For the master programme enrolments have been suspended starting with the summer term 2022 and the programme will be definitively closed by the summer term 2024. In this respect the private university must submit a corresponding application pursuant to § 26 (1) 5 Act on Quality Assurance in Higher Education (HS-QSG).

The Board deliberated the conditions proposed by the experts in their report of 10.06.2022 and decided to reformulate some of them, as, while all are relevant to quality assurance, not all can be considered deficiencies in the meaning defined by the Private Higher Education Act (PU-AkkVO 2019). Therefore some of the conditions proposed in the expert report were reformulated as recommendations. Thus, the conditions listed below differ from those proposed in the expert's report, attached as annex to this report.

The extension of the institutional accreditation of the Webster Vienna Private University (WVPU) is granted according to § 24 Abs. 9a HS-QSG under following conditions:

1. Within 24 months after the decision's entry into force, the private university will present proof of having developed a well-defined process, including a precise schedule for the development, introduction and implementation of doctoral degree programmes (§ 16 (2) 1 PU-AkkVO 2019 'Development Plan').
2. Within 24 months after the decision's entry into force, the private university will ensure that, to strengthen its autonomy, the internal stakeholders (academic and non-academic staff, students), so far involved in decision-making only informally and in an advisory capacity, will participate in decision-making within the university

- by way of formalized voting-rights and procedures. (§ 16 (3) 1 'Organization of the private university')
3. Within 24 months after the decision's entry into force, in order to strengthen academic self-governance, the private university will present proof of having enacted the right of the Senate, as representative body of the internal stakeholders, to participate in decision-making within the university, especially regarding:
 - a. the introduction, substantial amendment or termination of study programmes
 - b. the appointment of academic staff for the different chairs
 - c. the selection, appointment and dismissal of the rector
 - d. matters pertaining to internal organization subject to statutory regulation (§ 16 (3) 2 PU-AkkVO 2019 'Organisation of the university')
 4. Within 24 months after the decision's entry into force, the university presents proof that, in accordance with academic autonomy and while maintaining the Webster-Network's specific elements, the university ensures the participation of its teaching staff and the relevant academic committees (Department, Senate) in the decisions pertaining to the conception and performance of teaching. (§ 16 (3) 2 PU-AkkVO 2019 'Organisation of the university')
 5. Within 24 months after the decision's entry into force, the university certifies that formal regulations have been enacted, ensuring the rights of students to participate in decisions at all levels (degree programme, department, university). (§ 16 (3) 2 PU-AkkVO 2019 'Organisation of the university')
 6. Within 24 months after the decision's entry into force, the university presents proof that adequate measures have been taken to ensure the participation of all relevant stakeholders in the process of further development of study programmes. This condition is related to the condition § 16 (3) 1-2 (§ 16 (4) 2 PU-AkkVO 2019 ('Study offer'))
 7. Within 24 months after the decision's entry into force, the university presents proof that quantitative goals for enhancing its research activities as well as adequate measures for surveying their implementation have been set. (§ 16 (6) 1 PU-AkkVO 2019 'Research and Development')
 8. Within 24 months after the decision's entry into force, the private university will present proof of having taken measures to involve all academic staff members in specific research and development activities. (§ 16 (6) 4 PU-AkkVO 2019 ('Research and development'))
 9. Within 24 months after the decision's entry into force, the private university will present proof that its staff planning for the next 6 years is in line with the goals related to the enhancement of its research output and the introduction of a doctoral programme mentioned in its development plan and ensures a corresponding increase of its permanent academic staff. (§ 16 (7) 1 PU-AkkVO 2019 'Personal')
 10. Within 12 months after the decision's entry into force, the private university will present proof of adequate measures to ensure that the now vacant positions in the Department of Psychology are filled. (§ 16 (7) 3 PU-AkkVO 2019 'Staff')

11. Within 24 months after the decision's entry into force, the private university will present proof of having introduced a regulation that defines transparently the qualifications needed to teach different types of courses. (§ 16 (7) 4 PU-AkkVO 2019 'Staff')
12. Within 12 months after the decision's entry into force, the private university will present proof of having implemented adequate measures aimed at securing the time needed by its permanent academic staff for research, including a procedure for granting research-sabbaticals that guarantees access for every staff member without affecting the teaching load of the remaining ones. (§ 16 (7) 5 PU-AkkVO 2019 'Staff')
13. Within 24 months after the decision's entry into force, the private university will present proof of having adapted its procedures for the selection of academic staff so as to ensure that research-performance has a greater weight and will contribute to the universities intended enhancement of its research-performance. (see also the condition § 16 (6) 4 PU-AkkVO 2019). (§ 16 (7) 6 PU-AkkVO 2019 'Staff')
14. Within 24 months after the decision's entry into force, the university will present proof that the co-decision of the Senate in matters pertaining to the appointment of professors has been institutionalized. (see also the condition § 16 (3) 2). (§ 16 (7) 6 PU-AkkVO 2019 'Staff')
15. Within 12 months after the decision's entry into force, the private university will submit a revised financial plan, that, in the first place, adequately accounts for the introduction of a new doctoral programme as well as the enhancement of research and, in the second place, reflects the negative development of student numbers in recent years. (§ 16 (8) PU-AkkVO 2019 ('Funding'))

The Federal Minister of Education, Science and Research approved the decision on December 14th 2022.

4 Annexes

- Final expert report from 10.06.2022
- Comment on the expert report by Webster Vienna Private University from 24.06.2022

Expert Report on the Accreditation Procedure concerning the extension of the institutional accreditation (re-accreditation) of Webster Vienna Private University

pursuant to § 7 of the Accreditation Regulation for Private Universities 2019 (PU-AkkVO)

Vienna, 10/06/2022

1 Basic principles for the procedure.....	3
2 Short information on the accreditation procedure.....	4
3 Preliminary notes of the experts.....	5
4 Review and assessment based on the assessment criteria stipulated in the PU-AkkVO.....	6
4.1 Assessment criterion § 16 (1): Profile and objectives	6
4.2 Assessment criterion § 16 (2) 1 to 2: Development plan.....	7
4.3 Assessment criterion § 16 (3) 1 to 2: Organisation of the private university	9
4.4 Assessment criterion § 16 (4) 1 to 2: Course offerings	14
4.5 Assessment criterion § 16 (5) 1 to 3: Counselling and support for students	17
4.6 Assessment criterion § 16 (6) 1 to 7: Research and development	18
4.7 Assessment criterion § 16 (7) 1 to 10: Staff.....	24
4.8 Assessment criterion § 16 (8): Funding	28
4.9 Assessment criterion § 16 (9): Infrastructure	30
4.10 Assessment criterion § 16 (10): Co-operation	31
4.11 Assessment criterion § 16 (11) 1 to 4: Quality management system	32
4.12 Assessment criterion § 16 (12): Information	34
5 Summary and final evaluation	35

1 Basic principles for the procedure

The Austrian higher education system

To date, the Austrian higher education system comprises:

- 22 public universities; including the Danube University Krems, a public university for post-graduate continuing education;
- 16 private universities, run by nationally accredited private entities;
- 21 universities of applied sciences, run by state-subsidized entities organized under private law or by nationally accredited public entities;
- the university colleges of teacher education, run by nationally accredited public or private entities;
- the philosophical-theological higher education institutions, run by the Catholic Church;
- the Institute of Science and Technology – Austria, which focuses its tasks on the advancement and appreciation of new fields of research and post-graduate training in the form of Ph.D. and postdoc programs.

In the winter semester of 2021/2022, 288,448 students were enrolled at public universities (incl. the Danube University Krems). Furthermore, 59,673 students were enrolled at universities of applied sciences and 17,009 students at private universities.¹

External quality assurance

Pursuant to the Act on Quality Assurance in Higher Education (HS-QSG), public universities shall perform an audit procedure for the certification of their internal quality management system every seven years. There are no legal or financial consequences linked to the decision on certification.

Private universities require institutional accreditation conducted by AQ Austria every six years. After twelve years of uninterrupted accreditation, the accreditation may also be awarded for twelve years. Interim degree programs and certificate university programs for further education leading to a degree program also require accreditation.

Following the six years of initial institutional accreditation, universities of applied sciences must be re-accredited. After that, they pass on to the audit system. However, the accreditation is linked to a positive decision on certification in the audit procedure. Before degree programs can be offered, they must be accredited once.

Accreditation of private universities and their degree programs

In order to be licensed as a higher education institution in Austria, private universities require initial institutional accreditation, which must be renewed on a regular basis. In addition to institutional accreditation, newly established degree programs must be accredited once before they may be offered by a private university. The Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation Austria (AQ Austria) is responsible for carrying out accreditation procedures.

¹As of 15.11.2021 for public universities and universities of applied science and as of Winter 2020 for private universities. Data source: Statistics Austria/unidata. Contrary to the data of the public universities, the student numbers of the universities of applied sciences do not include non-degree seeking students. 266,380 degree students were enrolled at the public universities in the winter semester 2021/22.

The accreditation procedures are carried out in accordance with AQ Austria's Accreditation Regulation for Private Universities 2019 (PU-AkkVO). Furthermore, the agency's procedures are based on the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area.²

The AQ Austria appoints experts for reviewing accreditation applications. Based on the application documents and a site visit at the applicant institution, the experts draft a joint written expert report. The Board of the AQ Austria then decides upon the accreditation, based on the expert report and takes into consideration the higher education institution's comments on the expert report. If the statutory prerequisites for accreditation are met and the qualitative requirements fulfilled, the degree programs shall be accredited by official notification.

Before its entry into force, the official notification of the Board shall be subject to approval by the incumbent Federal Minister. After the procedure has been completed, a report on the outcome of the accreditation procedure as well as the expert report shall be published on the websites of AQ Austria and the applicant institution. Personal data and those parts of the report that disclose funding sources as well as business and operational secrets shall be exempt from publication.

The Act on Quality Assurance in Higher Education (HS-QSG) and the Private Universities Act (PUG) form the legal basis for the accreditation of degree programs at private universities.

2 Short information on the accreditation procedure

Information on the applicant institution	
Applicant institution	Webster Vienna Private University, Short: WVPU
Legal status	Association (Verein)
Initial accreditation	09.02.2001
Last extension of accreditation	2016
Site	Vienna
Number of students	512 (2019/2020)
Information on the degree study programs	
Bachelor programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bachelor of Science in Business Administration (BSc) • Bachelor of Arts in Strategic Communication (BA) • Bachelor of Arts in Management with an Emphasis in Marketing or International Business (BA) • Bachelor of Arts in International Relations (BA) • Bachelor of Arts in Psychology (BA)
Master programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Master of Science in Finance (MSc) • Master of Science in Marketing (MSc) • Master of Business Administration (MBA) • Master of Arts in International Relations (MA)

² [Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area \(ESG\)](#)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Master of Arts in Psychology with an emphasis in Counseling Psychology (MA)
--	---

Webster Vienna Private University applied for accreditation on 31 March 2021. In the decisions taken on 01.09.2021 and 22.09.2021, the Board of AQ Austria appointed the following experts for the review of the accreditation application, in alphabetical order:

Name	Function/Institution	Field of expertise
Prof. Dr. Matthias S. Fifka	Chair for Strategic and Values Oriented Management, Friedrich-Alexander-University Erlangen-Nürnberg	Expert with scientific qualification
Prof. Dr. Sabina Pauen	Chair for Developmental and Biological Psychology and Principal Investigator for Developmental Psychology, Heidelberg University	Expert with scientific qualification
Prof. Dr. Bernhard Stahl	Chair of International Politics Passau University	Expert with scientific qualification
Sonja Christiane Wind, BA	Department of Communication, University of Vienna	Student Expert
Mag. ^a Dr. ⁱⁿ Katalin Szondy	Head of Service Unit Higher Education Development, St. Pölten University of Applied Science	Expert with a qualification in quality management

Between 08.-09.02.2022, the expert panel and representatives of AQ Austria conducted a site visit at Webster Vienna Private University.

3 Preliminary notes of the experts

In the course of preparations for re-accreditation, WVPU prepared a high-quality and comprehensive application, in which all contents corresponding to the areas according to the HS-QSG are presented to the expert team.

Moreover, a good review of the re-accreditation in 2016, the implementation steps addressing the conditions imposed, and the further development to enhance the quality of WVPU were provided. During the well-prepared visit to WVPU, the expert team was able to get an excellent impression of the location and the university life in all its facets. The selection of partners for the respective discussion rounds was highly appropriate, and an open discussion atmosphere prevailed. The fact that leaders from the international Webster network also took part in the discussion rounds demonstrated how important the Vienna location is to the entire network.

The enthusiasm of the students and alumni for their university was a particularly pleasing detail in the course of the talks.

4 Review and assessment based on the assessment criteria stipulated in the PU-AkkVO

Assessment criterion § 16 (1): Profile and objectives

Profile and objectives

The private university has an institutional profile and has derived objectives suited to the university in the fields of teaching and learning as well as research and development.

The private university has described its institutional profile, emphasizing the dedication to ensure extensive student services and a good ratio between students and faculty in the classroom. This focus is also coherently reflected in the mission of the private university that centers on "personalized education, small classes, and mentorship." The vision in turn is consistent with the private university's emphasis on a global approach to teaching and with regard to the desired mindset of faculty and students alike. However, the vision to "solidify its position in Austria and Central Europe as an internationally competitive institution of higher education" alone is not sufficient.

