

Review Report of the Expert Panel to the accreditation of the study programme „Strategic Communication (BA)“ of Webster Vienna Private University

pursuant to section 7 of the Decree on Accreditation of Private Universities (PU-AkkVO)

Vienna, 20.05.2019

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1 Principles for the procedure

Higher education in Austria

The Austrian higher education system currently comprises:

- 21 public universities;
- 14 private universities, the providers of which are private entities, which have been publicly recognised through accreditation
- 21 universities of applied sciences; the providers are either institutions organised under private law which are subsidised by the state or accredited public entities;
- the university colleges of teacher education are provided by the state or private institutions that have been publicly recognised through accreditation;
- the philosophic-theologic higher education institutions are provided by the Catholic Church;
- the Danube University Krems is a state university for postgradual further education, its structure corresponds to a great extent to public universities;
- the tasks of the Institute of Science and Technology – Austria is the appreciation and advancement of new fields of research as well as the post-graduate education in the form of PhD and post-doc programmes.

In the winter semester of 2017¹ around 303.790 students were studying at public universities (incl. the Danube University Krems). Furthermore, approx. 51.522 students were inscribed for a degree programme at a university of applied sciences and approx. 13.530 students at a private university.

External quality assurance

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

Private universities must undergo an AQ Austria-coordinated institutional accreditation procedure every six years. After twelve years of uninterrupted accreditation, the accreditation can be awarded for twelve years at a time. If in the meantime degree programmes or certificate university programmes leading to an academic degree are set up, they also require accreditation.

Universities of applied sciences must have their initial institutional accreditation renewed after six years. After that, they switch to the audit system. The accreditation status is, however, linked to a positive certification decision following the audit procedure. Initial accreditation is required for each degree programme before it may be offered.

¹ As of April 2018

Accreditation of private universities and their degree programmes

In Austria, private universities wanting to operate as higher education institutions require institutional accreditation, which has to be renewed on a regular basis. In addition to the institutional accreditation, each degree programme to be offered by the private university requires prior accreditation. Furthermore, changes relevant to accreditation require approval by an administrative decision. Therefore, an application for modification of the administrative decision on accreditation needs to be filed. The Agency for Quality Assurance and Accreditation Austria (AQ Austria) is responsible for accreditation.

AQ Austria conducts all accreditation procedures pursuant to the Decree on Accreditation of Private Universities² (PU-AkkVO). Furthermore, the procedures conducted by the Agency are based on the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area.³

AQ Austria appoints experts for the evaluation of accreditation applications. On the basis of the application documents and following a site visit at the applicant institution, the experts draw up a joint review report. The Board of AQ Austria then makes its accreditation decision on the basis of the review report and taking into consideration the applicant institution's comment. If the statutory prerequisites for accreditation are met and the qualitative requirements are satisfied, the submitted degree programme may, by administrative decision, be accredited. In case of a modification of an administrative decision or an extension of an accreditation, accreditation may be granted under conditions.

The Board's administrative decision has to be approved by the Federal Minister for Science, Research and Economy prior to its entry into force. After the procedure has been completed, a report on the outcome of the procedure as well as the expert report shall be published on the websites of AQ Austria and the applicant institution.

The legal bases for the accreditation of degree programmes at private universities are the Act on Quality Assurance in Higher Education (HS-QSG)⁴ as well as the Private Universities Act (PUG)⁵.

2 Short information on the accreditation application for the modification of the administrative decision on accreditation of study programme

Information on the applicant institution	
Applicant institution	Webster Vienna Private University (WVPU)
Legal status	registered association (German: Verein)

²Decree on Accreditation of Private Universities (PU-AkkVO)

³ Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)

⁴ Act on Quality Assurance in Higher Education (HS-QSG)

⁵ Private Universities Act (PUG)

Initial accreditation	09.01.2001
Date of last extension of accreditation	09.01.2015
Site	Vienna
Number of students	575
Accredited degree programmes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business Administration (BSc) • Management (BA) • Management with an emphasis in International Business (BA) • Management with an emphasis in Marketing (BA) • International Relations (BA) • Psychology (BA) • Media Communications (BA) • Finance (MSc) • Marketing (MSc) • Master of Business Administration (MBA) • International Relations (MA) • Psychology with an Emphasis in Counseling Psychology (MA)
Information on the study programme subject to changes	
Name of study programme	Strategic Communication (BA)
Type of study programme	Bachelor degree programme
ECTS	240
Regular study period	8 Semester
Maximum intake per year	max. 25
Academic degree	Bachelor of Arts (BA or B.A.)
Study formate	Full time
Language	English
Tuition fee	€ 80.640
Accredited for the following location(s)	Vienna

The accreditation application was submitted by Webster Vienna Private University on 05.11.2018. As per resolution of 23.01.2019, 24.01.2019 and 12.02.2019 the Board of AQ Austria has appointed the following experts for the evaluation of the application:

Name	Function and institution	Role within the review panel
Priv.-Doz. ⁱⁿ Dr. ⁱⁿ habil. Stephanie Geise	Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster	Head of the expert panel Expert from academia
Dr. Jan Niklas Kocks	Freie Universität Berlin	Expert from academia

Mag. (FH) Roland Mayrl	Metrum Communications GmbH	Expert with professional practice
Tessina Koch	Universität Wien	Student expert

On March 21st 2019 the experts and the representative of AQ Austria conducted a site visit of the premises in Vienna.

