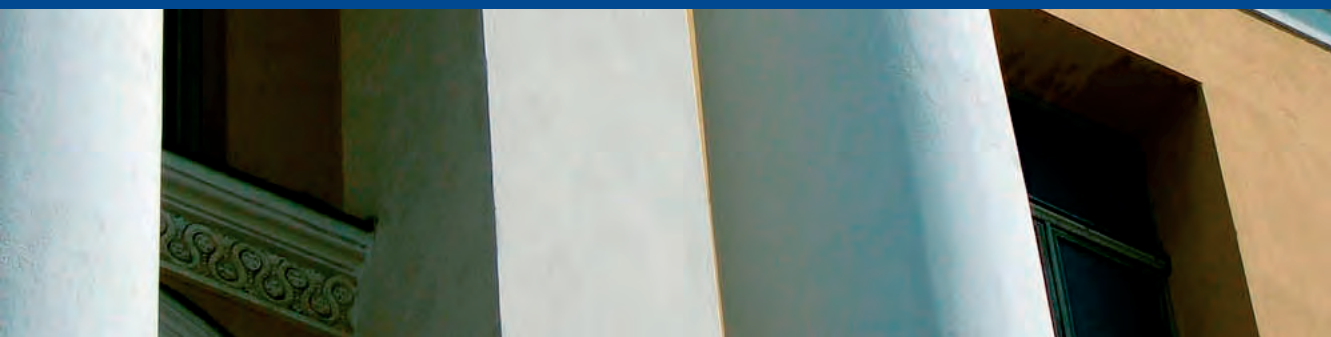




Water management (EuroAqua)

Programme report

Transnational European evaluation project II (TEEP II)





ENQA

TEEP

II

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DG Education and Culture

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1. Introduction

1.1 TEEP II project

This report forms part of the second Transnational European Evaluation Project (TEEP II), undertaken by the European Association of Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA¹). TEEP I, was carried out in 2002-2003 and focused on individual bachelor-level study programmes taught in different countries. TEEP II examined master's programmes that were offered jointly by several universities located 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 process of developing 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 three programme reports and a methodological report for the whole project. The present Programme Report deals specifically with the EuroAqua programme². Ideally, it should be read in conjunction with the programme reports on CoMundus and EMLE, and with the Methodological Report.

The intended benefits for those participating in the project included:

- an opportunity to share experiences with other programme organisers and networks, in order to ensure continuous improvement of the programme quality and quality assurance;
- the chance to develop criteria that are commonly agreed, that have been tested and that offer a dimension of transparency;
- a chance to contribute to the development of the quality assurance of joint degree programmes building on recommendations from experts, and identify good practice for comparable programmes and networks;
- the opportunity to obtain feedback on their own programme, which may help in identifying opportunities for improvement;
- the opportunity to (further) develop a "quality culture";
- The opportunity to promote their institutions, programmes and networks.

¹ www.enqa.eu

² www.euroaqua.org

1.2 Methodology

The TEEP II project was based on a peer review methodology that involved:

1. the testing of a common methodology and common criteria;
2. the selection of three joint master's programmes that wished to participate in the project;
3. a self-evaluation exercise by each of the programme teams;
4. the preparation of a self-evaluation report by each of the programme teams;
5. a 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;
6. the preparation of an evaluation report by each of the panels and feedback from each of the programme consortia;
7. the preparation of a summary report on the methodology used and lessons learned;
8. a contribution to the establishment of a methodology shared at the European level.

The project was conducted by six member agencies of ENQA: National Agency for Higher Education (HSV, Sweden), Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA, UK), Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands & Flanders (NVAO, The Netherlands), Comité National d'Évaluation (CNE, France), Agency for the Quality Assurance in the Catalan University System (AQU, Catalonia) and Hungarian Accreditation Committee (HAC). HSV coordinates the project assisted by the TEEP II management group and the ENQA secretariat. The project received financial support from the European Commission. The agency representatives formed pairs, each of which was involved in the evaluation of one programme.

The project management group developed a framework for the evaluation, based on:

- the criteria used in the preceding TEEP I project;
- the generic reference points for master's degrees suggested by the Joint Quality Initiative (the so called Dublin descriptors);
- the "Golden Rules" for new joint master's programmes established by the European University Association;
- the generic competencies developed within the TUNING project;
- criteria and regulations that existed within national contexts.

The criteria can broadly be divided into three categories: organisation and management, programme and programme delivery and quality assurance. These formed the basis for the evaluation which is presented in chapter 3 of this report.