The approach to education is described extensively and rests on five pillars, which are in line with the institutional profile. The aspects "individual accountability" and "social responsibility" are not described further and require a better linkage to the profile. The other aspects consistently refer to the student-centered approach, the commitment to diversity and an international environment as well as the integration of theory and practice.

Though an effort is being made to equally stress teaching and research, in the expert panel's opinion, the research dimension falls short in the description, as demonstrated by the fact that five principles underlying the private university's approach to education are listed, but no comparable list can be found for the approach to research in the profile.

Objectives for teaching, learning, and research have been derived and are consistent with the defined institutional profile. The objectives center around five central aspects:

- academic freedom
- encouragement of scholarship and personal improvement as well as life-long learning
- transfer-oriented approach to apply acquired knowledge
- generation and dissemination of applicable research
- advancing knowledge-based public and corporate decision making

According to the expert panel, what is clearly missing in the institutional profile is a delineation of the disciplines/programs of study offered. It is mentioned that "eight undergraduate and five graduate programs in the areas of Business and Management (including Finance and Marketing), International Relations, Media Communications, and Psychology" are offered. However, there is no explanation of the value created by this range of programs for students and the private university itself. It needs to be laid out why this selection is offered, which potential synergies exist between the disciplines in question, and how they contribute to and are aligned with the institutional profile.

Overall, the expert panel got the impression that the private university provides a solid institutional profile from which it derives objectives for teaching, learning and research. This profile could be sharpened by providing a stronger explanation of the role of research as well as a depiction of the value created by the program range offered and the link of individual disciplines to the profile.

The experts consider the criterion to be **fulfilled**.

Recommendation: The expert panel recommends to sharpen the institutional profile by explaining the role of research more profoundly and by depicting the value created by the program portfolio offered. The composition of the program portfolio which is also discussed in the section on "course offerings" should be explained and linked to the institutional profile.

Assessment criterion § 16 (2) 1 to 2: Development plan

Development plan

1. The private university has a development plan which is in line with its profile and objectives and which specifies longer-term objectives and strategies for their achievement. The development plan describes how the defined objectives can be achieved with the adopted measures and allocated resources within the six years following the extension of institutional accreditation. The development plan also comprises measures relating to gender equality as well as to the advancement of women.

A development plan for the period from 2022 to 2028 is available. WVPU reports how different recommendations of the last reviewer team have been addressed. It provides a list of all important changes and achievements that have been made since the last re-accreditation. The development plan is consistent with WVPU's profile and goals. It identifies longer-term goals and strategies for achieving them; it also includes KPIs assigned to the goals that allow for appropriate monitoring. The development plan includes sections on the assessment areas of the *Decree on the Accreditation of Private Universities 2019*. According to the application document, WVPU strives to open up new, interdisciplinary research fields and plans to align its study program with these fields.

The development plan highlights the goal to expand the current program portfolio. New programs will be chosen based on an internal market analysis, and cover topics, ranging from IT to Public Health.

Webster Vienna Private University is a private university on its way to the 3rd cycle. It offers bachelor's and master's degree programs and aims to develop two doctoral programs. The development plan includes a rough cost calculation and schedule for the implementation of the doctoral programs. As emphasized during the site visit, the feasibility of the doctoral programs depends not only on the definition of specific research topics but also, in particular, on a convincing plan on how to provide enough human resources to promote research-oriented teaching and applications for external grants. The rapid development of high-quality doctoral programs is only possible if well-connected professors who are recognized as experts in their respective fields can devote part of their work time to supervising doctoral students.

As became evident during the site visit, internal and external faculty members seem to be highly engaged in teaching activities and the intensive supervision of BA- and MA-students. This leaves open the question how they can find the time to write grant proposals, conduct studies and supervise PhD students. Even though WVPU seems to be aware of this problem and has already implemented regulations that allow for a temporary reduction of the teaching load for individual staff members (including sabbaticals), only very few faculty members actually have benefited from these measures so far.

In the expert panel's opinion, the private university has a development plan that is in line with its profile and objectives and specifies longer-term objectives and strategies for their achievement. The development plan describes how the defined objectives can be achieved with

the adopted measures and allocated resources within the six years following the extension of institutional accreditation. The development plan also comprises measures relating to gender equality as well as to the advancement of women.

According to the expert panel, the criterion to be only **partially fulfilled**.

Conditions

The experts recommend to the Board of AQ Austria to impose the following conditions: within 24 months, WVPU establishes a well-defined process including a milestone plan for the development, introduction, and implementation of the doctoral programs; as part of the milestone plan, WVPU has a comprehensive needs-acceptance and coherence analysis conducted by an external institution to ensure the implementation of the planned doctoral programs.

Recommendation 1: The expert panel recommends to carry out a comprehensive demand-, acceptance-, and coherence analysis in order to identify the topics for expanding the current program portfolio. With respect to the study program in Psychology, the expert panel recommends focusing on areas that complement the general profile of WVPU, thus putting more emphasis on social, organizational, and political psychology, than on counseling, as this would allow WVPU to (a) fill an important market niche, and (b) create additional cross-links with the other disciplines represented at WVPU, hence promoting the declared developmental goal of the institution.

Recommendation 2: The expert team recommends the introduction of measures that provide the private university's faculty with the opportunity to develop a unique research profile that attracts PhD students. Furthermore, the expert team recommends putting more emphasis on research-based teaching, as doctoral students need to be developed accordingly.

Development plan

2. The private university uses a regular process of monitoring the achievement of objectives and adapting the development plan as defined.

In the application for re-accreditation, WVPU describes the regular review of the development plan with the involvement of all relevant stakeholders. There is both a process and a corresponding timeline for strategic planning and performance agreements.

The concrete and ongoing monitoring is described as follows:

WVPU maintains a centrally organized, regular process of monitoring the achievement of its objectives and adapts the developments accordingly in weekly meetings of the Executive Board (EB).

The Executive Board annually negotiates a performance agreement with the University Council, amending and fusing the performance agreements of all of its academic departments and major administrative units, in order to guarantee that the EB's consolidated monitoring process functions smoothly, the EB relies on fixed points of information on, for example, enrollment, teaching, and student progress (through the Academic Services Office), external funding proposals (through the Research Services Office), student retention (through the Student Resource Center), and university finance (through the Finance Office).

The EB also receives various regularly scheduled inputs in the areas of teaching and learning, ongoing research, and human resources that in addition to regular monitoring are vital to guaranteeing quality assurance, measuring performance, and generating reports.

Also highly relevant to overall monitoring by the EB are regularly scheduled meetings with the University Senate, Works Council, and administrative units, weekly meetings with academic department heads, which have both a monitoring and implementation function, and once-per-semester town halls with students to guarantee that all stakeholders are informed of the university's progress in achieving its objectives as well as to provide students the opportunity to address issues that affect the implementation of the university's goals.

In order to monitor the specific progress of goals related to research, teaching, and service of its faculty, the Executive Board uses a system of individual and academic unit-level performance agreements. Faculty performance agreements are reviewed twice a year to monitor whether the university is meeting its goals with regard to research output, faculty well-being, and faculty-led service to the community.

The processes described are in accordance with common standards and are suitable to ensure the monitoring of the development plan.

The experts consider the criterion to be **fulfilled**.

Assessment criterion § 16 (3) 1 to 2: Organization of the private university

Organization of the private university

1. Based on a balanced system of academic self-administrational, governance and strategic management functions, the private university's organizational structure ensures the autonomy of the universities as well as the freedom of science and its teaching, the freedom of artistic activity, and the dissemination of the arts and their teaching, while taking into account the interests of the legal entity.

WVPU demonstrates an unusual structure in the form of an "association" (Bildungsverein) through which the private university is owned by another university - Webster University St. Louis. The German title of the association, "Friends of the University", is potentially misleading, considering that the "friends" are also the owners. The association template is reflected in a rather unusual top-heavy organizational structure. At its top is the "General Assembly" whose members are the four most senior officers of the private university's mother organization, Webster University in St. Louis.

As stated on the homepage of WVPU, all key decisions rest within the hands of the General Assembly: "It is responsible for approving structural and strategic decisions with financial implications, including development plans, annual budgets, annual reports and financial statements, changes to the Constitution and Articles of Association, and the appointment and termination of members of the Executive Board and the University Council." The latter aspects indicate that it wields full control over the University Council and the Executive Board.

The University Council in turn "monitors the management of the university operations in the capacity of the Supervisory Board of the Association. It consists of three members who hold or held responsible positions in society, especially in academic, cultural or business life, and, due to their exceptional knowledge and experience, contribute to achieving the goals and tasks of the university". The University Council, also because of its dependence on the General

Assembly, is not independent in any way in its supervisory work, and has a strongly limited scope of influence.

In the decision-making structure, the "Executive Board" ranks third. It consists of the Director, corresponding to the function of "Rektor" in the Austrian higher education sector, the Associate Director, and the Head of Finance and Administration, both comparable to the position of "Vizerektor". Its "director" is entirely dependent on the St. Louis institutions, since he is elected by the University Council and appointed by the General Assembly.

The vertical and hierarchical organizational approach that is characteristic of the relationship between the mother organization in St. Louis and WVPU as an affiliate can also be observed within WVPU itself. The director wields enormous decision-making power vis-à-vis the other Vienna institutions such as the University Senate, the Advisory Board, the Working Group on Equal Opportunities, the Works Council, the Student Government, as well as the different Academic Units. For instance, the University Senate is composed of all stakeholders of the Vienna campus including students, non-permanent staff, and the departments. Yet its function is merely advisory commenting on the Executive Board's decisions.

In sum, a balance in decision-making power and control cannot be attested for WVPU. Instead, the organizational structure is characterized by a strictly vertical command chain. While the director has no formal decision-making power regarding major strategic decisions in relation to the mother organization, such decision-making power is concentrated to a degree that must be regarded as unhealthy within WVPU itself. Though this might ensure quick and swift decision-making, it eliminates legitimacy and a participatory decision-making process including the different stakeholder groups. The bottom-up process is ineffective in a formal sense, taking the mere advisory functions of the Senate into account. Therefore, the private university's responsiveness, research autonomy, freedom of science, teaching, etc. largely depend on the personality of the director and his respective goodwill. Its strategic direction, program design, financial resource base, and self-administration in turn are fully dependent on the mother organization in St. Louis.

In the expert panel's opinion, the private university's current system of academic self-administration, governance, and strategic management as well as the private university's organizational structure do not permit the freedom of science and teaching as well as the necessary autonomy of the university.

The experts consider the criterion to be **only partially fulfilled**.

Conditions

The expert panel recommends that the Board of AQ Austria imposes the following conditions (specific requirements regarding individual bodies of the private university are laid down in chapter 2):

1. Establish a balanced organizational structure that reduces the concentration of power currently lying in the hands of only a few bodies to ensure the necessary degree of academic self-governance and autonomy. At the moment, there is a strong overlap between the Association and the internal organization of the private university, as the Supervisory Board of the Association also serves as the University Council of the private university, the Executive Board of the Association also serves as the Executive Board of the private university ('Rektorat' in the Austrian higher education sector), while the Executive Board's chairperson also serves as Director of the private university. In order to ensure such a balanced organizational structure, there should be no personal overlap between the Executive Board of the Association and the Executive Board of the private university. People represented on one of the boards should be banned from

simultaneous representation on the other. Likewise, the roles of Executive Board Chairperson and Director of the private university should also be separated.

2. Assure the freedom of science and teaching by granting more autonomy to the private university and strengthening the participation possibilities and involvement in the decision-making of internal stakeholder groups, such as academic as well as non-academic staff and students. These internal stakeholders, in particular the Senate, should be equipped with more avenues of participation in decision-making, first and foremost institutionalized voting rights, as laid out in the conditions suggested at the end of the following chapter.

Organization of the private university

2. The organizational structure and the responsibilities of the private university have been laid down in a statute, which governs the following issues as a minimum:

- a. the guiding principles and tasks of the private university;*
- b. the private university's bodies, their appointment, and tasks;*
- c. staff categories and set designations for the scientific or artistic staff, respectively;*
- d. gender equality and the advancement of women;*
- e. assurance of student co-determination in academic matters;*
- f. regulations governing the degree programs, in particular admission and examination regulations as well as the heads of studies;*
- g. guidelines for academic honors (if applicable);*
- h. guidelines for the appointment of professors and the procedures of awarding.*

The organizational structure and tasks of WVPU are laid down in the current bylaws. In the following, the expert panel addresses the individual aspects related to the organizational structure and the responsibilities of the private university that have been laid down in a statute, in detail:

2a. the guiding principles and tasks of the private university

The organizational structure and the responsibilities of the different institutions within WVPU have been laid down in a statute including extensive bylaws, which are part of the application. Overall, five guiding principles and seven tasks have been defined. Both are clearly stated. The extensive teaching orientation of the staff as well as the far-reaching student support offered by the administration serve as an overall guiding principle. This focus is clearly reflected by the private university's mission: "Webster Vienna Private University's mission is to generate knowledge and prepare students for success through a globally oriented and personalized education, small classes, and mentorship." This was impressively underlined in the exchanges with respective stakeholder groups during the site visit. Students and alumni alike provided very positive feedback, emphasizing the private university's dedication to teaching. Thus, it can be concluded that the guiding principles and the tasks of the private university are clearly defined and laid down in the statute.

