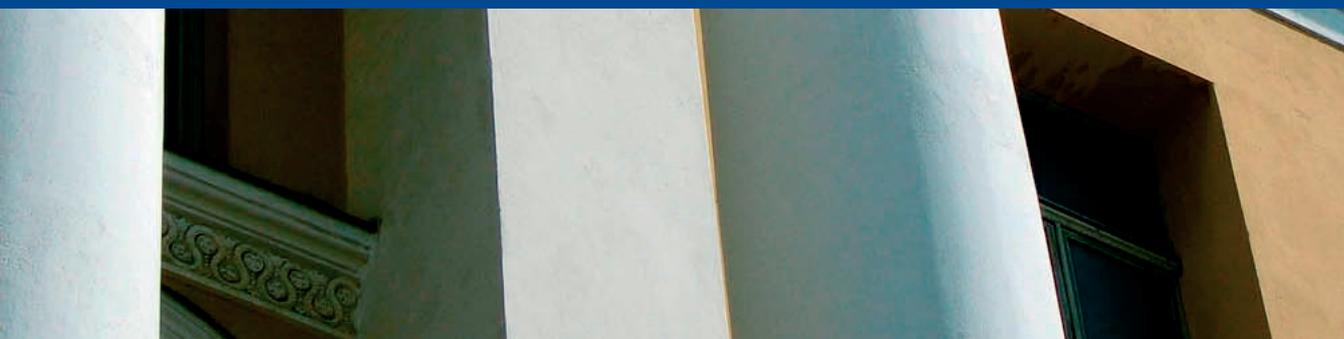




European Master of Arts in Media, Communication and Cultural Studies (CoMundus)

Programme report

Transnational European evaluation project (TEEP II)





ENQA

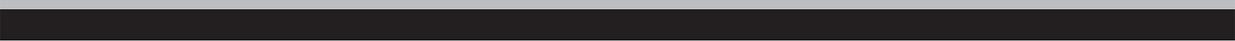
TEEP

II

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Programme report

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Education and Culture

DG Education and Culture

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1. Introduction

1.1 TEEP II project

This report forms a part of the second Transnational European Evaluation Project (TEEP II), undertaken by the European Association of Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). TEEP I, carried out in 2002–2003 focused on individual bachelor-level study programmes taught in different countries, while TEEP II examined master's programmes offered jointly by several universities in different countries.

The TEEP II project aimed to contribute to the development of a method for the external evaluation of joint programmes and to the developmental process of joint degrees in the European context. It did so by evaluating the organisation and management, level and content, and quality assurance systems of three Erasmus Mundus master's programmes:

- Euro Hydro-Informatics and Water Management (EuroAqua)
- European Master of Arts in Media, Communication and Cultural Studies (CoMundus)
- European Master in Law and Economics (EMLE).

The outputs of the project were the programme reports for each of the three programmes and a methodological report for the whole project.

The present Programme Report deals specifically with the CoMundus programme². Ideally, it should be read in conjunction with the programme reports on Euro-Aqua and EMLE and with the Methodological Report.

As set down in the TEEP II Self-evaluation Manual, the anticipated benefits from participating in the project included:

- An opportunity to share experiences with other programmes, networks and peers, in order to assure continuous improvement of the programme quality and quality assurance;
- The development of criteria that are commonly agreed, that have been tested and that offer a dimension of transparency;
- A contribution to the development of the quality assurance of joint degree programmes on the basis of the recommendations from the experts, and identification of good practice for comparable programmes and networks;
- The opportunity to obtain feedback, which may help in identifying opportunities for improvement;
- The opportunity to (further) develop a quality “culture”;
- The opportunity to promote the institutions, programmes and networks.

¹ www.enqa.eu

² www.comundus.net

1.2 Methodology

The TEEP II project was based on an internationally recognised evaluation model³ and was undertaken in dialogue with higher education institutions. It involved:

1. Testing of a common methodology and common criteria;
2. Selection of three joint master's programmes wishing to participate in the project;
3. Self-evaluation exercise by each of the programme teams and the preparation of a self-evaluation report;
4. Visit by an international panel of experts (including both subject area and quality assurance experts and a student) to discuss the self-evaluation report and gather additional information;
5. Preparation of a programme evaluation report by each of the panels;
6. Preparation of a summary report on the methodology used and lessons learned, including feedback from the programme consortia;
7. Contribution to the establishment of a methodology shared at the European level.

The evaluation of the CoMundus programme was co-ordinated by the Quality Assurance Agency, UK and the Hungarian Accreditation Committee. Christina Rozsnyai from the Hungarian Accreditation Committee acted as programme secretary, with responsibility to ensure that the Self-Evaluation Report was sent in time and to have an overview of the site visits, in addition to writing the draft Programme Report. In the self-evaluation phase, Fiona Crozier of the Quality Assurance Agency, UK, was also in communication with the CoMundus co-ordinator in the self-evaluation phase. All individual site secretaries were responsible for co-ordinating the specific site visits and writing the feedback letters to the visited site.

The TEEP II launching conference for all the project participants and experts was held in Stockholm in March 2005. The aims of the project were discussed with the co-ordinators of the three selected TEEP II programmes. The conference also gave an opportunity to the co-ordinators to express their expectations regarding the project.

Subsequently, the co-ordinators of the three programmes prepared their self-evaluation reports following the guidelines set down by the TEEP II Management Group. CoMundus submitted its self-evaluation report by the deadline of 30 June 2005.