3 Statements on and assessments based on the assessment criteria pursuant to PU-AkkVO

3.1 Assessment criteria pursuant to section 17 para. 1 sub para. a-n: Degree programme and degree programme management

Degree programme and degree programme management

- a. *The degree programme is aligned with the objectives of the institution and is logically connected with the plan for its development.*

Regarding questions of compatibility and alignment of the planned bachelor programme "Strategic Communication (BA)" with the overarching goals of the Webster Vienna Private University, the programme application as well as further explanations stated during the site visit comprehensibly and conclusively displayed that the planned bachelor programme easily fits into the already existing education offer – equally in terms of content, structure and philosophy.

Intending to prepare their students for success in a world defined by increasing complexity and rapid change, Webster Vienna Private University aims to offer five distinctive selling points: (1) dual accreditation in the United States and Austria, (2) small class sizes that engender mentorship – a particular of American academic culture, (3) a well-balanced combination of researchers and practitioners that provide students with the skills necessary for success in the labor market and further education, (4) a global network that provides mobility and leverages a large pool of researchers around the world, and (5) publicly engaged faculty who opens doors for the university's graduates. While WVPU's objective thus in general is to offer an academically excellent 'American-European' education in a distinctive global setting, the planned degree programme on "Strategic Communication (BA)" contributes to this objective by offering students a learning environment that not only brings together faculty and students from over 100 different countries, but also stipulates a balanced integration of studentship and professional experience in a global network.

Considering the academic content, the intended subject areas on strategic communication have a strong connection to the existing study programme on media and communication, at the same time broadening and specifying the scholarly scope of Webster Vienna Private University's education. While the "Media Communications (BA)" bachelor programme offers a more general education in mass and media communication, the proposed "Strategic Communication (BA)" programme provides a more focused and specified curriculum, placing

an emphasis on skills of strategic communication, such as diagnostic planning, communication policy, persuasion, argument, the balance of strategy and tactics, ensuring that theory, research, and application merge successfully. In addition, the proposed degree programme embraces the WVPU's core values of education, learning, diversity, and global citizenship, offering an international perspective, and encouraging individuality, creativity and scholarship, aiming to foster a lifelong desire to learn and actively serve communities and the world.

Based on these arguments, the expert panel considers the degree programme aligned with the objectives of the institution and logically connected with the plan for its further development.

The criterion is fulfilled.

Degree programme and degree programme management

- b. The qualification objectives of the degree programme (learning outcomes) have been clearly defined and meet the technical, scientific, and professional requirements and are in accordance with the respective levels of the qualification framework of the European Higher Education Area.*

The proposed bachelor programme "Strategic Communication (BA)" is estimated to last four years of full-time study culminating in 240 ECTS, thus relating to the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) framework for bachelor studies and according to the Bologna qualifications referencing Level 6 for bachelor studies for the National and European Qualifications Framework.

According to the written programme application, Webster Vienna Private University has specified the primary learning outcomes as (1) applying the acquired knowledge, skills, and research methods to the completion of an original thesis in strategic communication; (2) gaining exposure to global connectivity and interactivity through the exploration of corporate, social and political environments across borders; (3) applying current communication and media technologies to address clients' problems related to advocacy and/or reputation management; and (4) demonstrating knowledge of the fundamental theories and ethical best practices of strategic communication. As outlined in the application, all qualification objectives are examined by specific methods and measures, including written and oral examinations, and an original undergraduate thesis comprising an introduction, literature review, research methodology, analysis, and conclusion.

The expert panel therefore considers the qualification objectives of the degree programme as clearly defined. The qualification objectives meet the technical, scientific, and professional requirements and are in accordance with the respective levels of the qualification framework of the European Higher Education Area.

The criterion is fulfilled.