2b. the private university's bodies, their appointment, and tasks

The private university's bodies, their appointment, and tasks have mostly been described in sufficient detail.

The Association's work ('Bildungsverein') is determined by three institutions:

- 1) *Generalversammlung* (General Assembly): four Webster University senior executives ex officio.

2) *Aufsichtsrat* (Supervisory Board): no fewer than three past or present holders of responsible positions in society, especially in academic, cultural, or business life.

3) *Vorstand* (Executive Board): no fewer than three members filling the positions of chairperson, vice-chairperson, secretary, and treasurer.

There is substantial overlap with the internal organization of the private university since the Supervisory Board of the Association also serves as the University Council of WVPU, the Executive Board of the Association also serves as the Executive Board ('Rektorat' in the Austrian higher education sector), and the Executive Board's chairperson also serves as Director of the private university. Thus, there is a concentration of power in the hands of a few bodies.

Other bodies are:

- the Advisory Board that serves in a counseling role to the Director.
- the academic units of WVPU, that may be organized in different forms including departments, institutes, centers, or programs. The heads of these units are responsible for overseeing the delivery of academic programs (encompassing teaching, research, and service) and reviewing and recommending reforms.
- the heads of administrative units who are responsible for operational support.
- the University Senate represents the interests of faculty, scientific support and administrative staff, and students and serves as a consultative and commenting body.
- the Student Government Association represents the interests of the students and serves as a consultative body.
- the Works Council, consisting of four elected employee representatives, consults with the Executive Board.

The appointment and tasks of all bodies are sufficiently described. Nevertheless, especially the Senate lacks the powers a university senate should have according to the regulations for private universities in Austria. Likewise, the Student Government Association elected by the student body only has a consulting function, but cannot take any formally institutionalized influence.

In particular, the senate of the private university is not able to wield the necessary influence to ensure the self-governance and autonomy of the private university. The expert panel has found insufficient decision-making powers of the Senate in matters of:

- the introduction, substantial modification, and abolishment of study programs
- the appointment of faculty on the levels of assistant, associate, and full professor
- the appointment and dismissal of the Director
- matters of internal organization that need to be regulated through the private university's bylaws

Overall, the Senate's influence is limited to suggestions or the "expression of opinions" but does not include the power to make decisions or participate in decision-making to the necessary extent.

2c. staff categories and set designations for the scientific or artistic staff, respectively

The recruitment of scientific staff follows a fixed procedure and is carried out by a designated selection committee that is appointed by the Director in most cases. Only in the case of full professors, the appointment is handled by the Senate. The procedure entails interviews, research presentations, and a mock lecture or seminar. Publications, research grants, and the research track record overall are not explicitly mentioned in the recruitment criteria. Professorial positions have to be approved by the General Council. Job descriptions and recruitment of the adjunct staff were appreciated in an external report in 2020.

2d. gender equality and the advancement of women

Gender equality and the advancement of women have been laid down in the statute. They are also part of the private university's development plan for 2022 to 2028. Goals with regard to the advancement of women were defined after respective requirements were placed on the private university in the last accreditation procedure. However, the respective goals have not been met. Moreover, in some departments such as IR, the under-representation of non-male permanent staff is obvious. The site-visit also did not reveal any specific instruments, programs, or initiatives regarding the recruitment and career development of women. In conclusion, measures to strengthen gender equality and the advancement of women are rather weak at the moment.

2e. assurance of student co-determination in academic matters

On a formal level, student "co-determination" is poorly developed, as the student council is only able to bring forward concerns and converse with the Executive Board, and in particular the Director. Since the Senate also does not have any meaningful influence on important decisions so far, there is also no possibility for the students to wield influence through the Senate. Instead, student concerns are taken care of in an informal way, which - based on the impressions gained from the interviews with students and alumni during the site visit - seems to work sufficiently from the students' perspective. This, however, depends entirely on the goodwill of the executive board and the director, leading to a lack of institutionalization.

2f. regulations governing the degree programs, in particular admission and examination regulations, as well as the heads of studies

While the Executive Board reviews and oversees the degree programs on a regular basis, the Department Heads assist in course planning. Remarkably, new study programs have to be approved by the St. Louis institutions, which is detrimental to academic autonomy. Overall, the expert panel has found that the current structures and processes do not permit the necessary autonomy of the private university with regard to the design of degree programs and their respective modules.

2g. guidelines for academic honors

The award of academic honors is extensively described and laid out in necessary detail.

The experts consider the criterion to be **only partially fulfilled**.

Conditions: Except for the guidelines for academic honors, all other aspects mentioned in § 16 (3) 2 need improvement. The expert panel thus recommends to the Board of AQ Austria the imposition of following conditions:

1. The position of the Senate as the representative body of the various internal stakeholder groups has to be strengthened in order to ensure academic self-governance and academic autonomy. It has to be laid down in the private university's bylaws that the Senate is actively involved in decision-making processes and has to give its formal consent regarding all matters of academic governance, in particular
 - a. the introduction, substantial modification, and abolishment of study programs
 - b. the search and appointment of faculty on the levels of assistant, associate, and full professor
 - c. the search, appointment, and dismissal of the Director
 - d. matters of internal organization that need to be regulated through the private university's bylaws

2. To avoid the Senate being bypassed, its active involvement and its consent in the matters described shall be documented in protocols signed by the individual members of the Senate.
3. The design of degree programs and the respective modules are decided and administered by the departments in charge and not prescribed by the St. Louis organization.
4. Beyond the students' representation in the Senate, student co-determination should be institutionalized, possibly through fixed meetings per semester or similar formats.

Recommendation: In addition to these conditions, the expert panel recommends that the private university takes further measures to strengthen gender equality and the advancement of women.

Assessment criterion § 16 (4) 1 to 2: Course offerings

Course offerings

1. The private university offers a minimum of two bachelor programs with at least one subsequent master program. Diploma programs that have already been accredited at the date of entry into force of this regulation, shall be treated as master programs.

The private university currently offers eight Bachelor programs (one phasing out) in Business and Management (4), Psychology (1), Strategic Communication (1), and International Relations (1). In addition, five master programs complement the course offerings (3 in Business, 1 in Psychology, 1 in IR). (For specifications regarding documentation, contents, and module descriptions, see below).

The experts consider the criterion to be **fulfilled**.

Course offerings

2. The private university shall ensure that their degree programs fulfill the criteria for the accreditation of degree programs. For this purpose, the private university regularly applies its defined processes for the enhancement of degree programs, which involve the relevant stakeholder groups. These processes and their outcome are documented for the current accreditation period with regard to the following characteristics:

a. Bachelor and master programs

aa. The profile and the intended learning outcomes of the degree program have been clearly defined. They include scientific and/or artistic competencies, personal skills, and social competencies, they meet the professional requirements and are in accordance with the respective level of the National Qualifications Framework. The contents and structure of the curriculum ensure that the intended learning outcomes are achieved, while combining research (research and development and/or advancement and appreciation of the arts) and teaching. As regards regulated professions, the private university shall furthermore describe how it is ensured that the preconditions for an access to those professions are met.

bb. The workload related to the individual modules ensures that the intended learning outcomes can be achieved within the stipulated duration of studies, and in case of part-time degree programs takes into account any professional activity. The ECTS is applied correctly.

a. Bachelor and master programs

aa. The profile and the intended learning outcomes of the degree program have been clearly defined. They include scientific and/or artistic competencies, personal skills, and social competencies, they meet the professional requirements and are in accordance with the respective level of the National Qualifications Framework. The contents and structure of the curriculum ensure that the intended learning outcomes are achieved, while combining research (research and development and/or advancement and appreciation of the arts) and teaching. As regards regulated professions, the private university shall furthermore describe how it is ensured that the preconditions for an access to those professions are met.

WVPU has a quality-assured control loop, with numerous feedback loops, for the development and revision of its study programs. The regular revision of current study programs is included as a process in the application for re-accreditation.

From the discussions during the site visit and the documents provided, it can be seen that the private university has standardized curriculum descriptions and standardized modules that ensure interchangeability across the entire Webster network, which is very welcome in terms of network activities (student and staff mobility). At the same time, this standardization and the fact that there is no curricular commission in Vienna (as is usual for other university senates) contribute significantly to the fact that the curricula are designed without the necessary flexibility. There is very little room for updating the content and especially for implementing the topics relevant in the European Higher Education Area, but also for those topics that concern the European labor market. Due to the largely standardized module descriptions taken from the US curricula, students are given little opportunity to adopt different perspectives or to examine topics from different angles. Therefore, as formulated in §16 (3) (point 2, 2f in particular), more autonomous decision-making is required in Vienna in general and within the Departments in particular.

Basically, the description of the study programs complies with national and international requirements. After the last re-accreditation, the programs were revised in accordance with the specifications of the EHEA, in particular with regard to workload/studyability, and, comply with the specifications of the program accreditation. All programs have a so-called common core; the teaching of common values creates a good bond between students and the private university and also a good cohesion between students in different disciplines.

The module handbooks must be developed with constructive alignment in mind. In conversations with lecturers as well as with students and graduates, a pronounced satisfaction with the core business, teaching, could be determined. At the same time, it also became apparent that although intensive support in the small groups is guaranteed, there is relatively little didactic methodological diversity. Particularly when considering the intention to transform WVPU from a teaching-focused institution into a research-oriented institution, appropriate didactic concepts have to be implemented. For the introduction of the students to the independent development of questions, the corresponding research-based didactics are also required.

The profile and the learning outcomes of the study programs are clearly defined and correspond to the national and European requirements in many areas. The expert team was able to convince itself of the student-centered orientation in the discussions with WVPU. However, little flexibility was found in the highly standardized curricula. The orientation of the portfolio and related plans are not appropriately secured.

The current range of study programs is already very diverse; in the course of the discussions during the on-site visit to WVPU, a significant portfolio expansion was announced. In terms of the further development and expansion of the program portfolio, an external portfolio analysis must be carried out in order to appropriately secure the need and acceptance of the planned study programs. In doing so, as also laid out in the criterion on the organization of the private university, the Senate must be given the opportunity to autonomously co-decide on the establishment of the study programs in accordance with the findings of the external analysis, e.g. by using a curricular commission or the establishment of a working group for curricular further development, taking into account and preserving the special elements of the curricula in the Webster network.

The experts consider the criterion to be only **partially fulfilled**.

Conditions

The expert panel recommends the Board of AQ Austria to impose the following conditions: In terms of the further development and expansion of the program portfolio as well as for securing the acceptance of the planned study programs, an external portfolio analysis must be carried out. In doing so, as also laid out in the criterion on the organization of the private university, the Senate in Vienna must be given the privilege to autonomously co-decide on the establishment of the study programs in accordance with the findings of the external analysis mentioned above at 16 (3) 2, e.g. by using a curricular commission or the establishment of a working group for curricular further development, taking into account and preserving the special elements of the curricula in the Webster network.

Recommendation 1: The expert panel recommends a comprehensive revision of the module handbooks, taking the constructive alignment into account. To this end, a working group for the quality enhancement of teaching should be convened, which can also support the senate and a curriculum commission with recommendations.

Recommendation 2: The expert panel recommends the creation of continuing education programs for permanent faculty and, if necessary, for external faculty as well, in order to anchor didactic methodological diversity in the study programs.

a. Bachelor and master programs

bb. The workload related to the individual modules ensures that the intended learning outcomes can be achieved within the stipulated duration of studies, and in case of part-time degree programs takes into account any professional activity. The ECTS is applied correctly.

The European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) is correctly applied. One ECTS unit corresponds to a workload of 25 h. The workload associated with each module per semester is 30 ECTS and therefore 750 h. The students also reported no excessive workload during the site visit. So, the workload related to the individual modules ensures that the intended learning outcomes can be achieved within the stipulated duration of studies.

The expert team was able to get a good picture of the permeability of the study programs, especially in conversations with graduates it was clearly established that admission to study programs outside of the private university is possible without any problems, furthermore, the graduates also reported the problem-free creditability/recognition of the competencies acquired at the private university in further study programs at other universities.

The experts consider the criterion to be **fulfilled**.

Assessment criterion § 16 (5) 1 to 3: Counselling and support for students

Counselling and support for students

1. The private university provides adequate support structures on the subjects and relating to the organization of studies as well as psychosocial counselling for students.

As demonstrated in the application documents, WVPU provides its students with a wide range of support structures both in academic and non-academic matters. In the first area, the private university established several services to help students succeed academically: the Learning Support Services (LSS), faculty advising, Language Center (LC), Quant Center and Library Services. The non-academic support structures shall ensure social integration and psychological health of the students. These consist of three interrelated pillars: the Student Counselling Service (SCS), the Student Resource Center (SRC) and the Career Services.

The individual support of the students by the faculty is an offering, which students praised in the discussions during the site visit. This individual support is given through "Faculty Advising", which ensures that every student has a professor as mentor, seeking to foster the students' engagement with the subject. The students interviewed by the expert panel members highlighted that they felt well-supported by their professors and that they could always reach out easily to the faculty. According to the students, the small size of the classes provide room for discussions and exchange and create a very personal atmosphere, which was greatly appreciated. Some of the alumni interviewed during the site visit stated that they are still in contact with some of the professors.