For the CoMundus programme, the site visits were conducted between 16 September and 20 October 2005. The purpose of the project was to visit five universities in five countries, while the European institutions involved in the CoMundus programme were seven. Therefore representatives from Aarhus University participated in the visit to Roskilde University in Denmark and those from Stendhal University of Grenoble in the visit to the University of Burgundy in Dijon, France. The other partners were Kassel University, Germany, the University of Florence, Italy, and the Institute of Education, University of London, UK.

In preparation for the first site visit to Roskilde, Göran Bolin, the site chair, compiled a list of questions, which formed an interview guide for the various sessions. The following visits were built on the findings of the first and each subsequent visit.

³ The peer review model is a bottom-up approach to evaluation, practised by quality assurance agencies worldwide. Its benefits include providing legitimacy and encouraging self-reflection.

Within the Bologna process, ENQA has a mandate to establish a peer review system for quality assurance agencies in Europe.

The agenda for the site visits consisted of one-hour meetings each, beginning with the self-evaluation group/steering group of the programme. This was followed by meetings with students, teaching staff, and senior management (Dean of Faculty of the programme or of the person overseeing the CoMundus programme; the person at the institution responsible for quality assurance; persons external to the programme from the institutional level who are in touch with the programme). In conclusion, there was a second meeting with the self-evaluation group/steering group. Between each of these meetings a fifteen-minute private panel meeting was scheduled. The panel also held a briefing meeting in the evening before the visits to identify the main points to be clarified during the visits and deliberate a strategy for questioning.

The teaching schedule, with alternating semesters involving teaching at some sites, did not allow for visits to classes at all sites. In these cases, students who participated in the programme, but who had attended classes in a previous semester or were currently writing their thesis, were invited for the student interviews.

1.3 The visiting panel

In line with the project guidelines, the CoMundus pool of programme experts consisted of five subject experts (two of whom alternated as site chairs), four quality assurance experts who were members of the TEEP II Management Group⁴, and two students. Site visits were conducted by two subject experts, one of whom acted as chair, one student, and two quality assurance experts of whom one acted as site secretary. The subject and student experts were selected by the TEEP II Management Group from a list of experts proposed by the members of the Management Group.

The CoMundus subject experts were

- Göran Bolin, Chair (Professor for Media Studies, Södertörns Högskola, Sweden);
- Farrel Corcoran, Chair (Professor, School of Communication, Dublin City University, Ireland);
- Hilde Van den Bulck (Professor for Media Studies, University of Antwerp, Belgium);
- Audrone Nugaraite (Director, Institute of Journalism, Vilnius University, Lithuania); and
- Jenny Rice (Associate Dean, Academic Studies, School of Humanities, Languages and Social Sciences, University of Wolverhampton, U.K).

Student experts were

- Niki Strange (Doctoral Student in Digital Media, University of Sussex, U.K.); and
- François Tavernier (Doctoral Student in Information and Communication Sciences, Université Paris 12 Valde-Marne, France).

The quality assurance experts were

- Fiona Crozier (Assistant Director, Quality Assurance Agency, U.K.);
- Nick Harris (Director, Quality Assurance Agency, U.K.);
- Tibor Szántó (Secretary General, Hungarian Accreditation Committee); and
- Christina Rozsnyai (Programme Officer, Hungarian Accreditation Committee), who was also the co-ordinating secretary for the CoMundus evaluation.

⁴ For details on the TEEP II Management Group, ref. TEEP II Methodological Report

1.4 Focus of the evaluation

The emphasis of the project was on the joint delivery of the programme and on the quality assurance system attached to it. While the content was not the main aspect of the evaluation, it did figure with respect to the programme coherence and to the comparability of the graduates' degrees.

The CoMundus Consortium produced a self-evaluation report following the guidelines set down in the manual for the project. The report was unambiguous and comprehensive, with analytical parts on the programme's strengths and weaknesses and detailed appendices. It provided the panel with the necessary information for understanding the programme and its background. The Consortium defined the main aims of the self-evaluation report as being a self-analysis of the programme that would discuss

- added value of the CoMundus programme as a whole (multi-cultural, multi-lingual, ability of students to choose from a variety of subjects, etc.);
- positive and negative aspects, strengths and weaknesses of CoMundus as a co-ordinated and an international programme, including legislative hurdles and recognition challenges;
- quality assurance co-ordination and challenges of the joint programme.

In accordance with generally practised quality evaluation procedures the visiting panel conducted the site visits with an aim to learn more about the way the programme was implemented locally and to explore questions arising from the self-evaluation report. In succession, the five site visits provided a picture of the CoMundus programme as a whole.

Following each site visit, the visiting panels sent a short letter, which varied from three to five pages, to the individual site co-ordinators, describing their findings and making recommendations about how they felt the programme could be improved. Already with the first visit to Roskilde, the panel set the format of the letter to follow the internal logic of its review, namely focusing on positive features and what it called "developmental opportunities", both for the programme as a whole and for the specific aspects of the particular site. The present Programme Report was built on the individual site letters.

2. The CoMundus Programme

The CoMundus Programme is offered by a Consortium of seven European universities,

- Roskilde University Denmark;
- Aarhus University, Denmark;
- Stendhal University in Grenoble, France;
- the University of Burgundy in Dijon, France;
- Kassel University, Germany;
- the University of Florence, Italy; and
- the Institute of Education, University of London, UK.

The Consortium also includes non-European partners (Arizona State University, USA; the University of Texas at Austin, USA; Sao Paulo University, Brazil; and the State University of St. Petersburg, Russia). The core of the Consortium was established, initially as a network, in 1988/89. Since 1992/93 the programme has been awarding a degree of “European Master of Arts in Media, Communication and Cultural Studies”. CoMundus has operated as an Erasmus Mundus programme since 2004 and includes students from EU/EFTA and third countries, in addition to those from participating partner institutions in non-EU countries.