Degree programme and degree programme management

- c. The designation of the degree programme corresponds to the qualification profile.*

The proposed bachelor programme is labeled as "Strategic Communication (BA)". This designation corresponds to the education and qualification that is offered. The "Strategic Communication (BA)" combines courses in public relations, speech communication, media communication, advertising, political science, psychology, marketing, and anthropology,

combining a variety of disciplinary fields important to understand the diversity of strategic communication phenomena in theory and practice. Likewise, the degree programme corresponds to actual professional job titles such as Strategic Communications Manager or Strategic Communications Consultant, the graduates of the planned "Strategic Communication (BA)" can seek for, entering the labour market or continuing with the studies on a master level after their final degree. Thus, the expert panel considers the designation of the degree programme as corresponding to the qualification profile.

The criterion is fulfilled.

Degree programme and degree programme management

- d. The students are involved in an appropriate manner in shaping the teaching and learning processes. They are encouraged to be actively involved in the learning process.*

In the application the WVPU describes various options for their students to take part in shaping the teaching and learning process. The students are represented in the university senate of the WVPU and in the Student Government Association (SGA). They partake in formal and informal discussions, e.g. in curricular planning terms. WVPU has an anonymous online course evaluation process to evaluate the faculty, the teaching methods, the learning outcomes etc. This allows direct involvement and influence of the students in the teaching and learning process. During the site visit, the director of the WVPU emphasized that they see their students at WVPU as part of the department.

The WVPU offers its students different opportunities of participation in ongoing research projects taking place in the department. Students can also get active through the course assignments and activities, where feedback exercises, peer review exercises etc. are included. The statement of the students during the site visit concerning the close relation between the faculty staff members and the students as well as about the feedback culture of the faculty and student involvement in the learning process convinced the experts, that there is encouragement and involvement of the students in the learning process at the WVPU.

All in all, the expert panel considers this criterion to be fulfilled.

Degree programme and degree programme management

- e. The contents and structure of, and teaching method applied to the curriculum and the modules meet the technical, scientific, and professional requirements and are suited to achieve the intended learning outcomes. They furthermore take into account the requirements of a diversified student body.*

The bachelor programme "Strategic Communication (BA)" as proposed by the WVPU aims at a total of 240 ECTS. While 180 of these ECTS focus on discipline specific courses, their number is further subdivided into: 100 ECTS of individually required courses, 64 ECTS from a discipline-specific subset of degree electives and 16 ECTS for practical applications. In total, 75% of the proposed 240 ECTS have a clear focus on strategic communication. The course plan features theory-focused classes on *inter alia* political communication, public relations, communication theory and marketing, this is supplemented by methodological classes and classes focusing on practical applications and media production. Electives *inter alia* focus on writing skills, intercultural communication and media literacy, thereby offering students a

possibility to set their own priorities within this subset of appr. 25% of the total degree programme. The proposed combination of theory, empirical research and practical applications is adequate to achieve a profound understanding of strategic communication and to develop the necessary skills for further academic studies or a professional career or traineeship in this field. The portfolio of electives takes the requirements of a diversified student body into account.

This criterion is fulfilled.

Degree programme and degree programme management

- f. The academic degree to be awarded is comparable on an international scale.*

The proposed academic degree "Strategic Communication (BA)" is comparable to other undergraduate programmes in the area of strategic communication in Europe. According to the market overview, there are comparable undergraduate programmes in the area of strategic communication in Europe. The Netherlands, Slovenia, Spain, Romania, Germany, Italy and Bulgaria offer an undergraduate and Austria offers two different master-level programmes. All universities offer their programmes in departments of communication studies.

The expert panel considers the criterion to be fulfilled.

Degree programme and degree programme management

- g. The application of the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) is adequate and plausible.*

Admittedly, the 240 ECTS are on the upper end of bachelor programmes (and rather unusual for Austrian and German universities), yet they are in line with the American liberal arts focus the university postulates. The proposed workload for the individual ECTS - between 4 and 6 ECTS per course - is also on the upper end (with German universities often assigning 5 to 10 ECTS for such classes), yet in total, it seems adequate for such a programme, also considering the support structures students enjoy at this private university. The assignment of 8 ECTS for the final thesis are lower than what many other higher education institutions assign, yet this does not collide with the overall adequacy of the application of the European Credit Transfer System.

This criterion is fulfilled.

Degree programme and degree programme management

- h. The students' workload required for the degree programme is devised in a way so as to allow them to reach the aspired qualification objectives in the study period specified. The organisation of the degree programme and the students' workload of a part-time degree programme can be reconciled with a regular job.*

According to all provided information, the workload for full-time students is devised in a way that allows them to reach the aspired qualification objectives within the study period specified. Additional summer classes and counselling offers on statistical problems help here

as well; furthermore, the private university points out that there are possibilities to waive certain requirements for students with prior recognized academic experiences in specific fields. There are however no specific arrangements for part-time students in the proposed programme, as the degree programme is designed for fulltime study only. The private university states that there are flexibilities in curricular planning that will help to create opportunities for part-time studies should the need arise.

The expert panel thus considers the criterion as fulfilled.