Students with physical or psychological impairment have the opportunity to receive support from the Learning Support Services (LSS), where conditions can be set according to their needs, like extra time for assignments. The Language Center offers tutoring sessions and workshops to support students in (academic) writing. The Quant Center focuses on support for students who experience difficulties with completing assignments with mathematics and statistics. Library Services in turn offers support for students comprising workshops and personal services.

In addition to academic support, WVPU offers extensive non-academic services. The Student Counselling Service (SCS) aims to ensure the students' psychological health by offering free student-to-student consultations, which are done by second year master students in Psychology. Moreover, the university holds annual events dedicated to the well-being of students like the "wellness week" with services and workshops. The students interviewed said that the counselling helped them to get through difficult times and that the student-counsellors worked very professionally.

Extra-curricular activities like sports and student clubs are offered by the Student Resource Center (SRC), which should "enrich the student experience". This also includes orientation sessions for new students and assistance for students when applying for mobility programs or when students want to report misconduct. Finally, the Career Services provides students with individual coaching sessions, workshops and networking events. The goal is to guide students in their career prospective and to support them in finding jobs and internships.

During the discussions in the course of the on-site visit, the expert panel's members got the impression that these services are well received and appreciated by the students. According to the students interviewed, the availability of these support services is well communicated and the services are of great help.

The experts consider the criterion to be **fulfilled**.

Counselling and support for students

2. The private university shall provide for a procedure to handle the complaints of students.

As outlined in the application documents, WVPU has policies and procedures for handling grievances and challenges or appeals to grades. Referring to the "policy of subsidiarity" at the private university, grade disputes are first handled between the student and the instructor. Students have the right to see all examination documents as well as course assessment records. Grades can be discussed up until the closing of the grading period. If students have reasons to assume that the grading has been influenced by non-academic reasons, they can address the head of the respective academic department.

If there is no resolution within three months, students have the right to appeal the decision and address the Examination Committee. The Examination Committee has been introduced following the criticism voiced in the previous accreditation process in 2015. The Examination Committee consists of the Director or Associate Director, the head of the respective academic department, one additional academic department head, and a student representative. To date, there has been no case in which the Examination Committee had to act, as the Director of WVPU reported during the site visit. The students interviewed said that the grading is usually fair and they did not experience any trouble with it.

When instructors determine an act of academic dishonesty, they have to report it to the respective department/program head via email, including a list of details, e.g., the type of issue and assignment. This information may be used as evidence in a related grade dispute. When students complain about non-academic matters (e.g., discriminatory application or misapplication of a university policy), they may pursue an informal or formal grievance procedure according to Student Grievance Procedures.

The experts consider the criterion to be **fulfilled**.

4.1 Assessment criterion § 16 (6) 1 to 7: Research and development

Research and development

1. The private university's research and development activities are based on its profile and its objectives. For this purpose, it has developed a concept, which comprises at least strategic goals as well as measures for their implementation.

WVPU defines itself as a research-oriented and student-centered private university with its main focus on social sciences. It names "strengthening research culture" as one of its two main strategic goals. At the content level, its research focuses on studying social actors by using

qualitative and quantitative research designs that concentrate on the behavior of individuals, institutions, organizations, states and non-state actors in increasingly globalized economies and societies, thereby fostering interdisciplinary research. Hence, the university's research profile and objectives are clearly defined.

The focus of the private university has traditionally been on teaching while research was not pursued on an institutionalized level. According to the application, the process of transforming WPVU into a research-led institution started in 2016. An external evaluation conducted in 2019 analyzed the current status and made specific suggestions for means to promote this development by

- (1) sharpening the major research focus of WVPU,
- (2) setting incentives for conducting research at WVPU, and
- (3) adapting the organizational structure to promote research activities.

To address these issues, WVPU developed a 3-level plan that consists of (1) building upon existing strengths and addressing weaknesses identified by the evaluators, (2) developing research themes that strengthen the research profile of the university, and (3) implementing doctoral programs on International Relations, Economics, Business Intelligence.

Strategic goals and the means to achieve them are spelled out roughly, but should be worked out in more detail. So far, it remains unclear

- (1) how each discipline can contribute to sharpening the joint research focus of WVPU,
- (2) how incentives for conducting research at WVPU (at the staff and student level) can become more effective,
- (3) which role the equipment and use of the research labs may play in this context, and
- (4) how interdisciplinarity can be promoted and promising joint research themes can be identified. Furthermore, it remains unclear
- (5) why the topics International Relations, Economics, and Business Intelligence were chosen for future doctoral programs.

The experts consider the criterion to be **only partially fulfilled**.

Conditions

The experts recommend to the Board of AQ Austria to impose following conditions: WVPU assures, that its research concept covers the following aspects:

- a. provides a detailed concept for pursuing its strategic goal of developing an interdisciplinary joint research focus.
- b. defines qualitative goals for its departments and the respective disciplines and describe how these can be achieved.

Research and development

2. The private university offers services in research and development or the advancement and appreciation of the arts according to the university's approach and the respective subject cultures.

A range of different services in research and development are provided that meet the different subject cultures represented by WVPU. These include:

- Employment of a Research Service Officer (RSO) who disseminates funding opportunities, assists faculty members in writing grant proposals, budget plans, project reports, provides administrative support for PIs, and serves as a mediator between researchers and the senior management.

- Coverage of travel grants for academic staff to present papers at conferences (up to 1 overseas or 2 EU conferences per year and faculty member)
- Coverage of all journal publication fees,
- Access to online libraries,
- Laboratory equipment
- Department discretionary funds (e.g., to invite guest speakers)
- Flexibility in teaching schedules for writing grant applications or being on sabbatical
- Evaluation of grant proposals according to Ethical Standards by American Partners of the University

Based on information provided in the written application as well as during the site visit, it seems evident that WVPU made important progress since the last accreditation in terms of strengthening its research and development services.

The experts consider the criterion to be **fulfilled**.

Recommendations

Despite the progress, the expert team sees room for improvement and has the following recommendations:

- For quality management, WVPU might consider to implement regular inquiries among faculty members (e.g., conducted by the RSO) asking which type of service they consider to best support their research activities, and where they see room for improvements. The results of these inquiries should be protocolled.
- The laboratories should contain modern equipment matching the research interests of the current faculty (see Chapter on Infrastructure for more details).
- Regulations to ensure the flexibility in teaching schedules for faculty members engaging in research should be improved (see Chapter on Staff for more details)
- WVPU should offer trainings in methodology making researchers familiar with current research designs and methods.

Research and development

3. The private university carries out institutionally anchored co-operation projects in research and development and/or the advancement and appreciation of the arts with higher education partners and, where appropriate, from outside the higher education area in Austria and abroad adequate to the respective subject cultures.

Due to its general orientation towards social sciences, WVPU has established research cooperations with multiple international partners (e.g., participation in EU programs such as Horizon 2020, Erasmus+, ITNs; joint publications), as revealed by the written application. More specifically, faculty from WVPU cooperate with external partners at the national level (i.e., University of Salzburg, Institute for Advanced Studies (IHS), Vienna University of Economics and Business, Austrian Society for Operations Research, Vienna University), and at the international level (Germany, UK, Norway, Netherlands, Swiss, Italy, Australia). To further promote cooperations, guest speakers are invited, and seminars or workshops are being held

with external guests on a regular basis. This suggests that WVPU practices a vivid exchange with other research institutions.

In the documents submitted, clear goals regarding the strengthening of research as well as key indicators for monitoring purposes have been defined. It has become clear from the documents submitted as well as from the discussions during the site visit that the goals could at best be partially achieved, and that WVPU is still in the initial phase of establishing appropriate research framework conditions. As mentioned during the site visit, most of the guest speakers come from within the network of WVPU. However, the high potential of the WPU worldwide network is to promote joint international research projects and exchange students. This potential has not been realized so far. In the course of discussions with representatives of the institution and the Head of the Research Office, a simple comparison was made between defined key indicators and submissions approved. According to the head of WVPU, multiple grant proposals have been submitted but the success rate is still very low. This also becomes evident from the tables on research output and research funding to be found in the application documents. In any case, growth can be observed.

The experts consider the criterion to be only **partially fulfilled**.

Conditions

The expert panel recommends to the Board of AQ Austria to impose the following conditions: within the next two years, WVPU should increase

1. its efforts to team up with institutions within and beyond the WPU network in research activities
2. the number of academic workshops held as well as conference participation of its faculty, including paper presentations.
3. third-party funding granted to faculty members with and without internal and external collaborative partners.
4. the number of publications co-authored by members of WVPU and other institutions.

Recommendation 1: Further, the expert team recommends that WVPU analyzes potential reasons for this lack of success in establishing scientific collaborations as part of its quality management in collaboration with the faculty, and develops a joint strategy targeting higher success rates. In general, promoting collaborations with external institutions, and increasing the incentives for faculty members who publish in high impact journals and work on research proposals has proven to be effective in this regard.

Recommendation 2: The expert team thus recommends that WVPU promotes student exchange and develops joint research foci across different institutions of its worldwide network.

Recommendation 3: An additional recommendation is to invite more guest speakers from outside the network as well as researchers with strong research agendas for common workshops, as this will help to establish research collaborations beyond the WPU network and to increase the visibility of WVPU.

Research and development

4. The private university's permanent scientific and/or artistic staff is involved in the research and development or the advancement and appreciation of the arts in their specific subject.

According to WVPU, its permanent scientific staff is involved in research and development. This could be evidenced by peer-reviewed publications, third-party funded research projects, and contributions to scientific conferences, as well as the supervision of BA- and MA-theses.

The Appendix of the written application reveals large variation in terms of the productivity and the quality of (a) publications, (b) research projects, and (c) conference contributions by individual members of WVPU. Publications in journals of high international impact are rare in some disciplines. Furthermore, low-key research endeavors are also mostly absent. For instance, there is no in-house journal for excellent Bachelor and Master theses and research colloquiums are lacking.

Moreover, some of the permanent academic staff does not list any recent peer-reviewed publication (i.e., less than 5 years old), and single members do not seem to have a research orientation, but rather focus explicitly on teaching. The Appendix also lacks indication for the acquisition of substantial third-party funding by some disciplines. Therefore, the expert panel cannot state fully, that the private university's permanent scientific staff is comprehensively involved in research and development in their specific subject.

The experts consider the criterion to be **only partially fulfilled**.

Conditions

The experts recommend to the Board of AQ Austria to impose following condition: within the next two years, WVPU should establish a research culture comprising strategies that aim at monitoring and increasing each staff members' scientific productivity in terms of research activities and endeavors to integrate research to teaching.

Recommendation 1: The team of experts furthermore recommends that WVPU should be asked to develop specific means and procedures to encourage those members of the permanent scientific staff whose CVs reveal that they lack proof of scientific productivity in terms of published papers, research grant(s), and/or conference contributions during the past three years to become engaged in corresponding activities.

Recommendation 2: We also recommend that WVPU puts a strong emphasis on research productivity when hiring new faculty members.

Research and development

5. The private university promotes research and/or development activities by providing for appropriate organizational or structural framework conditions.

According to the written application, appropriate organizational and structural framework conditions at the WVPU include

- a sufficient number of faculty members per discipline who supervise final theses (including doctoral theses), conduct studies at WPVU, apply for external funding, and serve as authors for publications.
- sufficient lab space and equipment for running studies
- research services to help write grant applications and budget plans
- regular meetings of faculty members to exchange research ideas, cooperate, and support each other
- a monitoring system for research output
- incentives for faculty members to run research projects

As revealed by the site-visit, WPVU provides lab space and equipment tuned to the specific demands of the disciplines represented in this institution. Additionally, it hired a RSO providing research-related services of various kinds, and it holds regular meetings for faculty members. Moreover, it has developed a monitoring system for research output at various levels, counting the number of qualification theses, grant applications, and different kinds of publications - differentiated by discipline and the amount of external funding.

Research is tracked in annual performance agreements on an individual and departmental level. It is clear from both the documents submitted and the discussions with internal stakeholders concerned that WVPU is trying to create an appropriate structural framework, which supports research and development.

The experts consider the criterion to be **fulfilled**.

Research and development

6. The private university ensures a transfer of knowledge or technologies to the economy and the society.

In the written application, WVPU points out that its major route to transfer knowledge to the economy and the society is via research activities (e.g., scholarly publications in open-access journals, conference contributions, hosting workshops and conferences, interviews given by faculty members, media presentations, international networking). In addition, WVPU hosts public guest lectures with representatives from local and international organizations, government as well as industry leaders.

Cooperations exist with different Business and Management institutions. Staff and faculty mobility provide a further mean to increase transfer. Given that WVPU has a focus on explaining social behavior, and its declared goal to train students for taking leading positions in social organizations, promoting transfer activities targeting students as well as staff members is highly important for this institution.

Based on the multifaceted examples for different transfer activities, the expert team sees the criterion as fulfilled.

The experts consider the criterion to be **fulfilled**.