1.3 The programme panel

The evaluation of the EuroAqua programme was coordinated by AQU and CNÉ. The evaluation began with the assembly of an expert panel consisting of a pool of five subject experts, two students and four quality assurance experts. The panel members are listed below.

The subject experts were:

- Péter Bakonyi (Professor, VITUKI, Environmental Protection & Water Management Research Institute, Hungary);
- François Laulan (EU Consultant in Engineering and Education, France);
- Jan-Erik Gustafsson (Professor, Land and Water Resources Engineering, Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm, Sweden);
- Ignasi Rodriguez-Roda (Professor, Civil Engineering, University of Girona, Catalonia, Spain);
- Miquel Salgot (Professor, Natural Products, Vegetal Biology and Soil Science, University of Barcelona, Catalonia, Spain).

The student experts were:

- Csilla Balogh (Doctoral Student in Environmental Sciences, University of Veszprém, Hungary);
- Ester Huertas (Doctoral Student in Land, Water and Environmental Sciences, University of Barcelona).

The quality assurance experts were:

- Bruno Curvale (Chargé de mission, Comité national d'évaluation, France);
- Josep Grifoll (Head of Quality Assessment Area, AQU, Catalonia, Spain);
- Fabrice Hénard (Chargé de mission, Comité national d'évaluation, France);
- Gemma Rauret (Director, AQU, Catalonia, Spain).

1.4 Focus of the evaluation

Before reporting the main evaluation of the EuroAqua master's programme, it seems important to place it in a wider context. The programme is part of the Erasmus Mundus project, which itself exists within the larger education policy framework of the European Commission.

The Erasmus Mundus programme is a co-operation and mobility programme in the field of higher education. It is intended to promote the European Union as a centre of excellence in learning around the world. It aims to support top-quality European master's courses and enhance the visibility and attractiveness of European higher education in third countries. It also provides EU-funded scholarships for third country nationals who participate in these master's courses, as well as scholarships for EU-nationals studying in third countries.

The Erasmus Mundus programme is composed of four actions:

Action 1 supports high quality integrated master's courses developed by at least three European universities. The support consists mainly of a grant to help institutions organise the course and attain recognition for the programme. This then makes it eligible for further support as regards to the three other actions.

Action 2 concerns non-EU student scholarships. Application to an Erasmus Mundus master's makes non-EU students eligible for a personal grant.

Action 3 will support the development of partnerships between the consortia members and non-EU institutions. The main objective is to facilitate EU students' and scholars' mobility³ outside Europe.

Action 4 will be dedicated to actions in favour of improving the visibility and accessibility of European higher education.

The present evaluation process is concerned with the functioning of the Erasmus Mundus master's EuroAqua. In its assessment the evaluation panel considered part of the objectives and outcomes of actions 1 and 2 and also the quality of the student experience.

It is important to make clear that the purpose of the evaluation was to give an external view of the possible improvements that might be made to the programme, in order for it to achieve both the goals set by the Erasmus Mundus promoters, and the goals of the institutions involved. This purpose is all the more significant when it is considered that the EuroAqua master's is a new programme and so must deal with all the difficulties that accompany the start of a new programme.

The newness of the programme has also been a cause of difficulty for the conduction of the evaluation itself. The programme began after the approval of the application by the European Commission, during the first semester of the academic year 2004–2005. As a consequence, the evaluation panel had to appraise projects, intentions and, more concretely, the ability of the programme co-ordinators to solve problems on the spot rather than the achievements and outcomes that might be evident in a well embedded programme.

³ For example, in the EuroAqua programme design, the movement to a partner institution should be organised between the second and the third semester that is to say during summertime. In the case of the first generation of applicants that was not possible because of the late starting of the programme (see Introduction to part 3) and thereby the movement would occur during the fourth semester.

2. Brief description of the programme

The programme is described as follows on the EuroAqua website:

“The evolution of human activities, in the foreground of climate changes and growing earth population, induces situations more and more complex to manage. The sustainable development of water resources in the aquatic environment and its management represents today a major challenge. The global aim of the management is to avoid or minimise risk of crisis as water supply, irrigation, floods, waste water treatment ... Hydro-Informatics, a European concept, emerges as the central element for the progress of modelling activities and management of capacities.

The main objective of the master is to prepare and train future scientists and executive engineers in charge of modelling and managing projects in hydro-technologies and environment. These professionals have vocation to assist “local, regional, national and international authorities, public services and to be involved in private companies”.

The partners of the consortium for this master's programme are:

University of Nice-Sophia Antipolis (UNSA) France, Brandenburg Technical University Cottbus (BTUC) Germany, Budapest University of Technology and Economics (BUTE) Hungary, Polytechnic University of Catalonia (UPC) Spain, University of Newcastle upon Tyne (UNUT) United Kingdom.