Degree programme and degree programme management

- i. The higher education institution has adopted examination rules. The examination methods are suitable to assess whether the defined learning outcomes have been achieved.*

As defined in the written degree programme application, at Webster Vienna Private University all qualification objectives of the "Strategic Communication (BA)" bachelor programme are assessed by specific methods and measures suitable to evaluate whether the defined learning outcomes have been achieved. Examination methods include written and oral examinations as well as an original undergraduate thesis comprising an introduction, literature review, research methodology, analysis, and conclusion.

The assessment of student performance is based on a combination of approaches (e.g. diagnostic, formative, and summative) with diverse weights assigned to a mix of exams and various assignments. It is consistent of different examination assessment standards and norms as stated in the Study and Examination Guidelines. The strength of this formative assessment is that it allows faculty to monitor student performance and progress throughout the course, creating opportunities to motivate students not only to compete with one other, but predominantly with themselves.

The expert panel thus considers the criterion as fulfilled.

Degree programme and degree programme management

- j. A "diploma supplement" that complies with the requirements laid down in Annex 2 to the University Student Records Decree (Universitäts-Studienevidenzverordnung) of the Federal Ministry of Science and Research will be issued.*

A diploma supplement in accordance with the requirements of the Federal Ministry of Science and Research is issued in English and German.

The expert panel considers the criterion as fulfilled.

Degree programme and degree programme management

- k. Admission requirements and the admission procedure are clearly defined. In terms of the qualification level, admission requirements meet at least the provisions laid down in the Universities Act 2002, Federal Law Gazette I 2002/120 as amended.*

The admission requirements and admission procedures are defined and well explained in the admission requirements of the WVPU and were further specified during the site visit.

According to the admission requirements, all undergraduate students must possess a general university entrance qualification, like Austrian secondary-school leaving certificate (Matura) or a corresponding foreign certificate. In addition, WVPU requires an adequate knowledge of English language, which must be proven by various documents, transcripts and tests.

The expert panel considers the criterion as fulfilled.

Degree programme and degree programme management

- I. The private university provides the public with easily accessible information on the general conditions for student agreements which each student has to sign.*

The WVPU publishes the student agreement (Ausbildungsvertrag) in accordance with the Austrian Private University Act on the website of the WVPU (www.webster.ac.at).

The expert Panel thus considers the criterion as fulfilled.

Degree programme and degree programme management

- m. Adequate support structures are available for students seeking advice on scientific, specialist, study-related organisational, or sociopsychological matters.*

The WVPU has an extensive system of support structures available to students seeking advice on scientific, specialist, study-related organizational, or socio-psychological matters. Including a system of faculty advising, strong departmental and programme communities, tutoring centers and free counseling services. Small cohorts allow faculty members to focus on as few as 30 students. Because of that, faculty members establish a relationship to the students focused on the student's scholarly efforts, interests and progress. In addition students have open access to two tutoring centers. The "Language Center" for language development and the "Quant Center" for quantitative and statistical content. The centers provide regular workshops and walk-in tutorial services, to help the students in writing and statistical requirements of their coursework. Likewise the library of the WVPU provides research guides as well as access to online databases.

The expert panel considers the criterion to be fulfilled

Degree programme and degree programme management

- n. If e-learning, blended learning, and distance learning are part of the programme, suitable didactic, technical, organisational, and financial preconditions have been created to ensure the achievement of the degree programme's qualification objectives.*

The proposed degree programme does not explicitly incorporate e-learning as part of the studies, yet there are manifold possibilities for blended learning available at Webster Vienna Private University that could potentially be integrated into the programme. As laid out both in the proposal and demonstrated during the site visit, the private university provides state of the art digital resources for students; video-conferences, streaming and other blended learning formats are possible. The Webster Network does provide an established e-learning platform that could potentially be integrated into the programme should the need arise.

The criterion is fulfilled.

3.2 Assessment areas pursuant to section 17 para. 2 subpara. a-d: Staff

Staff

- a. A sufficient number of scientific or artistic staff is available for the degree programme, possessing the didactic qualifications necessary for teaching at universities and, in the case of certificate university programmes - if required by its profile - also professional qualifications.*

According to the written application and the site visit the WVPU has sufficient number of qualified scientific staff to execute the planned degree programme. At the moment there are five full-time internal scientific employees, and one half-time internal scientific employee for the programme: one associate professor who at the same time is head of the department, three full professors and two assistant professors. In addition, a small but growing number of external adjunct instructors will support the programme. The internal as well as the external staff have many years of teaching experience at various national and international universities.

Due to the given mixture of the faculty with different backgrounds and focuses and the didactic qualifications, the expert panel considers the criterion to be fulfilled.