Remark: The annual number of internships by WVPU students represents one of the development plan's key performance indicators when it comes to achieving strategic goals. Therefore, students are supported in their internship through various measures:

- The university's Career Services Team monitors and evaluates student internships and works closely with prospective employers to monitor internship progress.
- Students returning from internships deliver open presentations to other students in order to foster interest and a sense of achievement.

Yet, the experts point out that these internships do not represent content anchored in the curriculum that formally contributes to the competence or qualification profile of the respective study program. Moreover, awarding credits for internships is difficult without curricular anchoring and a predefined workload allocation.

Recommendations: The team of experts recommends that WVPU develops course programs that coordinate student training in the classroom with internships and research activities in a structured way (i.e., as part of the regular curriculum), thus promoting the transfer of knowledge in both directions (i.e., from within the university to society and vice versa).

In addition, it is recommended to foster networking with different external institutions in Vienna and beyond, in order to become a more attractive partner for research collaboration.

Assessment criterion § 16 (7) 1 to 10: Staff

Staff

1. The private university has sufficient scientific and artistic staff as well as sufficient non-academic staff for carrying out its tasks in accordance with the development plan.

The ratio of the number of faculty to the demands of the organization is critical. The overall number of faculty has been stagnating, which can largely be explained by the Covid-19 pandemic and the respective stagnation in student enrollment. The ratio of 1:1 in the relation between scientific and administrative staff seems to be reasonable at first glance. The teaching load is reasonable, taking into account that one teaching hour is supplemented by 1 hour of assessment (so the teaching load of 430h de facto is reduced to its half). Furthermore, students as well as alumni praised the counselling and tutoring endeavors of the teaching staff. What is critical, however, is the low number of permanent scientific staff (see below), in particular when considering the future task to promote research activities.

So far, only the disciplines Business and Management and International Relations reach a critical mass of employed faculty members (i.e., 6 and 5, respectively), whereas other disciplines (i.e., Media Communication, Psychology, Center of Liberal Arts) have only one or two professors each. In the latter case, many post-docs or academics without a PhD serve as adjunct faculty. For example, in Psychology, the adjunct faculty includes one professor, 8 post-docs, and multiple academics without a PhD. Working with adjunct faculty and junior researchers may be sufficient when it comes to providing good teaching, but it is certainly a disadvantage when it comes to acquiring external funding and increasing the visibility of the WPVU on the international level.

Since the development plan foresees additional tasks for the future (let alone the introduction of a doctoral program) an increase of permanent academic staff looks indispensable (see § 17 (7) 2 below). The additional tasks that pertain to the introduction and operation of a doctoral program cannot be fulfilled by the existing staff.

The experts consider the criterion to be only **partially fulfilled**.

Condition

The experts recommend that the Board of AQ Austria imposes the following condition: Permanent academic staff should be increased in line with the upgrading of research capacity and the implementation of doctoral programs.

Staff

2. The relation between permanent scientific and/or artistic staff and students shall be in accordance with the profile of the respective degree program. Permanent staff here means working at least 50% of one's total working hours in salaried employment at the private university.

As mentioned before, Media Arts, Psychology and the Center of Liberal Arts are understaffed when it comes to professors responsible for the study and research program. In Psychology,

for example, the adjunct faculty includes one professor, 8 post-docs, and multiple academics without a PhD. Working with adjunct faculty and junior researchers may be sufficient when it comes to providing good teaching, but it is certainly a disadvantage when it comes to acquiring external funding and increasing the visibility of the WPVU at the international level.

Overall, the criterion is met for the current situation but falls short of the tasks envisaged in the medium and long term.

The experts consider the criterion to be **fulfilled**.

Recommendation: Consequently, the expert panel strongly recommends to recruit additional permanent faculty with the appropriate research experience for the introduction of a doctoral program.

Staff

3. The subject-specific core competencies of the degree programs are covered by permanent professors.

In the International Relations Department, the core-competencies of the degree programs are covered by permanent professors. This can also be attested for the Business Department. The core subjects of the Strategic Communication are all covered by one of the three permanent professors of the department. The Bachelor of Arts in Media Communications is no longer important as it will be taught out by the end of June 2023 and does not admit new incoming students.

The subject-specific core competencies of the degree programs in Psychology (BA, MA) are not fully covered by permanent professors yet. Only after experts for two more vacant positions (one full and one assistant professor) are hired will this criterion be met.

The experts consider the criterion to be **only partially fulfilled**.

Condition

The experts recommend that the Board of AQ Austria imposes the following condition: The vacant positions in Psychology need to be occupied as soon as possible.

Staff

4. The scientific staff or the artistic staff, respectively, is qualified according to the requirements of the respective position.

Overall, the staff has to be considered well qualified to meet the requirements of teaching. It is questionable whether lecturers without a PhD degree shall be allowed to give introductory lectures on the respective field, but this can be further qualified in bylaws. Regarding research, though, the picture becomes more ambiguous since a good share of the permanent staff does hardly have a reliable record of research. This point is most critical in those study programs that are represented by only 1-2 professors (e.g., Psychology).

The experts consider the criterion to be **only partially fulfilled**.

Conditions

The experts recommend that the Board of AQ Austria imposes the following conditions:

1. The academic qualification required to teach different formats and to offer different course content must be clearly defined. By doing so, the recruiting process could become more transparent and verifiable.
2. To consider the candidates' research agendas in future recruitment processes to a greater extent.
3. To offer further training regarding methods and research design for the academic staff (see also § 16 (6) (2)).

Staff

5. The prioritization of the permanent scientific or artistic staff's teaching, research, and administrative activities ensures adequate participation in teaching in degree programs and leaves sufficient time for research and development or the advancement and appreciation of the arts.

Bearing in mind that teaching represents the competitive edge of WVPU, the teaching, tutoring and counselling load is accordingly high. This was also confirmed by the interviews with alumni and lecturers alike during the site visit. As underlined in the research part, the newly introduced incentives for enhancing research (e.g., sabbaticals) look promising. Yet promoting research activities among staff members requires that they can take time off from teaching. Regarding the actual flexibility in teaching schedules for writing grant applications or being on sabbatical, the information provided in the application still leaves open several questions:

(1) Given a fairly high teaching load of individual staff members, it seems unclear how they could take on even more classes in order to compensate for a colleague who wants to write a grant proposal. No incentives for doing that were mentioned in the application, thus raising the question of how fairness among the faculty members can be guaranteed.

(2) Being on sabbatical is possible (every 5th year), but only if the financial situation allows for it. The staff member can apply, different committees discuss the application, and in the end, the director decides. It looks as though the sabbatical would be granted in an informal procedure. Hence, individual faculty members do not really have a right to go on sabbatical, they can only ask for it. So far, only one sabbatical was granted to one member of the entire private university. Hence, it seems important to change current regulations in order to actually provide the freedom for conducting research without the need to teach at the same time.

The experts consider the criterion to be only **partially fulfilled**.

Conditions

The experts recommend the Board of AQ Austria to impose the following condition: the private university introduces an institutionalized policy on sabbaticals that ensures the eligibility of all staff members to a sabbatical and regulates the conditions under which sabbaticals are granted to applicants. The policy should also include respective measures to guarantee that sabbaticals taken do not negatively affect the work of colleagues and teaching provided to students.

Staff

6. The private university shall provide for transparent and quality-driven recruitment procedures for hiring permanent and adjunct scientific or artistic staff as well as non-academic staff. The appointment procedures for university professors are modelled at least on the basis of the related requirements stipulated in the Universities Act. In the event that a private university does not have a sufficient number of university professors in order to fill the seats of an appointment committee, external university professors shall be appointed as members of the appointment committee until an adequate professorial body has been built.

As already outlined in the chapter on the organization of the private university, the recruitment process also tends to be 'top-heavy' considering that the Director decides on the composition of the Selection Committee and hires visiting professors, lecturers and even tutors.

The composition of the Selection Committee (Associate Director, HR, and Head of respective Department + additional faculty member and student + external) results in a minority of academic members on the committee. It can be assumed, therefore, that organizational and personal skills of the candidates rank high while the specific teaching and research record are not prioritized. It should be noted, hence, that the candidates have to give an "example course-type lecture/seminar" which may reveal their teaching quality. The additional requirement of "present(ing) their research", by contrast, remains vague.

The experts consider the criterion to be only **partially fulfilled**.

Conditions

The experts recommend that the Board of AQ Austria imposes the following condition:

1. WVPU needs to change the recruitment process for permanent academic staff paying more tribute to the quality of research (see the assessment for §17 (7) 4 above).
2. WVPU must ensure the active participation of the Senate in the search and appointment of faculty members on the level of assistant, associate, and full professor, with the Senate having to give its consent to all respective appointments. (As also pointed out in the chapter on the organization of the private university).

Staff

7. The private university provides adequate further training and staff development measures.

The private university substantially professionalized its Human Resources services since 2016, thereby creating the basis for a substantially enhanced roster of professional development opportunities for its employees.

The private university has set up professional development guidelines for administrative employees that guarantee an annual budget as well as reserved professional development days for every employee. For higher-ranking employees (e.g., unit and department heads), the private university introduced modular structured leadership training seminars, which continue on an annual basis.

WVPU also makes available to its employees several tools and services designed to foster professional development on a voluntary basis. Webster University's online Faculty Development Center offers additional professional development programs.

Both in the application for re-accreditation and in the discussions during the site visit, the experts were able to convince themselves of the high-quality teaching at WVPU.

The experts consider the criterion to be **fulfilled**.

Recommendation: For the implementation of the curricula in the sense of constructive alignment using an appropriate variety of didactic methods, the expert team recommends intensifying the didactic training offered, especially for external faculty.

Staff

8. The private university takes adequate measures for the integration of adjunct teachers in the organization of teaching and in program organization.

Once per semester, there is an orientation event for new external teachers. This has been taking place online since spring 2020, which allows greater flexibility in onboarding. External teachers have full access to online information on guidelines, tutorials, etc. There are also professional development activities for both permanent and external teachers. The private university offers a range of tools and services aimed at innovative teaching methods and the use of new technologies in teaching. These offers are also available to external lecturers.

In the future, the private university would like to involve external lecturers even more intensively in the transfer of knowledge from practice. Externals are also encouraged by the university to make their practical experience and expertise available in the form of documents and data.

All active adjunct faculty (teaching at least one course in an academic year) will have access to faculty development and mobility opportunities, and to provide more flexibility in their onboarding, the university strengthened its online information systems including faculty guidance and tutorials, providing them unrestricted access.

The private university takes adequate measures for the integration of adjunct teachers in the organization of teaching and in program organization.

The experts consider the criterion to be **fulfilled**.

Assessment criterion § 16 (8): Funding

Funding

The private university has a viable and sustainable financial plan, which ensures the performance of its tasks in accordance with the development plan. Provisions have been made to fund expiring degree programs.

The private university has been able to consolidate its financial situation in recent years. From the fiscal year 2016/2017 on, earnings have exceeded costs, and the private university's EBIT has been positive. Despite declining student numbers, the private university has even managed to make a profit for three consecutive years, beginning with fiscal year 2017/2018.

Due to the drop in student numbers, the actual budget has not developed in line with the planned budget. While in 2016/2017 actual revenue from tuition exceeded planned revenue [REDACTED], indicating higher enrollment than planned, from 2017/2018 on, a negative development has to be acknowledged. In the last fiscal year reported (2019/2020), actual revenue [REDACTED] dramatically lower. This development cannot be attributed to Covid, considering that the outbreak of Covid took place in March 2020 and thus almost towards the end of the fiscal year in question. In addition, the private university's gap between projected revenues from tuition and actual ones has been widening since the fiscal year 2017/2018, indicating a continuous decline in enrollment.

Due to the decline in revenues, the financial consolidation has been achieved through cost reduction, for personnel and operating expenses alike. Personnel costs were reduced [REDACTED]. In the same period, operating costs fell [REDACTED]. While this development is laudable from a cost perspective, it must be considered a necessary reaction to a decline in enrollment. This is reflected by the fact that personnel expenses for fiscal year 2019/2020 were [REDACTED] less than the amount projected [REDACTED]).

Considering the development described, the goal to increase revenues from tuition [REDACTED] must be judged as highly optimistic, also because the demographic development and the newly established presence of the Central European University in Vienna do not support this projection. While the increase in student numbers is overly optimistic, the personnel expenses have been estimated adequately. In 2016/2017, when the revenue from enrollment was similar to the one projected for 2027/2028, the ratio between revenue from tuition [REDACTED] and personnel cost [REDACTED] was 1.7. This indicates that the university generated EUR 1.7 for every EUR spent on personnel. In 2019/20, this ratio increased to 1.84. For 2027/2028, a ratio of 1.73 is projected, which as such is realistic.

Operating expenses in turn were cut [REDACTED]. This can mainly be attributed to the fact that the private university does not operate the deficit running student dorm any longer. Therefore, the operating cost [REDACTED] projected for 2027/2028 is plausible as such. While the revenue projections are thus highly optimistic, the cost projections are more plausible, but only when neglecting that the university seeks to considerably increase expenditures for research and to establish a doctoral program.