The degree is recognised in all the partner countries except Denmark and France, where additional 30 credit points are required for a master’s degree. Discussions to accept an equivalent value of prior studies as an entrance requirement or additional course requirement for Danish- and French-based students are under way. Quality assurance has been considered to be the responsibility of each partner institution, in line with local requirements, though a dialogue has begun to pave the way for a common quality assurance system for CoMundus.

At the time of the evaluation, Kassel University was the co-ordinator of the programme, and as such was responsible for the programme’s main organisational and financial administration. Each partner university uses its own support services such as admissions and registration, in order to help CoMundus students. A common Board, in which all partner institutions are represented, is the chief decision-making body of the programme, while a Steering Committee and Chairperson act as the executive body. Each partner concludes bilateral agreements with all other partners. The partners also agree on the tuition fee, which is common to all students in the programme.

The programme requires one and a half years of study, including the writing of a thesis in the final semester, and awards 90 ECTS credit points. The core of the programme involves four major areas of study:

- Theory, History, Epistemology of Media, Culture and Communications;
- Institutions, Law, Politics, Economy of the Media;
- Media as Text, Media Production and Analysis, Multimedia; and
- Audience, Reception and Media Education.

⁵ At the Consortium meeting on 12 January 2006 the co-ordination of the programme was transferred to the partner at the University of Florence.

Students apply to a home university and choose one host university in one of the partner countries. The choice of the home and host universities is based on the individual's focus of studies as well as on the language ability.

Each partner university is obliged to offer studies in each of the four areas for at least 10 ECTS credit points. The actual courses offered reflect both the content profile of the media programme at the institution teaching CoMundus, and the local teaching methods. Except for Aarhus and Roskilde, where teaching is offered in English also for local students, the language of tuition is the local language, and students have to prove the language proficiency in their application when choosing the two universities they wish to attend. (At the time of the evaluation the Florentine partner was negotiating with the Consortium to teach the programme in English in order to make it available to a broader group of students.)

Student performance is assessed by the university at which the student is studying the given course, and the home university is responsible for marking the thesis. The final mark is based on the accumulated achievements, based on ECTS guidelines.

The CoMundus-programme has already undergone a number of evaluations, including the ongoing internal quality assessment, the German accreditation of the European Master's Programme, and the Erasmus Mundus application itself. Due to the German accreditation system, CoMundus at the University of Kassel was scheduled to undergo accreditation by the accreditation agency ZEvA during the lifetime of the TEEP II project. The TEEP II self-evaluation process could not substitute for the ZEvA procedure, due to the differences in criteria and goals as well as deadlines of the two processes. However, CoMundus Kassel scheduled the visit by the experts of ZEvA to coincide with the visit of the TEEP II expert panel, and the joint visit proved mutually supportive.

3. Evaluation

3.1 Introduction

The visiting panel identified a number of recurring features affecting the quality of the CoMundus programme that came up in several or all site visits. They concerned

- dichotomy between a well-defined common core necessary for a coherent programme and the special profiles of the partner institutions;
- value of the thesis within the full ECTS credit load;
- degree of staff mobility and experience within CoMundus;
- degree of dedication to the CoMundus programme from the part of the university at which it is taught;
- problems students encountered in their transition between home and host institutions;
- time-consuming processing on the part of the European Commission of the third country applicants and the ensuing administrative difficulties for students and universities;
- “culture clash” experienced by the third country students in the local environment and the ways this was handled by the home and host institutions;
- common quality assurance mechanism for the programme.

As a whole, the visiting panel considered the CoMundus programme to be a very positive one with respect to the opportunity given to students to gain not just the personal experience of living in a foreign environment but the access to an international perspective in a very international field. Moreover, students could choose a home and host institution which best suited the choice of focus of their studies, although this was limited by their individual language ability.

In line with the decision of the Management Group, this evaluation was divided into three sections: organisation and management, programme content and delivery and quality assurance. Each section starts with a list of the criteria used, as described in the TEEP II Self-evaluation Guidelines. The criteria provided the leading thread that ran through the panel’s reviews of the five sites as well as the CoMundus Programme Report. However, this visiting panel decided to approach the CoMundus programme from the inside, by looking at the characteristics of the programme as they were, and considered the agreed evaluation criteria as a guideline rather than a checklist. This methodology was reflected in the structure of the five feedback letters to the sites and was also carried through in the Programme Report. All of them followed the logic that arose from the panel’s findings. The panel also considered it important to focus on the particular strengths and weaknesses discovered, and consequently each of the three sections of the report are divided into positive features and developmental opportunities. Therefore the report does not assign equal emphasis to each and every one of the criteria, and conversely, aspects not directly following from the criteria do receive emphasis. A reference to the pertaining criteria has been provided where applicable, but the sequence of the comments runs from the general to the particular.

3.2 Organisation and management

CRITERIA

1. The aims of the programme are clearly defined.
2. The processes of developing the aims and choosing partners for the programme are interconnected.
3. The management of all the participating institutions supports the goals and objectives of the programme. The programme is fully recognised by all the participating institutions.
4. Academic and administrative aspects of the programme are adequately staffed and funded. A sustainable funding strategy is in place.
5. Mechanisms for co-operation, including the degree of institutionalisation, the role of each partner, the financial management, the communication system etc, are spelled out and understood by all parties.
6. Responsibilities are clearly defined and shared amongst the participating institutions. Lead roles and responsibilities are identified.
7. Information about the programme is easily accessible to students and others.
8. Arrangements for reaching out to and receiving guest students and scholars are in place, e.g. in terms of accommodation, mentor schemes, language courses, activities aiming at social integration, and assistance with visas and social insurance.
9. The infrastructure, e.g. library and other information sources, premises and equipment, meets the needs of the programme.
10. A language policy is in place.