Staff

- b. The permanent scientific and/or artistic staff allocated to the consecutive bachelor/master model consists of at least one full-time employee who possesses the required pertinent qualifications to be appointed professor, as well as additional full time equivalents allocated to a maximum of three persons with at least a doctoral degree or artistic credentials, without prejudice to the provisions of section 14 para. 5 subpara. g. In the case of related certificate university programmes, the full-time employee with the required pertinent qualifications to be appointed professor, responsible for the existing degree programme, may also take over the responsibility for the related certificate degree programme.*

The degree programme will be managed and super-headed by a full-time employed associate professor, who is also head of the department. At the WVPU, he is also head of the department of media communications and holds a PhD in Communications Media and Instructional Technology from Indiana University of Pennsylvania and has many years of teaching experience as associate professor at the WVPU and assistant professor at the University of Arkansas. In addition, at least three full professors will teach various courses in the study programme. All of them have an excellent scientific track record, are authors of numerous publications and have many years of research and teaching expertise. Thus the permanent scientific staff assigned to the degree programme comprises several persons with relevant qualifications.

The expert panel considers this criterion to be fulfilled.

Staff

- c. *Scientific and/or artistic staff in permanent employment shall teach at least 50% of the classes.*

The majority (27 of 32 required courses and degree electives, i.e. 156 of 180 ECTS - excluding the free general electives and Global Citizenship Programme) of the teaching workload is covered by permanently employed scientific staff of the faculty. The planned degree programme thus fulfills the requirement that at least 50% of the teaching workload is carried out by employed scientific staff.

The expert panel considers this criterion to be fulfilled.

Staff

- d. *The ratio of permanent scientific and/or artistic staff to students is adequate.*

The WVPU is assuming a first cohort of approximately 10 students, and an increase in subsequent years of five students per year. Considering this limited number of students for the planned programme, the ratio between full-time scientific staff and students is adequate. The WVPU has set a maximum class capacity to 27 students and by this calculation the student-teacher ratio does not exceed 27 students for 1 teacher. The expert panel finds this student-teacher ratio as adequate.

The expert panel considers this criterion to be fulfilled.

3.3 Assessment areas pursuant to section 17 para. 3 subparagraph. a-c: Quality assurance

Quality assurance

- a. *The degree programme has been integrated into the institution's quality management system.*

The undergraduate programme "Strategic Communication (BA)" is both integrated into the extensive quality management system of the WVPU and, via its curricular planning platform, into the curriculum of the private university. There have been regular visits to and by the parent university in St. Louis and buy-ins from stakeholders across the WVPU's global network, to guarantee a smooth integration. The WVPU will also implement a homepage for the planned degree programme and integrate it into the marketing strategy. In addition, the quality management system is intended to ensure the sustainable implementation of the university's mission statement and to serve quality control in teaching and research. The quality assurance of teaching is carried out by and through the study commission, the study and examination regulations, through evaluations of the courses. Further input is provided by general student feedback, university rankings, feedback from accrediting bodies and advice from partner organizations and alumnae.

Due to its great proximity to the degree programme "Media Communication (BA)", that already passed many stages in the development process and has already been integrated into

the institution's quality management system, the expert panel considers this criterion to be fulfilled.

Quality assurance

- b. The degree programme includes a regular quality assurance and advancement process which takes into account the degree programme, the study conditions, and the programme organisation and which involves all relevant groups as well as external experts.*

In the application the WVPU describes its extensive, multi-tiered, internal system of quality assurance and programme review for the planned degree programme. According to this, there are three levels of annual performance agreements - individual, departmental and management. Reports from all three levels are handed quarterly to the university council to ensure the control of the executive board operations and the necessary discussions of strategic objectives. The executive board and the university council conclude a performance agreement, which serves for the WVPU's strategic planning, self-evaluation purposes and enhances the functioning of individual departments and administrative units. Furthermore, programme reviews and assessments are conducted on an annual and bi-annual basis across the WVPU's global network, including syllabi, faculty, qualifications, student reviews etc. WVPU considers student feedback as an essential part of maintaining high quality - this is why the WVPU has an anonymous online course evaluation. The faculty input is guaranteed by the university senate representing the interest of faculty, staff and students and like this, enabling participation in matters of strategy development and quality management relevant for teaching, research and service.

The expert panel therefore considers this criterion to be fulfilled.

Quality assurance

- c. Students can participate in regular reflections on the degree programme and the conditions and organisation of the degree programme.*

The student evaluation of courses is an important part of the quality assurance of teaching at the WVPU. All students are thus given the opportunity to evaluate courses, faculty, teaching methods, learning outcomes, administrative support etc. at the end of each term and semester course. This anonymous online feedback system ensures a constant quality control of all degree programmes and enables every student to participate in regular reflections on the degree programme and its conditions. Students at the WVPU participate in formal and informal exchange with the staff and the faculty on various curricular matters, are represented by the Student Government Association (SGA) and are part of the university senate.