The master's is a two-year programme (120 ECTS), with four semesters, each of 30 ECTS. It expects to attract 40 new students each year. The EuroAqua master's is organised in a pedagogic continuum to provide: an introduction to the subject and establish common knowledge/soft skills (Semester I – all locations); the acquisition and the use of the hydro-Informatics concepts, methods and tools (Semester 2 – UNUT, UK); a thematic specialisation, either Hydro-Informatics systems, urban waters management, inland waters management, or decision support systems (Semester 3 – all locations except UNUT, UK); and for semester 4 (all locations), a research project or professional practice. The mobility scheme covers at least three locations.

Each partner university already issues a national academic degree, an MSc, in the field of Hydro-Informatics. These masters constitute the backdrop for the EuroAqua master which offers its new programme design by combining different courses from the national masters. The consortium wishes to establish the EuroAqua as a joint European degree defined as Master of Sciences in Hydro-Informatics & Water Management.

EUROAQUAE SCHEDULE				
	SEMESTER 1 Basic acquisitions	SEMESTER 2 Hydro-informatics	SEMESTER 3 Thematic specialisations	SEMESTER 4 Professional practice and research
BUTC	Knowledge update		Software engineering and modelling	Research project (Rp) Modelling & software development
			Rp introduction	
BUTE	Knowledge update		Inland Waters management	Research project (Rp) Inland Waters management
UNUT	Knowledge update	Application of tools		Research project (Rp) Water and society
	English intensive (2 weeks)			
UPC	Knowledge update		Decision support systems	Research project (Rp) Decision support systems
UNSA	Knowledge update		Urban waters management	Professional practice (Pp) All of the 4 thematics
			Pp introduction	

Note: Knowledge update embraces mathematics, physics, hydrology, hydraulics, GIS, ICT and language.

3. Evaluation

3.1 Introduction

EuroAqua was a new programme that derived from existing relationships between its promoters and a long held intention held by them to organise a joint programme. The Erasmus Mundus project gave them the opportunity to implement this programme and to open it to students from further afield.

Taking into account the practical challenges of setting up a new multi-national programme the decision to have the programme up and running for 2004/05 was an ambitious one. The programme did have, however, the firm backing of the institutions involved and support at national and European levels. Because of this situation, the programme has been regarded as a kind of pilot project as it differs significantly from other Erasmus Mundus programmes. It was not a pre-existing master's that has subsequently received the Erasmus Mundus recognition but was a programme designed in order to demonstrate the European spirit of the project. This commitment underlay the great personal dedication, goodwill and enthusiasm of the people encountered during the evaluation at the five participating institutions. This also explains the great importance attached to the following two issues in this evaluation:

- The feasibility of a 'real' joint degree awarded by the five universities involved;
- The conditions of the enrolment of EU-students in the programme.

It was the intention of the evaluation panel to be a 'critical friend' to the programme in order to help it reach its goals. At the same time, the panel wanted to clearly state the confidence it felt regarding the capacity of the programme management board to find solutions on the spot to the "teething problems" of a new programme.

This evaluation is divided into four sections: organisation and management, programme and programme delivery, quality assurance and institutional issues.

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 should be interconnected.
3. The management of all participating institutions supports the goals and objectives of the programme. The programme is fully recognised by all 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 degree of institutionalisation, role of each partner, financial management, communication system etc, are spelled out and understood by all parties.
6. Responsibilities are clearly defined and shared amongst 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.

AIMS AND PURPOSES OF THE PROGRAMME

The overall aims of the programme (set out in part 2 of this report, above) were unanimously endorsed by the 5 institutions involved. They agreed that EuroAquaе’s main objective was to: “prepare and train future scientists and executive engineers in charge of modelling and managing projects in hydro-technologies and environment”.

In addition to this, each institution had its own specialised objectives. EuroAquaе was considered by some as a tool to increase their knowledge and understanding at a European level:

- BTUC was keen to enhance its e-learning capacity;
- BUTE saw EuroAquaе as a means to strengthen the international position of the university, for example by becoming more attractive to different kinds of students coming from overseas;
- UNSA envisioned EuroAquaе as a lever for internal innovation and as a stimulus for the institution’s outreach strategy;
- UNUT saw the programme as part of a strategy to develop a European dimension to the operation of the institution;
- For UCP, the programme was an opportunity to promote research and modelling tools that had been developed locally.