POSITIVE FEATURES

- (Criterion 1) At several sites, the panel heard that the third-country students **valued the CoMundus programme highly**. They noted that the Erasmus Mundus scheme was well thought of in their own countries, and it was seen as an equivalent to the American Fulbright programme. The European Commission may wish to bear this in mind when considering the future of the Erasmus Mundus scheme.
- (Criteria 3, 4) The panel considered the **support of the university leadership** at which the CoMundus programme was taught of key importance. The support was especially noticeable at the Roskilde, Aarhus Dijon and Grenoble universities, where the rectors made themselves available to the visiting team panels. Support was less evident at the co-ordinating university of Kassel, though the panel realised that faculties are traditionally more independent from the university management in Germany than in many other countries. The CoMundus managers were aware that the success of an international programme was both dependent on and beneficial to the university as a whole, especially where internationalisation was recognised as a progressive feature within the European Higher Education Area and beyond.
- (Criteria 1, 2, 5, 6) The **organisation, management and co-ordination** of the CoMundus programme was efficient and well thought through, extending to many details of the programme and set down in a number of mutually worked-out documents (e.g. Consortium contract, governing document, operational procedures and administrative handbook).
- (Criteria 5, 6, 7) At each site, the panel noted the **strong commitment** on the part of the CoMundus **teachers and managers** towards the programme. This involved also personal dedication of time and effort, which should be recognised by the whole programme as well as their universities. The panel noted particularly that the chairman of the Consortium and his colleagues took their task very seriously and worked hard to ensure its success at all levels. Equally positive was the great

degree of **openness and flexibility** at all sites towards the needs of an individual student and the interaction between academic and administrative staff to solve arising problems.

- (*Criterion 7*) One of the features of the programme was the “**learning agreement**” within the Erasmus Mundus programmes. Some partners took the idea further and provided a student portfolio (Roskilde, Aarhus, Kassel), which also included comments on the student’s experiences in class and other parts of the programme. The portfolio could be made a common feature for all the CoMundus students. This would not only help to track the student’s progress but also to constitute a quality assurance tool.
- (*Criterion 7*) The panel supported the planned further development of an **administrative handbook** and eventually a **curriculum catalogue** with course descriptions. The handbook of the Institute of Education in London could serve as a model, which provides detailed and advanced information about the academic content of modules and teaching, learning and assessment methods, as well as detailed advice on such matters as essay writing.
- (*Criterion 8*) All sites provided a **tutor** in some form to aid incoming students. Informal assistance to students, whereby students had access to staff as they encountered problems, was freely provided in Kassel, Dijon, Grenoble, Roskilde, Aarhus, Florence and London. Additional services included an **induction day** (London) or a similar event. This was especially important for students from the third countries for two reasons. Firstly, they often experienced a “culture clash” in what was to them a very new environment, both with regard to their living environment and study methods (e.g. the concept of an independent study, which is a key approach to learning at Roskilde University, was not fully understood beforehand). Secondly, the **lengthy processing** of the Erasmus Mundus applications often posed difficulties for students and local organisers, such as finding available accommodation.

DEVELOPMENTAL OPPORTUNITIES

- (*Criteria 7, 8*) With regard to the student services, the panel recommended the development of a **consistent student assistance and information scheme** for the whole programme, accessible on the website. The scheme would include, for instance, full and continuously updated information about course descriptions, assessment requirements, local study and living conditions and other important features related to the programme. In addition to the mentioned learning portfolio, the availability of ongoing individual tutoring (such as provided by the London Institute of Education) to guide the learning progress could be provided. The website could be expanded to include information on employment opportunities and perhaps an open forum for students and graduates. (On linking this to an interactive part of the website for students, see section 3.3 below.) Finally, it would be important that the visiting students could integrate into the local student environment, and at the same time feel that they were part of a special group, i.e. to develop a “CoMundus identity”. The programme should promote these aspects in a systematic manner.

- (Criteria 7, 9) The **CoMundus website** should provide as full access to the above mentioned information as possible, especially because the panel had repeatedly heard that many students had learned about the programme from this source.
- (Criteria 4, 8 and 2 from “Programme content and delivery”) The CoMundus programme could be expanded to offer opportunities for the **mobility of the participating staff**. The panel realised that teaching at another institution for various periods requires additional resources, e.g. financial, with regard to workload and time. However, the panel believed that this could add a new dimension to the programme. Joint meetings at the staff level to exchange experiences about the programme, including organisation, teaching and students, should be promoted.
- (Criteria 5, 6) The **synchronisation of study modules**, especially between the partner institutions, should be resolved. Students encountered difficulties in moving to their host institutions if the semester or term structure were different to those at their home institutions. There have also been difficulties in the recognition of the studies completed in other institutions. Because of discrepancies between home and host institutions, consistent assessment schemes should be considered.
- (Criterion 8) Negotiations should be carried out with the European Commission to ensure **faster processing of applications**. The problem surfaced at each of the sites visited and concerned both the students and the programme administrators. The delay in students being able to start their studies and prepare for living in another country was an obstacle to the programme as a whole. The problem requires immediate action on the part of the Commission, since it may endanger the overall success of the Erasmus Mundus scholarship scheme.
- (Criteria 4, 5) The panel noted that the **funding** provided for the programme **did not meet the administration needs**. This imposed an additional burden, particularly on the co-ordinating university. The complexity of the organisation for the CoMundus programme was apparent, and the panel encouraged the initiative on the part of the Consortium leadership to **divide developmental and organisational tasks** among several partners.