The expert panel considers this criterion to be fulfilled.

3.4 Assessment areas pursuant to section 17 para. 4 subpara. a-b: Funding and infrastructure

Funding and infrastructure

- a. Funding of the degree programme is ensured for at least six years, with the funding sources being transparently documented. Provisions have been made to fund expiring degree programmes.*

The written application contains a detailed financial plan for the period 2020 to 2025, in which the securing of financing for at least six years is comprehensible and clearly visible. The study financing of the planned degree programme consists of the tuition fees and the basic funds of the WVPU. Furthermore, it was stated in the application that the financial situation of the WVPU guarantees a teach-out for all students and that a comfort letter from the parent university - Webster University (St. Louis, USA) - offers additional funding security.

The expert panel considers the criterion to be fulfilled.

Funding and infrastructure

- b. The facilities and equipment required for the degree programme are available.*

Both in the application for accreditation and during the site visit, the WVPU stated that the necessary facilities and equipment are available for the implementation of the planned degree programme. The WVPU has the necessary premises for the holding of courses and exercises as well as sufficient recreation and learning rooms, libraries, etc. According to the expert panel, the equipment is available to a sufficient extent and meets the necessary requirements.

The expert panel considers the criterion to be fulfilled.

3.5 Assessment areas pursuant to section 17 para. 5 subparagraph. a-d: Research and development

Research and development

- a. The (planned) research and/or advancement and appreciation of the arts activities for the degree programme comply with international standards. (This applies only to degree programmes.)*

Following the Humboldt model of higher education by consequent integration of teaching and research, Webster Vienna Private University conducts research in the framework of the social and behavioral sciences. Systematically studying processes of behavior, the overarching research orientation and foci of Webster Vienna Private University and those engaged in delivering the proposed "Strategic Communications (BA)" programme seamlessly interlock. As a multidisciplinary field, strategic communication is a fast growing area of practical as well as scientific interest and research. According to the written programme exposé, WVPU intends a close integration of research and teaching especially by requiring bachelor and master theses, but also by offering study programmes that go in line with the research foci and involve students into an active research agenda. The expert panel finds that the faculty is well focused and demonstrates a record of producing research on an internationally competitive level. In addition, WVPU also has efficiently worked on the implementation of an appropriate research infrastructure as well as evaluation and quality assurance procedures.

Moreover, to further sharpen the research agenda and/or advancement of the arts activities for the degree programme on an internationally comparable level, since gaining re-accreditation in December 2016 Webster Vienna Private University is proceeding with six interconnected goals through the use of performance agreements:

- (1) Increase of research output in the form of peer-reviewed articles, books and book chapters
- (2) Increase of faculty and their network through participation in competitive conferences and projects.
- (3) Increase of acquisition of external research funds
- (4) Comprehensive integration of theses at the master level into faculty research
- (5) Increase of the number of cross-departmental, interdisciplinary theses;
- (6) Increase of the amount of cross-departmental research collaboration.

As the expert panel has experienced during the site visit, Webster Vienna Private University is committed to further work on these goals, focusing on research and improving the scholarly footprint and image of the private university, conformal with international standards. The expert panel thus considers the (planned) research and/or advancement and appreciation of the arts activities for the degree programme conforming with international standards.

The criterion is fulfilled.

Research and development

b. The scientific and/or artistic staff is involved in the institution's research activities and/or activities regarding the advancement and appreciation of the arts. The interaction between research and teaching is ensured.

Faculty in the Media Communications department conducts quality research and/or creative activities related to their area of expertise within the broader field of media and communications as well as strategic communication. Current research activities within the broad area of strategic communication encompass, for example, research on social media use and online engagement, strategic communication in polarized environments; notions of post-truth and fake news; internet memes; technology in the context of health; information/communication technologies and media convergence; media ethics; or digital culture. Applying quantitative, qualitative, and critical approaches, the faculty aims to further develop robust scholarship in public relations principles and practices; strategic writing; crisis management; corporate advocacy and communication; issue management; social media strategies; strategic communication in a global environment; organizational communication, offering a clear link to the three other departments at Webster Vienna Private University for interdisciplinary research.