When accounting for such specific line items, the financial plan presented lacks substance. The private university plans to spend [REDACTED] on research sabbaticals in total until 2027/2028, another [REDACTED] per annum for the doctoral program, and [REDACTED] in the first year of its establishment, which clearly are costs that have not been incurred before. Considering that the doctoral program is planned to start in 2025, this would mean additional personnel costs of app. [REDACTED] annually from 2025 until the end of the planning period in 2027/2028. These are not reflected by any means in the numbers stated, unless one assumes that personnel costs on other ends would be cut further substantially. This, however, would be detrimental to teaching quality and the generation of revenue.

In 2019/20 (as the last financial year for which actual numbers are provided in the application, and the last pre-Covid financial year), the ratio between revenue from tuition [REDACTED] and total cost (personnel and operating) [REDACTED] was 1.31. For 2027/2028 it is projected to be 1.27 and thus at a very similar level. While this would not be unrealistic as such, it must be noted that the latter number loses much of its plausibility, because it also includes the establishment and operation of a doctoral program and increasing expenditures on research.

Overall, the following facts must be considered when judging the financial plan submitted:

- The projection on increasing student enrollment is highly optimistic.
- The assumption that a doctoral program can be established and that research expenditures can be increased while operating at the same revenue cost ratio is hardly plausible.
- The latter assumption becomes even more fragile, when considering that it will be more than challenging to build and operate a doctoral program by hiring two associate professors. The argument that also existing permanent faculty can be employed for the doctoral program falls short, since existing faculty already is at its limits with teaching and counselling, as the interviews during the site visit demonstrated.

In addition, the private university is facing substantial teach out costs for the period in question. According to its own calculations, these will amount to [REDACTED], mainly resulting

from additional costs for teaching to be done by adjunct faculty. This is a substantial additional financial burden that puts the financial planning presented into question.

In conclusion, the financial planning projected until 2027/2028 must be evaluated as either too optimistic or as not suitable to carry out the planned extension of research, including a doctoral program, while providing sufficient teaching quality and supervision to the increasing number of students that is expected.

The criterion is only partially fulfilled, considering that the development, introduction, and operation of a functional and meaningful doctoral program is not reflected sufficiently in the private university's financial planning for the period up to fiscal year 2027/2028.

The experts consider the criterion to be **only partially** fulfilled.

Conditions

The expert panel thus suggests that the Board of AQ Austria requires as a condition the revision of the financial planning of the private university, in particular with regard to the doctoral programs in question.

Assessment criterion § 16 (9): Infrastructure

Infrastructure

The private university's facilities and equipment are quantitatively and qualitatively adequate to ensure the performance of the university's tasks in accordance with the development plan. In the case that the private university draws on external resources, their authorization to use them has been contractually secured.

As outlined in the application documents, WVPU has a total area of 5.000 square meters over six floors with 17 classrooms (average room size of 50 m²) and 48 offices (for employees, student services and administration). Two of the classrooms can be converted into a conference room that hosts up to 80 people. The classrooms are equipped with data projectors or digital whiteboards and external speakers. One classroom provides multiple screens and cameras and ceiling-based microphones to enable joining classrooms in different locations. In addition, two computer labs are located in the university building.

The atrium serves as a meeting area for students and as a place for events. In total, the building has four student lounges for socializing and studying. The university library consists of 500 m² and 22 computers available for students. It offers three separate areas for group work, eight individual workplaces and numerous seats.

The Psychology department offers ten recording channels for startle reflex modulation experiments and three PCs, which are set up for behavioral experiments. According to the faculty, it seems important to keep the equipment up to date. WVPU also provides students with a video recording studio, a video post-production studio, an audio and radio studio as well as an animation studio. All students have access to Microsoft Office 365 as well as Adobe Cloud. The private university also has installed versions of programs like SPSS and R, which may be needed for research activities. High-speed Wi-Fi is available in the whole building.

The classrooms may be reserved by students outside of class schedules, and the equipment used. Seven printing stations are available throughout the building. The private university also uses an e-learning platform, providing the students with online documents for the courses.

In 2016, an adjoining building has been purchased to expand the work and social space for students and faculty. Due to the high costs of the necessary renovation and construction of the object, its development has been postponed.

The experts consider the criterion to be **fulfilled**.

Assessment criterion § 16 (10): Co-operation

Co-operation

The private university maintains collaborations beyond § 16 (6) 3 with higher education partners and partners outside the higher education area in Austria and abroad matching their profile and also promoting the mobility of students and staff.

WVPU defines its goal to give its students a global perspective. The private university states in the application documents that it is committed to promote student and staff mobility. Mobility and internship opportunities are provided through cooperations with various partners.

For example, WVPU has an arrangement with OPEC that reserves internship spots for WVPU students. Expert practitioners are invited into the classroom to share hands-on skills. Students also have the opportunity to search for internships on their own and have them recognized for their studies. For this, the internship has to fulfil certain criteria, which WVPU has published on their website. Students are required to hold a presentation when they return to the private university after the internship.

In terms of mobility, students have the opportunity to go abroad to one of the Webster Universities network of campuses in Europe, the USA and China, among others. As mentioned in the application documents, WVPU joined the Erasmus+ network in 2017 and has established seven inter-institutional agreements in the higher education area. However, in the case of Erasmus+, WVPU students still have to pay the tuition fee for WVPU if they decide to study abroad. This might be one of the reasons why the number of students going on Erasmus+ exchange is rather small. Moreover, during the on-site visit it was explained that 80 percent of the students are already international, which would make studying at WVPU already a study-abroad experience for most students. In addition, in certain cases staying at WVPU is required to meet the Austrian residential requirements.

For the future, WVPU wants to particularly focus on promoting student mobility by improving the existing services (see chapter "Student support") and by creating a platform for feedback as well as introducing a self-assessment before, during and after the mobility. By increasing the mobility, WVPU targets its strategic goals of educational opportunities for students and staff as well as strengthening cross-border relationships with (non-)academic institutions.

Furthermore, WVPU highlights in the application documents the collaborations which go beyond research. This includes cooperating with companies and institutions, which fund the studies of highly qualified and/or financially less privileged students. This is in line with WVPU's goal to make it easier for students to finance their studies.

The benefit of the collaborations are confirmed by some of the students interviewed during the site visit. Some reported that they got an internship through the cooperation of WVPU with the UN.

Regarding staff mobility, there is only one scholarship that allows faculty from the Webster network to spend one semester at the Vienna campus. In turn, there are no meaningful

institutionalized programs or initiatives to foster the possibility for the private university's faculty to teach or do research abroad within the Webster network.

Overall, the criterion is **fulfilled**, but it is strongly recommended that the private university uses the Webster network to promote staff mobility with regard to research and teaching.

The experts consider the criterion **to be fulfilled**.

Recommendation: The experts recommend that WVPU makes better use of the Webster network in order to promote staff mobility with regard to research and teaching.

Assessment criterion § 16 (11) 1 to 4: Quality management system

Quality management system

1. The private university uses a quality management system, which has been incorporated in the higher education institution's strategic management. Based on the private university's objectives, it ensures that the quality of studying and teaching as well as of research and development or the advancement and appreciation of the arts, respectively, and of the supporting tasks are assessed on a regular basis. It furthermore guarantees that the assessment criteria are met and promotes the private university's enhancement.

The private university has a comprehensive quality management system that covers all core areas: studies and teaching, research and development, human resources and administration. The internal quality management system of the private university is based on a so-called Deming Wheel (PDCA cycle), and the ESG are taken into account during implementation. Processes and policies are communicated publicly and transparently via the website. Internal documents on the quality assurance and development processes are made available to all employees on the intranet.

While ECTS credits for competencies acquired at the private university can be obtained at other universities, the topic of recognition of competencies acquired at other institutions plays a rather subordinate role. There is a process for the recognition of competencies acquired on formal educational paths, which is described in the application for re-accreditation. In accordance with the efforts of the EHEA and in the sense of opening up further target groups, e.g. through students transferring from public universities, the topic of recognition should also be focused more strongly at the private university. In the course of the site visit, there was also talk of expanding the program portfolio and, if necessary, also addressing working students with newly created programs; for this purpose, a process for the recognition of work experience or competencies acquired in non-formal or informal ways should be considered.

The expert team considers the criterion to be only **partially fulfilled**.

Conditions

The experts recommend the Board of AQ Austria to impose the following conditions: WVPU develops a policy for recognition procedures related to formal, non-formal educational pathways and informally acquired competencies in the sense of the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), taking into account the guidelines and recommendations of the EHEA.

Quality management system

2. The private university periodically and systematically collects information on the quality of studying and teaching as well as research and development or the advancement and appreciation of the arts as well as supporting tasks performed within the quality management procedures.

The structures and procedures of the quality management system of the private university are strongly differentiated and diverse. As indicated in the written application, different instruments such as performance agreements, quality reports (external and internal), feedback meetings (in different formats and with different stakeholders), course evaluations, alumni surveys, accreditation procedures, etc. are used. There is participatory cooperation between all actors and relevant stakeholders. The private university thus periodically and systematically collects information on the quality of studying and teaching, research and development and the supporting tasks performed within the quality management procedures.

The experts consider the criterion to be **fulfilled**.

Quality management system

3. The private university assesses the effectiveness of its quality management system on a regular basis and enhances it as required, drawing on the knowledge of internal and external experts.

The internal quality management system complies with the specifications and recommendations of the ESG. WVPU ensures quality control, quality assurance, and quality improvement by adhering to the principles of continuous improvement. There are a number of internal measures that recur in regular cycles securing the periodic review of the internal quality management system. The so-called PDSA cycles are established at all levels in the quality management system, there is an individual cycle, one at the departmental level, at the institutional level and a cyclical review of the development plan.

The cycles involve the following four steps: 1. Plan: establish direction and ambitions, develop and work out the details of policy in accordance with objectives, and plan activities based on a systematic analysis of the environment and the available resources (e.g. strategic planning, performance agreements, curricular planning). 2. Do: implement the planned activities, such as university processes and procedures. 3. Study: evaluate the implementation, measure the results, critically reflect on the results, and compare the outcomes with the stated goals (e.g. performance reviews, stakeholder feedback, internal information systems, KPI monitoring, external reviews). 4. Act: draw conclusions and formulate points for improvement, modify plans where necessary and/or formulate objectives for the period ahead (e.g. annual reporting, evaluate targets, revise processes and policies, revise goals and milestones). The private university is also accredited in the US and also has an Accreditation Council for Business Schools and Programs (ACBSP) accreditation.

The experts consider the criterion to be **fulfilled**.

Quality management system

4. The private university has implemented structures and procedures to ensure that the rules of good scientific practice are adhered to.

In the past years, WVPU was able to establish an internal quality management system, which is able to ensure the standards of good scientific practice. The internal quality assurance system,

which is set up according to the specifications and recommendations of the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG), ensures that the standards of good scientific practice are adhered to.

At this point, the approach of student-centered teaching and learning can be emphasized, which ensures that teachers introduce the standards of good scientific practice to their students in the context of their teaching. In addition, the supervision of scientific papers, theses and scientific projects is carried out by appropriately qualified personnel/scientific staff. The recruitment of scientific staff, which includes faculty and scientific support staff, follows distinct procedures, new employees follow a structured and systematic onboarding process that also takes into account the standards of good scientific practice. WVPU has established its own appropriately staffed Research Office to support the research work at the university in every respect.

The WVPU Code of Conduct provides guidance and sets the baseline for the standards of ethical behavior of WVPU community members. The Code of Conduct includes all relevant provisions on good scientific practice. In particular, all members of the WVPU are encouraged to comply with the Guidelines for Good Scientific Practice developed by the Austrian Agency For Research Integrity (ÖAWI). The Students Handbook contains important information on good scientific work as well and also refers to the Code of Conduct that must be observed.

The private university has implemented structures and procedures to ensure that the rules of good scientific practice are adhered to. WVPU is committed to adhering to good scientific practice as commonly defined.

The experts consider the criterion to be **fulfilled**.

Assessment criterion § 16 (12): Information

Information

The private university publishes easily accessible and up-to-date information on its services on its website, including, as a minimum, the statute, the curricula and study regulations as well as examination regulations, model written training agreements and an outline of the quality management system.

The website of WVPU provides visitors with information on its study programs, the faculty, the statute, study and examination regulations, the constitution, and the quality management system. WVPU also publishes annual reports for each academic year as well as reports on the status of equal opportunity employment. The student services are outlined in a clear and structured way. In the section "Code of Conduct", students can find a document for grievance procedures.

For each study program, the degree requirements and the courses are outlined. However, no direct links are provided to receive information on the mentioned courses. To receive the respective details, one must proceed to the course catalog, which is located on a different website (atlas.webster.ac.at), or proceed to the departmental websites (legacy.webster.ac.at), which is in need of updates as most of the links lead to errors. Overall, however, the requirements are met satisfactorily.

The experts consider the criterion to be **fulfilled**.

Recommendation: The expert panel recommends renewing the course catalog and updating the links as well as providing students and website visitors with a more centralized and concise overview of the programs and their content as well as better linkages to the syllabi.

Furthermore, it could be beneficial to include an easily accessible visual representation (i.e. a table) of the curricula, in which the structure of the program (and a model for which courses/modules to take in which semesters) is outlined.

5 Summary and final evaluation

In order to provide a general assessment regarding the reaccreditation of WPUV, a brief summary of the individual assessment criteria will be given, followed by a recommendation from the expert panel.