3.3 Programme content and delivery

CRITERIA

1. The programme, through its joint delivery, provides an added value as compared to similar programmes delivered at national level.
2. Teacher qualifications are sufficient and appropriate to the aims of the programme. Opportunities for staff development are provided. The programme is linked to research activities and/or recognised professional standards.
3. The learning environment, including teaching and learning methods and assessment methods, favours the aims of the programme. Assessment methods are common to all parts of the programme or, at a minimum, agreed by all partner institutions.
4. The programme ensures that all of its expected competencies/learning outcomes are achieved.

POSITIVE FEATURES

- (Criterion 1) The panel found that the CoMundus programme was built on a **well worked-out academic core**, and it was evident that the Board continuously re-evaluated the viability of the scheme and content. It was a key benefit of the

programme that it provided many opportunities for cross-fertilisation and transfer of knowledge. The successful job placement rate, tracked by Kassel University, was an indication of the success of the programme. At the University of Florence, it was a practice to review annually the study programmes, including the European Master's Programme, to ensure their fine-tuning to the changing needs.

- (Criterion 2) Especially in Dijon and Grenoble the panel commended the two partners for the exemplary openness and co-operation they exhibited and practiced both in managing the project and in research and professional development.
- (Criteria 1, 4) The strength of the CoMundus programme was that it offered the students an opportunity to study communication, media and culture from **different perspectives** in different schools of thought and by means of different teaching traditions. In addition, classes held together with Erasmus Mundus and local students were a strength of the programme (e.g. in Dijon and Grenoble).
- (Criteria 1 and 10 from "Organisation and management") The opportunity to take **courses in the local language** was welcomed by the students and could be made an integrated part of the programme. Beyond the basic foreign language training, teaching the professional terms and concepts of media and communications in foreign language could be considered. The decision made by the University of Florence to offer the programme in English should be carefully considered by weighing the different advantages for students to study in different languages against those of providing greater accessibility to the programme.

DEVELOPMENTAL OPPORTUNITIES

- (Criteria 1, 4) One of the panel's main concerns related to the **academic coherence** of the CoMundus programme. Although there was a "common core" of four subject areas, the categories were extremely broad, and it was unclear whether the knowledge and skills of graduates from two given partner institutions were in any way comparable with those from a second set of institutions. The panel encourages the Consortium to consider delivering a core module to all students (possibly utilising an on-line approach such as that used by the Institute of Education in London). This core module would cover both methodology (research, study, approach) and content (e.g. theory of communication or introduction to mass communication). It would provide students with a common, conceptual "map" of the programme and its study area. The core module could be team-delivered and supported locally at each individual site.
- (Criterion 3) When discussing the curriculum update, the Consortium might consider placing **more emphasis on the practice** of media and communication studies/training within the theoretical framework of the four main study areas. Students would appreciate **practical training opportunities**, which could be explored on the programme level in order to take an advantage of the international sources available to the Consortium. This could involve any kind of placement or internship or a possibility of working in a local media institution. (Students in London, for example, study on practice-focused modules such as Digital Video Production, as well as on theoretical ones.)
- (Criterion 3) The consortium might also consider to **design common projects**, such as an on-line newspaper and/or a virtual TV channel, where students would

act as correspondents at the various partner institutions. Themes and tasks could be defined centrally for the project(s) while students could react to them according to the cultural context in which they are involved. This arrangement could serve the enhancement of the programme coherence, integrity and the “CoMundus identity” of students while maintaining diversity of context and approaches at the same time.

- *(Criterion 3)* The panel recommended a greater emphasis to be placed on the **everyday use of ICT** in the delivery of the programme. Regular video conferences could be held for students and a separate sub-page could be created and updated by the students themselves on the CoMundus website. The sub-page would function as part of the studies and assignments of the students and serve as a forum for exchanging ideas and experiences. This would also allow them to help each other in administrative and academic matters.
- *(Criteria 4, 5)* In line with the above, the Consortium might wish to consider **harmonising the marking of theses** by ensuring that each thesis is read (and perhaps marked) in both home and host institutions. The ECTS load of the thesis, which constituted one third of the whole workload, made it a major part of the programme. Therefore, the supervision of theses needs to be ensured. The common project suggested above could earn ECTS credits in the final semester and thus carry some of the load of the thesis’ credit points.
- *(Criterion 4)* The Consortium is encouraged to **define and publish the intended learning outcomes** and expected generic and subject-specific competencies to be attained by students by the end of their studies⁶.
- *(Criterion 2)* The panel encouraged the Consortium to consider further the different kinds of **teaching and learning strategies** employed by the various partners that could be used across the Consortium. It also encouraged the partners in the Consortium, both those who plan and deliver the programme, to discuss student performance against set academic standards.

3.4 QUALITY ASSURANCE

CRITERIA

1. The programme formulates and implements a joint quality assurance strategy/ies. Strategies may consider e.g. changes in student demand, external expectations, developments in teaching and learning, and new research areas.
2. The programme develops mechanisms for follow-up and continuous improvement.
3. Quality assurance practices involve students, staff and other stakeholders from all participating institutions.
4. The programme evaluates whether its aims are met and standards upheld.