Regarding the interaction between research and teaching, the Webster Vienna Private University is following Humboldtian principles fostering linkages between education and research. In that vein, faculty at the assistant, associate, and full professor levels together with employed lecturers and adjunct faculty ensure that students are involved in appropriate research activities. While professors bring their research practices and experiences into the classroom, providing students with insights into research activities, projects and methods, the emphasis of integrating research and teaching at the undergraduate level is put on the formation of foundational knowledge required to produce appropriate scholarly output. On top of that, by following a "Methods Roadmap" implemented in the planned bachelor programme, students are well educated in research methodology and design throughout their course of studies. According to the follow-up explanations of Webster Vienna Private University, all

"Strategic Communication (BA)" students must take a minimum of four methods and research design courses (three of these apply to all undergraduate students at WVPU, one is specific to students enrolled in the BA "Strategic Communication" programme). The expert panel thus considers the scientific staff appropriately involved in the institution's research activities. The expert panel considers the interaction between research and teaching ensured.

The criterion is therefore fulfilled.

Research and development

- c. *To the extent required by the type of degree programme, students will be integrated into research projects and/or projects regarding the advancement and appreciation of the arts.*

According to the degree programme exposé, the explanations during and subsequent to the site visit, research is understood as a central component in a student's experience in the proposed "Strategic Communication (BA)" programme. Students can participate in a variety of applied and research-oriented activities, such as creating a social media campaign to support an issue important to the students or conduct survey research on comparisons of self-esteem of men and women in their use of social media. In addition, students will have opportunities to participate in the work of professional organizations and/or in the production of promotional campaigns, crisis management protocols, social media strategies, etc. that could be used in the professional environment.

In the scope of the proposed degree programme, students will work on research proposals, projects, papers, etc. Moving through the curriculum, research assignments are expected to become more rigorous, and instructors take on increasingly important mentorship roles, guiding students on how to maximize the benefits gained from their methodological training and delivering increasingly sophisticated research papers as an essential component of their coursework. Students also will be encouraged to pursue research topics of interest to them personally and/or professionally in order to nurture a sustainable and emboldened research component in the programme. Students also will be stimulated to participate in research projects conducted by the faculty as suitable. However, while students will be encouraged to participate in ongoing faculty led research projects appropriate to their level whenever possible, the integration of teaching and research at the undergraduate level occurs primarily through course assignment and assessment. Finally, in order to complete their undergraduate degree students are required to write a research-based thesis. In this process, students will cooperate with their thesis supervisors as members of faculty. To the extent required by the type of degree programme, students will thus be integrated into research projects and/or projects regarding the advancement and appreciation of the arts.

The criterion is fulfilled.

Research and development

- d. *The (planned) organisational and structural framework conditions are sufficient and suitable to implement the research concept and/or the concept for the advancement and appreciation of the arts. (This applies only to degree programmes.)*

Webster Vienna Private University in general, and its department of media communications in special, benefit from several key areas of support serving as foundation that enable the

realization of its research and teaching objectives. In that vein, for faculty the private university provides financial support to attend conferences and participate in collaborative projects. Faculty is also supported by an internal research service offering help in the pursuit of grants as well as for attracting visiting researchers and professors from other institutions as well as by establishing mobility programs to benefit faculty and students alike. Another part of the supporting infrastructure is Webster Vienna Trainee Scholarship (WVTS) program for students, affording opportunities to support and participate in ongoing projects at WVPU in the form of scholarships awarded each term of the academic year pending the submission and approval of an application. The expert panel accordingly considers the organisational and structural framework conditions sufficient and suitable to implement the research concept and/or the concept for the advancement and appreciation of the arts.

The criterion is therefore fulfilled.

3.6 Assessment areas pursuant to section 17 para. 6 subpara. a-b: National and international co-operation

National and international co-operation

- a. In line with the degree programme's profile, national and international co-operation projects with higher education institutions or, if applicable, partners outside the higher education sector are envisaged.*

Webster Vienna Private University maintains a network of partner institutions in higher education both within the Webster network and outside of it. There are currently 40 partner universities in a variety of countries. Webster Vienna Private University has furthermore been awarded the Erasmus charter in 2015 and actively seeks to broaden its network with various Schools of Communication. Co-operation outside of the network of Webster is actively sought as well. The private university offers student exchange and faculty mobility, visiting professorships and scholar-in-residence-programmes. Considering the curriculum of the programme described, the concept for national and international cooperation outlined here is adequate and well fitting.

This criterion is fulfilled.

National and international co-operation

- b. The co-operation projects encourage and support the advancement of the degree programme and the mobility of students and staff.*

Webster Vienna Private University offers exchange both within the Webster network and also through the Erasmus exchange system. Students have the opportunity to study part of their classes at other Webster universities. The "Strategic Communication (BA)" programme is however not offered at these; accordingly, students will have to take part of their elective or liberal arts classes during their exchange semesters. In sum, there are currently appr. 40 partner universities of Webster Vienna Private University. Students have active support for exchange programmes on campus. Faculty mobility is also encouraged, yet considered as a form of 'sabbatical', i.e. faculty has to arrange for ways to make up for their unavailability to teach in such semesters. Despite this, faculty mobility is actively encouraged, WVPU supports faculty in working at partner universities abroad. Active and regular exchange of both students and faculty ensures an adequate level of international co-operation here.