(1) Concerning **profile and objectives**, the private university meets the requirements. The private university provides a solid institutional profile from which it derives objectives for teaching, learning and research. The institutional profile is described well, emphasizing the dedication to ensure extensive student services and a good ratio between students and faculty in the classroom. This focus is also coherently reflected in the mission of the private university that centers on "personalized education, small classes, and mentorship." The vision in turn is consistent with the private university's emphasis on a global approach to teaching and with regard to the desired mindset of faculty and students alike. The criterion is fulfilled.

(2) With regard to the **development plan**, the private university provides such a plan that is in line with its profile and objectives and specifies longer-term objectives and strategies for their achievement. The development plan describes how the defined objectives can be achieved with the adopted measures and allocated resources within the six years following extension of institutional accreditation. The development plan also comprises measures relating to gender equality as well as to the advancement of women. Due to deficiencies regarding the development of a doctoral program, the respective criterion is only partially fulfilled, however. Conditions are pointed out below. Concerning the existence of a regular process to ensure monitoring of the achievement of objectives and according adaptation of the development plan, the expert panel has found no shortcomings. The processes described are in accordance with common standards and are suitable to ensure the monitoring of the development plan and its adaption. The criterion thus is fulfilled.

(3) Regarding the **organization of the private university**, the expert panel has found conditions that do not match regulatory prerequisites, in particular with regard to academic autonomy and self-governance. The private university's current system of academic self-administrational, governance, and strategic management functions as well as the private university's organizational structure do not permit the freedom of science and its teaching as well as the necessary autonomy of the university. Thus, the criterion is only partly fulfilled, and the expert panel recommends the imposition of several conditions pointed out below. With regards to the organizational structure, and the responsibilities of the private university that have been laid down in a statute which governs these important issues (a. the guiding principles and tasks of the private university; b. the private university's bodies, their appointment, and tasks; c. staff categories and set designations for the scientific or artistic staff, respectively; d. gender equality and the advancement of women; e. assurance of student co-determination in academic matters; f. regulations governing the degree programs, in particular admission and examination regulations as well as the heads of studies; g. guidelines for academic honors (if applicable); h. guidelines for the appointment of professors and the procedures of awarding), the private university also does not meet all of the necessary conditions and requirements.

Therefore, the criterion is also only partly fulfilled. Except for the guidelines for academic honors, all other aspects mentioned need improvement. The respective conditions suggested will be pointed out below.

(4) **Course offerings** are mostly satisfactorily structured and described, but due to several shortcomings, also here conditions are suggested to the Board of AQ Austria. The private university currently offers eight Bachelor programs (one phasing out) in Business and Management (4), in Psychology (1), in Strategic Communication (1), and in International Relations (1). In addition, five master programs complement the course offerings (3 in Business, 1 in Psychology, 1 in IR). Hence, this individual criterion is fulfilled. Regarding the profile of the bachelor and master programs as well as defined learning outcomes and the respective content, the profile and the learning outcomes of the study programs are clearly defined and correspond to the national and European requirements in many areas. The expert panel was also able to convince itself of the student-centered orientation in the discussions. However, little flexibility was found in the highly standardized curricula. The orientation of the portfolio and related plans are not appropriately secured. Also, the program design shows inconsistencies, and the private university does not wield sufficient power to design programs and shape course content. The criterion is therefore only fulfilled with restrictions. The experts recommend that the Board of AQ Austria imposes the conditions mentioned below.

(5) **Counseling and support** for students are widely and satisfactorily provided to the students. WVPU offers a wide range of support structures both in academic and non-academic matters to its students. According to the information obtained during the site visit and the interviews held with current and former students, the services are well received and appreciated by the students. The availability of these support services was said to be well communicated and the services to be of great help. The criterion thus is fulfilled without restrictions.

(6) With regard to **research and development**, the private university is only partly able to demonstrate that its research and development activities are based on its profile and its objectives. It remains unclear how each discipline contributes to sharpening the joint research focus of the private university. The criterion is thus only partially fulfilled leading to conditions that will be pointed out below. Moreover, a concept that comprises at least strategic goals, as well as measures for their implementation, has also only been developed partially, leading to further shortcomings. Services in research and development according to the university's approach and the respective subject cultures are extensively provided, which is why the expert panel considers the criterion to be fulfilled. Institutionally anchored co-operation projects in research and development with higher education partners and, where appropriate, from outside the higher education area in Austria and abroad are insufficient, as existing networks are limited and the potential network at hand within Webster itself is not being used accordingly. Thus, the criterion is only partially fulfilled. The private university's permanent scientific staff is involved in research and development in their specific subject, as the private university could demonstrate through peer-reviewed publications, third-party funded research projects, and contributions to scientific conferences, as well as the supervision of BA- and MA-theses. However, some of the permanent academic staff does not list any recent peer-reviewed publication (i.e. less than 5 years old), and single members do not seem to have a research orientation, but rather focus explicitly on teaching. The acquisition of substantial third party funding by some disciplines could also not be demonstrated. Thus, this criterion is also only fulfilled under the conditions listed below. Finally, the private university promotes research and/or development activities by sufficiently providing for appropriate organizational or structural framework conditions. Although the staff situation remains tight and the permanent

faculty has to use a considerable share of its time for teaching and counseling issues, the expert team considers this criterion to be fulfilled.

(7) Following up on the issue of **staff**, the ratio of the number of faculty to the demands of the organization is critical. In particular, the introduction and maintenance of a doctoral program does not seem feasible with the current staff situation and planning, even more, when considering that the research capacity is also to be increased. Thus, the private university cannot be considered to have sufficient scientific staff for carrying out its tasks in accordance with the development plan. The criterion, thus, is only partially fulfilled and the conditions below are suggested accordingly.

(8) Due to larger budget needed for developing and maintaining the doctoral programs and at the same time extending the research capacity, **funding** and the respective financial plan provided by the private university cannot be considered to be fully sustainable. Overall, considering that the development, introduction, and operation of a functional and meaningful doctoral program is not reflected sufficiently in the private university's financial planning for the period up to the fiscal year 2027/2028, the criterion is only partly fulfilled.

(9) With regard to **infrastructure**, the private university meets all requirements. Its facilities and equipment are quantitatively and qualitatively adequate to ensure the performance of the university's tasks in accordance with the development plan. The criterion is fulfilled.

(10) Likewise, on the issue of **cooperations**, the private university maintains sufficient collaborations with higher education partners and partners outside the higher education area in Austria and abroad with matching profiles. The mobility of students and staff is promoted, although the Webster network itself could be put to better use. Overall, however, the criterion has to be considered fulfilled.

(11) Regarding the **quality management system**, several shortcomings have to be noted. While ECTS credits for competencies acquired at the private university can be obtained at other universities, the topic of recognition of competencies acquired at other institutions plays a rather subordinate role at the private university. A process for the recognition of work experience or competencies acquired in non-formal or informal ways does not exist. The criterion is only partially fulfilled, therefore. In contrast, the structures and procedures of the quality management system of the private university are strongly differentiated and diverse. Different instruments such as performance agreements, quality reports (external and internal), feedback meetings (in different formats and with different stakeholders), course evaluations, alumni surveys, accreditation procedures, etc. are used. The criterion thus is fulfilled. The private university also assesses the effectiveness of its quality management system on a regular basis and enhances it as required, drawing on the knowledge of internal and external experts. This criterion also is fulfilled. Finally, WVPU has been able to establish an internal quality management system, which ensures the standards of good scientific practice. The internal quality assurance system, which is set up according to the specifications and recommendations of the ESG, ensures that the standards of good scientific practice are adhered to. The criterion also is fulfilled.

(12) Concerning **information**, the private university publishes easily accessible and up-to-date information on its services on its website, including, as a minimum, the statute, the curricula and study regulations as well as examination regulations, model written training agreements, and an outline of the quality management system. The criterion is fulfilled.

Based on the evaluation and assessment provided above, the expert panel recommends to the Board of AQ Austria to bind the reaccreditation of the private university to the following **conditions** (listed in the order of the subparagraphs of the §16 PU-AkkVO 2019):

(1) Development plan:

The private university establishes a well-defined process including a milestone plan for the development, introduction, and implementation of the doctoral programs; as part of the milestone plan, WVPU has a comprehensive needs-acceptance and coherence analysis conducted by an external institution to ensure the coherent implementation of the planned doctoral programs.

(2) Organization of the private university:

- The private university establishes a balanced organizational structure that reduces the concentration of power that currently lies in the hands of only a few bodies to ensure the necessary degree of academic self-governance and autonomy. At the moment, there is a strong overlap between the Association and the internal organization of the private university, since the Supervisory Board of the Association also serves as the University Council of the private university, the Executive Board of the Association also serves as the Executive Board of the private university (Rektorat in the Austrian higher education sector), while the Executive Board's chairperson also serves as Director of the private university.
- The private university assures the freedom of science and teaching by granting more autonomy to the private university and strengthening the possibilities for participation and involvement in the decision-making of internal stakeholder groups, such as academic as well as non-academic staff and students.
- The position of the Senate as the representative body of the various internal stakeholder groups is strengthened in order to ensure academic self-governance and academic autonomy. It is laid down in the private university's bylaws that the Senate is actively involved in the decision-making processes and has to give its formal consent regarding all matters of academic governance, in particular
 - the introduction, substantial modification, and abolishment of study programs
 - the search and appointment of faculty on the levels of assistant, associate, and full professor
 - the search, appointment, and dismissal of the Director
 - matters of internal organization that need to be regulated through the private university's bylaws
- To avoid the Senate being bypassed, its active involvement and its consent in the matters described are documented in protocols signed by the individual members of the Senate.
- The design of degree programs and the respective modules are decided and administered by the departments in charge and not prescribed by the St. Louis organization.
- Beyond the students' representation in the Senate, student co-determination is institutionalized, possibly through fixed meetings per semester or similar formats.

(4) Course offerings

In terms of the further development and expansion of the program portfolio as well as for securing the acceptance of the planned study programs, an external portfolio analysis is carried

out. In doing so, as also laid out in the assessment of the criterion on the organization of the private university, the Senate of the private university is given the opportunity to autonomously co-decide on the establishment of the study programs in accordance with the findings of the external analysis, e.g. by using a curricular commission or the establishment of a working group for curricular further development, taking into account and preserving the special elements of the curricula in the Webster network.

(6) Research & Development

The private university assures that its research concept covers the following aspects:

- provision of a detailed concept for pursuing its strategic goal of developing an interdisciplinary joint research focus
- definition of qualitative goals for its departments and the respective disciplines and describe how these can be achieved.

The private university convincingly demonstrates an increase of:

- its efforts to team up with institutions within and beyond the WPU network in research activities
- the number of academic workshops held as well as conference participation of its faculty, including paper presentations
- third-party funding granted to faculty members with and without internal and external collaborative partners.
- the number of publications co-authored by members of WVPU and other institutions.

Within the next two years, the private university establishes a research culture comprising strategies that aim at monitoring and increasing each staff member's scientific productivity in terms of research activities and endeavors to integrate research into teaching.

(7) Staff

- Permanent academic staff is increased in line with the upgrading of research capacity and the implementation of doctoral programs.
- The vacant positions in Psychology need to be occupied as soon as possible.
- Defines more clearly the academic qualification needed to teach the different course formats.
- Considers the research agenda of candidates to a greater extent in future recruitment procedures.
- WVPU offers further training regarding methods and research design for the academic staff.
- The private university introduces an institutionalized policy on sabbaticals that ensures the eligibility of all staff members to a sabbatical and regulates the conditions under which sabbaticals have to be granted. The policy has also to include respective measures to guarantee that sabbaticals taken do not negatively affect the work of colleagues and teaching provided to students.
- The private university changes the recruitment process for permanent academic staff paying more tribute to the quality of research (see conditions for §17 (4) above).
- WVPU must ensure the active participation of the Senate in the search and appointment of faculty members on the level of assistant, associate, and full professor, with the Senate having to give its consent to all respective appointments. (As also pointed out in the chapter on the organization of the private university,)

(8) Funding

The financial planning of the private university is revised taking into account the planned introduction and maintenance of doctoral programs as well as the expansion of research capacities.

(11) Quality Management System

The private university develops a policy for recognition procedures related to formal, non-formal educational pathways and informally acquired competencies in the sense of the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), taking into account the guidelines and recommendations of the EHEA.

In addition to the requirements laid out, the expert panel suggests that the Board of AQ Austria makes the following **recommendations** to the private university:

(1) Profile and objectives

The private university sharpens its institutional profile by explaining the role of research more profoundly and by depicting the value created by the program portfolio offered. The composition of the program portfolio, which is also discussed in the section on *Course offerings*, is explained and linked to the institutional profile.

(2) Development plan

- The private university carries out a comprehensive demand-, acceptance-, and coherence analysis in order to identify the topics for expanding the current program portfolio. With respect to the study program in Psychology, the private university focuses on areas that complement its general profile, thus putting more emphasis on social, organizational, and political psychology, than on counseling, as this would allow the private university to (a) fill an important market niche, and (b) create additional cross-links with the other disciplines represented at WVPU, hence promoting the declared developmental goal of the institution.
- The private university puts more emphasis on research-based teaching, as doctoral students need to be developed accordingly.