POSITIVE FEATURES

- *(Criterion 3)* The CoMundus programme had **clearly defined scopes of responsibility** for the Consortium and the individual members **with regard to quality assurance**; according to the self-evaluation report, quality assurance of the programme lied with the Common Board, whilst the delivery of the

⁶ See Dublin Descriptors, <http://www.jointquality.org/>, and A Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area, http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/Docs/00-Main_doc/050218_QF_EHEA.pdf.

programme components lied with the individual members. The latter was in part governed by the requirements of the country in which the partner institution operated. At Kassel University, for example, a central person responsible for quality assurance at the University was in charge of the quality management of the CoMundus programme as well. Similarly, in Dijon, a central quality assurance unit had been established at the university level.

- ⌘ (Criterion 3) Each partner practiced some form of **quality evaluation**, for example, course evaluations by students and regular review of the curriculum. The Erasmus Mundus learning agreement, through which student progress can be traced, was one of the quality assessment tools.
- ⌘ (Criterion 1) The Consortium had begun to work out a **coherent course evaluation system** for the whole programme. The Institute of Education, London, with its strong culture of self-evaluation, could serve as a starting point for an overarching quality assurance system.

DEVELOPMENTAL OPPORTUNITIES

- (Criteria 1,3) International best practice shows that **delegating responsibility** for internal quality assurance management to a person or body other than the general management of the given organisation can be a useful organisational tool. Persons responsible for quality assurance could, nevertheless, be expected to regularly report to the Steering Committee and the Common Board of the Consortium where final decisions are made. Alternatively, the Steering Group could benefit from the contribution of an individual unaffiliated with any of the member institutions (i.e. someone independent who could hold up the ‘quality mirror’ on an ongoing basis). This person could either be someone with a background in quality assurance, or teaching, or even a student to ensure that the student experience is always considered.
- (Criterion 1) Given the variety in national requirements for quality assurance, the Consortium agreement assigned quality assurance to each partner institution. Nevertheless, a **coherent quality management system** embracing the whole programme and its parts would be necessary to ensure the consistent and up-to-date quality and integrity of the programme, as well as the marketability of the graduates’ degree. The Consortium might find it useful to look at the STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE IN THE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA⁷.
- (Criterion 4) **Clearly defined academic standards** should be worked out and made explicit to form the core of a quality assurance system. Possible elements of a quality assurance system were mentioned and were already in place sporadically. They included published information about the programme and local levels and the ways of monitoring compliance with programme requirements; a student portfolio; coherent student assessment guidelines and practice; etc. Other elements, such as anonymous staff evaluations by students, and a complex staff evaluation system; a formalised curriculum review; or a staff development scheme could be added.

⁷ www.enqa.eu

- (*Criteria 1 to 4*) The panel recommended the **drafting and publishing of a document** in which the Consortium could outline its **internal quality assurance system** describing
 - the overall mission of the Consortium;
 - its commitment to continuous quality enhancement;
 - its aims and goals related to the quality of the programme;
 - the ways and means of attaining these, the quality assurance procedures applied (e.g. organised feedback mechanisms) ;
 - reference points for quality or quality indicators;
 - the documentation of the quality assurance system; and
 - responsibilities in relation to quality assurance.

4. Conclusion

The visiting panel concluded that the CoMundus programme is a valuable element in the educational provision of the subject of media and communication. The added value for CoMundus students lies in their participation in a joint programme offered by an international consortium; in the broad subject and teaching backgrounds of the programme and its presenters; in the international experience they gain; and the proficiency with which graduates are able to work in a foreign environment.

The visiting panel hopes that its findings and recommendations contribute to the implementation of a coherent programme that is sustainable even beyond the lifetime of the Erasmus Mundus project.

For the TEEP II project the evaluation of CoMundus showed that the success of an international joint master's programme hinges on ensuring a balance between the individual character and a specific profile of a programme and its parts as well as between its coherence and synergy.

Annex I.

Timetable of site visits

SITE VISIT	TIME	VISITING PANEL MEMBERS
Roskilde University, with representatives from Aarhus University	16 September	Göran Bolin (chair) Hilde Van den Bulck Nick Harris François Tavernier Christina Rozsnyai (site secretary)
Kassel University	27 September	Göran Bolin (chair) Jenny Rice Christina Rozsnyai Niki Strange Fiona Crozier (site secretary)
Florence University	5 October	Farrel Corcoran (chair) Hilde Van den Bulck Nick Harris François Tavernier Christina Rozsnyai (site secretary)
University of Burgundy, Dijon, with representatives from Stendhal University, Grenoble	12 October	Göran Bolin (chair) Jenny Rice Fiona Crozier Niki Strange Tibor Szánto (site secretary)
Institute of Education, University of London	20 October	Farrel Corcoran (chair) Audrone Nugaraite Tibor Szánto François Tavernier Fiona Crozier (site secretary)

Annex II.

First feedback letter from CoMundus

(FEBRUARY 2006)

From
CoMundus Chair
Prof. Giovanni Bechelloni
University of Florence
Febr. 13th 2006
bechelloni@unifi.it
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To
Mrs. Christina Rozsnyai
Hungarian Accreditation Committee
MAB Titkarsag
Ajtosi Dürer sor 19-21
H-1146 Budapest

Second Transnational European Evaluation Project (TEEP II), undertaken by the European Association of Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)

COMMENTS ON THE COMUNDUS PROGRAMME REPORT

Dear Christina, dear members of the Teep2 project,

The following comments were developed in cooperation with the former CoMundus Chair Prof. Ben Bachmair, who was responsible for the Teep2 evaluation until January 13th 2006.

A. GENERAL COMMENT

The general approach to the evaluation of international study consortia is fully appropriate to the main activities of a consortium which are:

- Adjustment of the operational practices to the self defined pursuits of the consortium, the demands of the EU and national or local requirements,
- Institutional self identity and local as well as common infrastructure,
- Teaching and the relationship with students.