The criterion is fulfilled.

4 Summary and final evaluation

According to the Webster Vienna Private University's written application and the site visit, the "Strategic Communication (BA)" degree programme is aligned with the objectives of the institution and is logically connected with the plan for its development. The expected qualification objectives and learning outcomes have been clearly defined. They meet the technical, scientific, and professional requirements and are in accordance with the respective levels of the qualification framework of the European Higher Education Area. In addition, the designation of the degree programme corresponds to the qualification profile. Moreover, the expert panel considers the programme adequate to reach the stated learning goals and find these in accordance with academic standards in the field of political communication. The contents and structure of, and teaching method applied to the curriculum and the modules, meet the technical, scientific, and professional requirements and are in accordance with the respective levels of the qualification framework of the EHEA. They also take into account the requirements of a diversified student body.

While the academic degree to be awarded in the degree programme is comparable on an international scale, the application of the ECTS-system is adequate and plausible. The students' workload required is devised in a way so as to allow them to reach the aspired qualification objectives in the study period specified. Multiple forms of blended learning are possible, support structures and modern infrastructure are readily available. WVPU provides possibilities for and actively encourages student mobility and faculty mobility and seeks broad international cooperation.

WVPU has adopted examination rules. The examination methods are suitable to assess whether the defined learning outcomes have been achieved. Regarding the students appropriate involvement in shaping the teaching and learning processes, the students are actively encouraged to be involved in the learning process. Amongst others, students at WVPU are represented in the University Senate and the Student Government Association, evaluate the faculty, the teaching methods and learning outcomes with an anonymous online course evaluation and can get active through their course assignments. The strong feedback culture strengthens the encouragement and involvement of the students and emphasizes, that the students are part of the department. Through the close relation between faculty staff and students, the direct involvement and influence of the students is assured. For students seeking advice on scientific, specialist, study-related organisational, or socio-psychological matters, adequate support structures are available: More precisely, the students at WVPU benefit from the extensive system of support structures available for students seeking advice on scientific, specialist, study-related, organizational or socio-psychological matters. The "Language Center" and "Quant Center" provide help for students in writing and statistical requirements. All in all, the students studying at WVPU are in really good hands and receive all the help they need to bring out the best in them.

According to the written application and the site visit the WVPU has sufficient number of qualified scientific staff to execute the planned degree programme. The internal as well as the external staff have many years of teaching experience at various national and international universities. All of them have an excellent scientific track record, are authors of numerous

publications and have many years of research expertise. The planned programme fulfills the requirement that at least 50% of the teaching workload is carried out by employed scientific staff and the expert panel finds the student-teacher ratio as adequate. The "Strategic Communication (BA)" programme fulfills the quality assurance requirements amongst others with its integration into the extensive quality management system and WVPU's global network. They have an extensive, multi-tiered, internal system of quality assurance and programme review for the planned study programme, whereby the students feedback as an essential part of maintaining high quality bargains. Besides that, the University Senate guarantees the representation of the interests of faculty staff and students and enables their participation in the quality assurance process. The anonymous online feedback system ensures a constant quality control of all programmes and enables every student to participate in regular reflections on the degree programme and its conditions. This steady exchange between students and faculty assures quality and the students' influence on the degree programme. The financial plan for the period 2020 to 2025 shows that financing for at least six years is secured. Both in the application for accreditation and during the site visit, the WVPU stated that the necessary facilities and equipment is available for the implementation of the planned degree programme.

The planned research for the degree programme complies with international standards. The scientific staff is involved in the institution's research activities and activities regarding the advancement and appreciation of the arts. The interaction between research and teaching is ensured. Students will be integrated into research projects and/or projects regarding the advancement and appreciation of the arts. The proposed study programme has a clear academic concept and integrates sufficient amounts of profound communication theory and empirical research methods to distinguish it from pure 'applied sciences' programmes. The planned organisational and structural framework conditions are sufficient and suitable to implement the research concept and the concept for its further advancement.

Webster Vienna Private University offers exchange both within the Webster network and also through the Erasmus exchange system. There are currently 40 partner universities in a variety of countries. The private university offers student exchange and faculty mobility, visiting professorships and scholar-in-residence-programmes. Faculty mobility is offered in form of a "sabbatical" but actively encouraged, WVPU supports faculty in working at partner universities abroad. Active and regular exchange of both students and faculty ensures an adequate level of international co-operation here.

In line with these arguments, the expert panel recommends the Board of AQ Austria to accredit the proposed degree programme "Strategic Communication (BA)".

5 Reviewed documents

- Application documents and amendments by Webster Vienna Private University
- Subsequent submissions after site visit