(3) Organization of the private university

The private university takes further measures to strengthen gender equality and the advancement of women.

(4) Course offerings

- The private university undertakes a comprehensive revision of the module handbooks taking the constructive alignment into account. To this end, a working group for the quality enhancement of teaching, which can also support the senate and a curriculum commission with recommendations, should be convened.
- The private university creates continuing education programs for permanent faculty and, if necessary, for external faculty as well, in order to anchor didactic methodological diversity in the study programs.

(6) Research & Development:

- The private university considers implementing regular inquiries among faculty members (e.g., conducted by the RSO) asking which type of service they consider to best support their research activities, and where they see room for improvements. The results of these inquiries should be protocolled.

- The laboratories should contain modern equipment matching the research interests of the current faculty.
- Regulations to ensure the flexibility in teaching schedules for faculty members engaging in research should be improved.
- The private university offers trainings in methodology making researchers familiar with current research designs and methods.
- The private university analyzes potential reasons for its lack of success in grant acquisition as part of its quality management in collaboration with the faculty and develops a joint strategy targeting higher success rates. In general, promoting collaborations with external institutions, and increasing the incentives for faculty members who publish in high-impact journals and work on research proposals have proven to be effective in this regard.
- The private university promotes student exchange and develops joint research foci across different institutions of its worldwide network.
- The private university invites more guest speakers from outside the network as well as researchers with strong research agendas for common workshops, as this will help to establish research collaborations beyond its network and to increase its visibility.
- WVPU should be asked to develop specific means and procedures to encourage those members of the permanent scientific staff whose with lacking proof of scientific productivity to become engaged in corresponding activities.
- WVPU puts a strong emphasis on research productivity when hiring new faculty members.
- While students make use of internships, these are not anchored in the curriculum. The team of experts recommends that WVPU develops course programs that coordinate student training in the classroom with internships and research activities in a structured way (i.e. as part of the regular curriculum), thus promoting the transfer of knowledge in both directions (i.e. from within the university to society and back from society to WVPU).
- WVPU increases networking with different external institutions in Vienna and beyond, in order to become a more attractive partner for research collaborations.

(7) Staff

Recruit additional permanent faculty with the appropriate research experience for the introduction of a doctoral program.

(10) Cooperations

The private university uses the Webster network to promote staff mobility with regard to research and teaching.

(12) Information

The private university renews the course catalog, updates the links, and provides students and website visitors with a more centralized and concise overview of the programs and their content as well as better linkages to the syllabi. Furthermore, the private university considers including an easily accessible visual representation (i.e. a table) of the curricula, in which the structure of the program (and a model for which courses/modules to take in which semesters) is outlined.

6. Documents reviewed

- Application for institutional re-accreditation of the Webster Vienna Private University from 30.03.2021 in the version of 07.07.2021 in the version of.
- Submission of additional information before the site visit from the 17.12.2021
- Submission of additional information after the site visit form the 09.02.2022

Vienna, June 24, 2022

Dear Members of the Board,

Please allow us to commend the reviewers and the AQ Austria team for a very productive site visit. We highly appreciate the time and effort they spent helping us to further develop the quality and services at Webster Vienna Private University (WVPU). We would also like to thank the reviewers for the extensive evaluation leading to a series of recommendations that can help us advance our mission and objectives.

We would like to take this opportunity to address the issues that led to the reviewers' recommendations. Perhaps we can provide some further details that clarify our development plan, governance structure, particularly the role of the Senate, faculty research and training, the planned introduction of PhD programs, and financial planning.

Ad Development Plan & Doctoral Programs

The reviewers recommend that WVPU develops a "coherent well-defined process including a milestone plan for the development, introduction, and implementation of the doctoral programs". As part of this plan WVPU should have an external institution conduct a needs acceptance and coherence analysis (p.38).

Due to the transition conditions (§14 Abs. 4 PrivHG) issued on 24 May 2022, WVPU has ample time to introduce doctoral programs (see also further clarification of §22 para 5-7, 16 June 2022: https://www.aq.ac.at/de/akkreditierung/dokumente-verfahren-pu/PrivH-AkkVO_2021_18_03_2022_und_20_05_2022_V1.3.pdf?m=1655118855&).

This time period will allow WVPU to develop not only the exact nature of the doctoral programs but, more importantly, create the essential scientific infrastructure with the necessary personnel and international network. As has been pointed out during the site visit, WVPU is planning to analyze the possibility of a doctoral school, i.e. pooling resources with the founding campus in St. Louis, USA and our fellow European campus in Geneva, Switzerland. We have already taken the first step in this process by discussing areas where our expertise and network may lend itself to PhD programs. In the coming years, together with the Senate and our colleagues in the global Webster network we will further specify and detail the doctoral program to be set up.

While this is only the first step, it is a significant start that comes directly on the heels of the site visit. That means we used the fruitful discussions with the reviewers to deepen our

doctoral program plans, and as a result have also begun to examine the pros and cons of a multi-campus doctoral school as a means to leverage our existing resources. WVPU sees a tremendous need to establish doctoral programs at the intersection of different disciplines in the social sciences. Such programs would further establish WVPU's objective to not merely copy existing programs in the European landscape, but rather develop an innovative and progressive program that also corresponds to the complexity of our societies in the 21st century.

Moreover, in May 2022, we contracted an external institution (BDO) to evaluate the most promising fields to develop Webster's program portfolio at the BA and MA level. Naturally, the process stemming from this external evaluation will also steer the development of the doctoral programs.

Concerning the costs associated with the introduction of doctoral programs, we would like to stress that the finances of the institutions are sound and WVPU has produced a surplus in each of the last four years (please see below our annotations to the financial plan). Part and parcel of any decision to move forward with doctoral programs will naturally include an external evaluation of its financial viability. Being one of the very few private universities in Austria that relies entirely on tuition, we are acutely aware of the financial implications. Furthermore, WVPU is in possession of a letter of patronage (see Appendix 1) from its founding campus as well as the full support as was emphasized by the Webster University's president Dr. Julian Schuster. Webster is looking forward to working together with AQ Austria to organize the next steps.

Ad Organization of the Private University

The reviewers recommend that "the university establishes a balanced organizational structure that reduces the concentration of power that currently lies in the hands of only a few bodies to ensure the necessary degree of academic self-governance and autonomy" (p. 38). Allow us to address the individual points mentioned:

1. Overlap between board of the association and the Executive Board of WVPU

According to point 3.I. of the explanations to § 16 para 3 PU-AkkVO, such a personnel union is permissible in principle. In such cases, a transparent separation between the tasks of the rector and the management is required. The division of business and representative duties within the management body of the association is also permissible under association law. Point 2.2.4. para 2 of the WVPU statutes already contains a detailed regulation of the rector's competences. Point 2.2.3 of the statutes regulates the tasks of the board and thus also of the chairman of the association. In our opinion, the transparent separation of competences recommended in the explanations to the PU-AkkVO is, therefore, already sufficiently given.

2. “Ensure the freedom of science and teaching” by strengthening the participation in the decision-making by internal stakeholder groups.
 - a. Senate – According to the statutes (§ 2.2.9) and the respective bylaws the WVPU Senate, which fully represents permanent faculty, adjunct faculty, administrative staff, and students, has the requisite rights regarding academic matters. All program changes, modifications, deletions are discussed with and voted upon by the WVPU Senate. This is also relevant for the recommended condition related to course offerings (p.38f). WVPU does not introduce or change a program without the consent of the WVPU Senate. Furthermore, the Senate plays a lead role in organizing faculty development, faculty research seminars, vocational training for staff, and any fundamental changes in the academic organizational structure. Contrary to the statement on p. 27 of the Expert Report that faculty is in the minority in the search committee for new faculty members, faculty always have the majority in such committees.
 - b. Student co-determination – We can confirm that student co-determination is already institutionalized and well-practiced. In addition to being represented in the WVPU Senate, and by invitation also present in the meetings of the University Council, meetings between the rector, associate director and the Student Government Association (SGA) take place twice a semester (during the Covid-19 pandemic meetings took place weekly) and at any time at the request of the SGA. Furthermore, once a semester the SGA organizes together with rectorate town-hall meetings to which all students are invited and can directly address any matter of concern with the WVPU Executive Board. Indeed, the students play a vital part in the interaction between the rectorate and the university as a whole. As confirmed by the reviewers’ meetings with WVPU students, Webster takes pride in its student-oriented operations.

Ad Research & Development

In the area of R&D, the reviewers recommend the condition that WVPU provides a “definition of the qualitative goal for its departments and the respective disciplines” (p.39). In fact, the annual performance agreements between the individual departments and the Executive Board include qualitative and quantitative objectives. Included in these agreements are the detailed publications plans of each faculty member with an eye on the top tier journals and publishers as well as professional and/or vocational development goals. The performance agreements are also the place for faculty to plan research stays, sabbaticals, exchange visits, and the department’s symposia plans. Moreover, faculty, also announces the conferences it wants to attend which provides management with the necessary input for financial planning.

As for the development of an interdisciplinary joint research focus, WVPU had an external consulting firm (mentioned above) conduct an analysis to better understand the market conditions and future areas of development. Given the small size of WVPU and, most importantly, the expertise of its faculty, interdisciplinarity serves the objective of providing a well-rounded education to our students. This interdisciplinarity is not a self-serving endeavor, but rather is based on the research interests of faculty and students. It is our understanding

that the complexities of today's world demand knowledge that reaches beyond the traditional confines of single disciplines. We have addressed this issue and the related process in our application documents (especially Goals 1&4).

The reviewers also recommend that WVPU “convincingly demonstrates an increase of” (p. 39) the number of workshops and conference participation of our faculty. As shown in chapter 6.3.4 Research output (p.149f), WVPU faculty shows an impressive academic output including conference participation. As stipulated in our regulations, faculty may only attend a conference if a paper has been accepted. WVPU also hosted a wide range of workshops, symposia, and external guest lectures on campus over the last years, as shown in the table below.

Year	Scholarly presentations at Conferences	WVPU hosted Conferences or symposia	WVPU hosted guest lectures, panel discussions	External event cooperation	Visiting scholars hosted
2015-2016	62	1	6	1	2
2016-2017	33	2	8	4	0
2017-2018	30	3	20	10	0
2018-2019	44	6	19	8	5
2019-2020	41	5	23	2	4

With respect to the research culture, WVPU already has been actively strengthening it over the last years. Through its efforts, reaching from an annual research day where faculty present their research endeavors, seminars where grant applications are presented at a very early stage in order to receive feedback, to numerous external guest lectures integrating Webster not only in the local Viennese network but also into the international one, WVPU has succeeded to become part of the international research community.

Ad Staff

WVPU is aware of its need to enhance its faculty roster with respect to the introduction of doctoral programs. As said above, WVPU has started discussions with colleagues from the founding university as well as its fellow European campus in Geneva on how to establish a doctoral school in the coming years. The new transition regulation also allows WVPU to develop its personnel structure. In addition, WVPU is determined to tie vacant positions to the development of programs based on the external review conducted in May 2022.

It is also recommended (p.39) that WVPU defines more clearly the academic qualification required to teach different course formats. In fact, WVPU lists the specific qualifications required for every position and rank (p.168ff of the re-accreditation application). Each department has minimum qualification requirements, checked annually, to ensure all teaching and research needs. Every individual who teaches any course must be pre-approved by the respective department head to confirm they meet the qualifications (either by scholarly degree or years of tested experience).

Some explanatory notes for the above table include:

- The visible increase in revenues in AY2021/22 as compared to AY 2020/21 is due to the return of study abroad students who were absent during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Starting with AY 2022/23 student numbers are planned with a yearly moderate increase of 0,5%.
- Student tuition is planned with a yearly increase of 1%.
- Doctoral programs are planned to begin in 2025/26 with costs at the earliest from 2025 onwards, with a portion potentially shared with the Geneva campus. However, the new transition guidelines allow WVPU more time for their introduction and, therefore, also for the implementation of the recommendations of the reviewers pertaining to such programs.

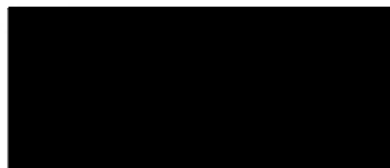
Finally, WVPU is committing over [REDACTED] for faculty and staff development and training.

Conclusion

WVPU highly appreciates the extensive feedback the reviewers provided. We have already begun to act on implementing many of their recommendations and hope that this letter has clarified some of the most important issues related to the recommended conditions. Last but not least, we also want to point out the specific nature of Webster University. A truly global university, with campuses on four continents, naturally differs in its organizational set-up and carries with it multiple levels of responsibilities to its stakeholders and above all else to its students. This unique structure requires a great deal of cooperation and coordination in order to guarantee quality and consistency across the network. The support from our colleagues in Webster St. Louis as well as the exchange amongst all the international campuses secures a unique educational experience for Webster students. Faculty benefit as well through exchange and mobility programs. WVPU has thrived in Austria for over 40 years and we are excited to continue our mission. The input of the reviewers and efforts of AQ Austria has been invaluable to achieve our goals.

Again, we would like to thank everyone involved in the re-accreditation process for the excellent cooperation and we look forward to receiving your final response.

Sincerely,



Prof. Dr. Johannes Pollak
Rector