In addition the way in which the Teep2 group received, analysed, objectified by textual reports and communicated with the consortium's members coincided with the consortium's self definition as an innovative intercultural social practice. Generally speaking, the evaluation procedure did not follow the logic to subordinate the practices of the consortium. This interpretative approach of the evaluation characterizes positively the difference to the usual accreditation and assessment procedures, which pretend to know how to organize teaching as a core activity of the university. The statement "characterizes positively" does not intend to define evaluation as harmonizing interaction between the evaluated CoMundus group and the evaluating Teep2 group but emphasises the fact that the "interpretative" approach of Teep2 meets the essential of the investigated object, its social practices of an intercultural university cooperation.

However, some additional “tools” of communicative counselling could help the Consortium’s institutional bodies to obtain a deeper awareness of conflicting issues especially

- on the local realisation of the study programme,
- on an action plan to react to the critique of the Teep2 investigation,
- the conflicts on resources between the consortium and partner universities and
- necessary claims to the EU. (*See section 2*)

B. QUESTIONS OF THE PROGRAMME SECRETARY

1. a) The self-evaluation manual

Statement from June 28th 05 as part of the Self-evaluation report (this comment is still valid)

The guidelines were helpful in facilitating the writing of a joint self-evaluation, which was mainly undertaken by a group of authors. In dividing up the writing activities the group utilised the guidelines. However, the guidelines invite more or less general answers, but it is anticipated that the site visits will clarify specificities of the programme in partner universities.

The self-evaluation manual provided the basis for a two day discussion by the whole Consortium at a meeting in London at the end of April 2005. This discussion was considered as really fruitful in the sense of self reflection of the Consortium’s structures and procedures, which were as well formally developed as have grown naturally over years. The self reflection in the context of a communicative evaluation procedure is considered as helpful for the self concept of the Consortium and for understanding difficulties, which result from the network structure, the cultural diversity of each partner’s academic basis and practices and of the interdisciplinary diversity.

1. b) The self-evaluation process

The impression of the CoMundus group can best be expressed through this comment from one partner institution:

The self evaluation process was considered a major achievement for the CoMundus team. It has been time-consuming, but exciting to be part of the document production process. It is appropriate and necessary that we ask ourselves whether we have been sufficiently critical. The ENQA TEEP II question helped to raise questions like: Have we, to the best of our knowledge, hidden anything that we know to be problematic about our business, or anything that we can assume that the evaluators will find problematic? Are we too easily pleased, knowing how notoriously difficult it is to run an operation like ours smoothly?

The self-evaluation report was written cooperatively by an editing group, which consisted of 8 people from 4 partner universities. The process was seen as very helpful and concise by the members of the this editing group.

1. c) The site-visits

The CoMundus Common Board shared the following view expressed by a member of the editing group regarding the site visits.

The site visits were conducted in a constructive way with a genuine dialogue between representatives of the institution and members of the expert panel. The structure of the visit was helpful with the introductory meeting providing the opportunity for members

of the self-evaluation group in the individual institution to provide clarification of any issues at the beginning of the day. Both members of the course team and CoMundus students were given the opportunity to share their experiences of the CoMundus course with the panel, while the meeting with members of the senior management of the institution provided the opportunity for evidence of wider institutional support to be demonstrated. The final meeting with members of the self-evaluation group provided the opportunity for final clarification of any issues that remained unclear and in the [specific] case, for a tour of facilities available to the students and a demonstration of the type of work which students following the Media, Communication and Cultural Studies course undertake.

1. d) The usefulness of the feedback letters

The feedback letters were highly useful for all CoMundus partner universities, especially because they provide a profound understanding on the local realisation of the Master programme. It was especially appreciated that the letters arrived shortly after each site visit.

The style of the reports gives a reader the possibility to accept critique in the way to deal with it in a constructive manner. The term “development opportunities” is representative for this constructive approach to inform on local problems. For the communication within the consortium this gentle and “acceptable” style of critique can be seen as supportive for a common discussion, but the reading between the lines and its implied ambiguity can be an obstacle to identify local problems. Which group like a Common Board or the Chairperson has the “energy” to hint on the hurting local disadvantage and the power to ask for a local action plan?

1. e) The usefulness of the programme report

The Programme Report has two advantages: it gives a detailed overview to the project and its methodology itself and it outlines the most important positive features and the most important development opportunities of the programme.

On the discussion of the Common Board the Programme Report was seen as a tool to inform a public on CoMundus and helps to identify CoMundus as an institution. (To identify CoMundus as an institution is one of the current main issues of the Consortium, because CoMundus considers itself on the way from an highly motivated group of scholars to a supra-national and supra-university institution.) Also it was expressed that a “reading between the lines” is necessary to understand also the weak parts of CoMundus. But until now the CoMundus group was not able to develop a common official action plan to react on these impacts of the Teep2 evaluation.

1. f) The information you have received before and during the evaluation process.

The information flow between the Teep2 group and the CoMundus partner universities was very good and informative. The chair person endeavoured to gain further information on a definitive evaluation of local problems. In a convincing telephone discussion with the programme secretary it was explained that the methodology does not imply either practical counselling or judgements and instructions like those of an accreditation agency. Probably this strict orientation on the interpretative path of Teep2 offers more support to the self-organisation of the CoMundus consortium than just to give answers to very practical but conflicting issues of CoMundus.

2.) WHAT SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT OF THE PROCESS OF EVALUATING A JOINT PROGRAMME DO YOU HAVE?

From the perspective of CoMundus the Teep2 evaluation is a real support for a better understanding of our basic concepts, strategies and what has to be improved. However, there remain some issues, which are difficult for a social organisation such as an international and inter-university cooperative.

First the cooperative is based on the personal relationships within the consortium. A personally organized social body has to avoid a clear assessment of local disadvantages otherwise one destroys the social reliability. In this situation a kind of external mediating and counselling body would be helpful. This could or should come from experts, who are not equipped with the power of an accreditation agency. Practical advice on the basis of a critical external view is finally more productive.

Secondly, advice should be provided to the Consortium's institutional bodies on an action plan and its realisation as the Consortium's response to the teep2 reports on the site visits and the Programme report.

Thirdly, the resources for the consortium as an institution come from the partner universities, which do not have the same motivation for CoMundus as those colleagues directly involved in managing and running CoMundus. At some of the partner universities clear claims from Teep2 to the faculty and university management would be helpful. This would require a process of communication and adjustment with the local CoMundus representative. This is a serious task in respect to the chairing university, which has to dedicate the necessary resources for the chair person.

Fourthly, it seems not to be very likely that the relevant EU institutions will take into serious consideration the proposals from the Teep2 reports passed by CoMundus. Obviously the relationship between the Erasmus Mundus consortia and the EU is more communicative than the traditional relationship between ministry and academic institution. But there exists still a clear difference on a balance of institutional power. Therefore Teep2 should develop a powerful "tool" to inform the EU on the concrete result of the Teep2 investigation.

3.) ANY OTHER COMMENTS: INFORMATION ON THE WAY COMUNDUS IMPLEMENTS PROPOSED "DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES"

The following paragraph summarises the already achieved steps to react on the "report on the site visits" and the "CoMundus programme report" from January 12th 2006.

London and Kassel wrote two separate overviews on the basis of the five site visit reports. The report from London stresses on the encouragement of Teep2 to develop a core module. It outlines the various possibilities of such a commonly delivered module. The report from Kassel is a systematic analysis of the development opportunities mentioned in the five site visit reports. It identified four main development areas that are now mainly covered by the new dissemination of responsibilities with the steering committee of the International Consortium: (A) Common assessment criteria, as well as coherent evaluation and marking of the thesis; (B) More detailed information for students in advance, mainly on the website (academic and administrative matters, learning outcomes, module information, student life, etc.); (C) Administrative and teaching staff mobility and exchange; (D) Common quality assurance system covering the programme as a whole

*** Dividing of activities**

London: Quality Assurance, Management & Communication, Supervision of Task Force(s), Administrative Handbook task force

Aarhus together with London: on-line evaluation system

Roskilde: Curriculum Development

Kassel: Public relation

*** Dublin Descriptors**

Kassel used the Dublin Descriptors' to define the learning outcomes (just available in German)

*** Academic coherence, common core module, everyday use of ICT**

A common on-line module offered to students who need to acquire additional 30 ECTS to meet the prerequisites for entry to the programme was discussed in Tempe January 2006. Kim Schröder from the Roskilde University together with Norbert Pachler and Bob Ferguson from the Institute of Education, University of London are currently working on a proposal for a common core module.

*** Mobility of participating staff**

The Administration Meeting in London, Dec 13th and 14th 2005 was the first step towards administrative staff mobility. The Erasmus Mundus Action 3 is a good opportunity for teaching staff mobility.

*** Faster processing of applications of students**

The European Commission and now the 'Executive Agency' are fully aware of this problem. The selection of applications for Action 2 is now set for the end of May 2006. On the 31st of May 2006 the Erasmus Mundus Consortia should get a final feedback on the selection of students.

*** Coherent quality management system**

- Norbert Pachler, responsible for QA within the Steering committee will propose a common quality assurance system at the next meeting of the Common Board in Florence in June.
- At the Common Board meeting in Tempe, Arizona January 13th and 14th 2006 Per Jauert (Aarhus) and Norbert Pachler (London) presented two on-line models of the planned evaluation systems.

Annex III.

Second feedback letter from CoMundus

(MAY 2006)

As a concrete sign of the positive reactions and attitudes of CoMundus programme to the evolution experience and the final ENQA Conference in Stockholm our feedback will deal with what we consider the main issue: the new Action plan we began to design and the first steps we took since the TEEP II site visits and the final Conference.

In the context of a two days meeting of the Steering Committee these few statements can give an idea of the main topics we are actually dealing with; for the purpose of:

- a) fostering more coherence and more effective management;
- b) looking for the best ways to better identify, valorise and preserve diversities among partners and at same time
- c) reaching, in the next three years, the common goal of a competitive and efficient joint programme.

Three main issues are considered relevant:

- 1) enhancing attractiveness for the programme among potential motivated applicants coming from European countries and from Third countries;
- 2) developing common research and publication activities through seminars, conferences and symposia;
- 3) looking for the best ways to further develop the institutionalisation process in order to reach a stronger juridical configuration before the end of the EU contract (fundraising, logo, carefully design of working structure and proceeding of the Consortium organisation).

In connection with previous statements decisions were taken in order to:

- 1) an application for Action 4;
- 2) minor changes in the working organisation in connection with the next three years calendar;
- 3) new kinds of scientific common activities (annual CoMundus Symposium on cross cultural communication, the first one this year) and publications series on line and with an European publisher;
- 4) new criteria for applications in order to get applications from a wider group of countries (in the direction, by example, of having students who are able to use two European languages and to open a "latin-american" window);
- 5) the planning for the next years of two different summer schools: a) an intensive week for all CoMundus students, at the beginning of their European experience; b) a two week summers school open to PhD students coming as well from partner universities and from other universities;
- 6) all partners signed a contract for the purpose of fostering the award of joint degrees.



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