In brief, the multiple goals in this Erasmus Mundus programme reflect and consolidate the involvement of the universities’ executives in EuroAquaе.

The panel concluded that, although the five universities might have been pursuing various objectives through EuroAquaе, they were all, nevertheless, concerned with the quality and outcome of the programme as a whole.

PROGRAMME CO-ORDINATION

Co-operation at programme level was monitored by the co-ordinator based at UNSA. During the evaluation process the UNSA hired an assistant to support the management of the programme.

For each institution a team of five individuals (who could be called “local co-ordinators”) formed the curriculum and management board for the programme – one of whom also took on the role of main co-ordinator. This type of organisation allowed problems of a financial, organisational or administrative nature to be addressed; and solutions to be found, or at least an open debate to take place. Students, teaching/support staff and the executive at all of the universities involved, expressed their positive experiences of the willingness of the programme co-ordinators to overcome obstacles, and push the project forward.

The main and local co-ordinators formed the key support mechanism for every aspect of the programme from internal problems to political decisions. They acted not just as academics but also as personal tutors for the students. They helped them through procedural and financial difficulties, supported them in their studies and tried to ensure that in general their experience of the host institution was a positive one.

The operational objectives and the content of the curricula were designed by the programme co-ordinators acting both at a university level and within the framework of the consortium. Other teaching staff also had the opportunity to contribute during the early stages of set up, including towards the outline of the curriculum and the programme structures.

At each delivery site a teaching team was put together with the goal of providing an international flavour to the programme. Teachers were invited to join on a voluntary basis, meaning that much of the participation was a result of the gentle influence of members of the programme co-ordinators (this could lead, however, to a weakening of the collective academic monitoring of EuroAquaе).

The academic staff actively involved in EuroAquaе sometimes received support from other members of staff at their institutions, including: internal services (e.g. international and quality assurance staff at Cottbus), occasionally executive staff (rector etc.) and from members of other faculties. Due to the nature of EuroAquaе as a 2-year programme, the stability of this support group cannot be guaranteed. The sustainability of the programme relies primarily on the overall level of commitment from the university, and secondly on the quality of the collaboration with related faculties/departments.

The programme co-ordinators worked on a daily basis on the practical, organisational aspects of the programme with the teachers involved in delivery. Such teachers were not, however, able to specifically contribute to the overall objectives of the programme and were often not aware of the aims of the Erasmus Mundus programme. Most of the teachers met by the panel were not willing or able to teach within another of the five institutions involved in the consortium. Some did, however, have some knowledge of ECTS and of the kind of degree that could be awarded through arrangements such as EuroAquaе.

As a consequence of this focus of organisation of EuroAquaе with the five programme co-ordinators, the small numbers of teachers involved in the monitoring of the programme and the fact that most of the teachers did not know much about the wider structure and functioning of the programme there was little opportunity to design and run a participative and coherent pedagogical policy.

SUPPORT BY THE INSTITUTIONS

All of the institutions involved offered support, to a greater or lesser extent, to the EuroAquaе programme. The programme co-ordinators often relied on the political and technical support offered by the executive board of the universities. The amount of support able to be offered by individual institutions varied depending on the allocation of sometimes limited means. BTUC had recently recruited a junior professor of hydro-informatics with the aim of stabilising the subject area within the institution and enhancing the research profile of EuroAquaе within the university. UNUT put substantial effort into clarifying the legal aspects of joint degrees. In contrast, UPC claimed for classroom allocation to the programme, still to be negotiated on a daily basis. Neither UPC nor BTUC were able to obtain from their Rector the ability to highlight the EuroAquaе programme on their respective university websites; thus losing the ability to advertise to potential students and teachers.

INTEGRATION WITHIN THE EXISTING PROVISION

Links necessarily existed between EuroAquaе modules and existing courses and disciplines. The academic and professional specifics which set EuroAquaе apart from existing master's courses in hydro-informatics and related areas were, therefore, not always easy to identify. The academic boundaries between local master's courses and EuroAquaе were sometimes blurred and the added-value of the European dimension

above what was already in place through existing networks was not highlighted. Some of these mismatches between EuroAqua's objectives and its contents can be explained through the necessary rush to launch undertaken by promoters in order to take advantage of Erasmus Mundus recognition.

The prior experience of the universities in welcoming and supporting students, including the provision of English language education, was used effectively to support the Erasmus Mundus programme.

THE FEES ISSUE

According to Erasmus Mundus rules, consortia are entitled to charge tuition fees to non-EU students. This is intended to be a source of funding for the master's specific operations, and to cover the lack of funding available to EU students interested in the master's. The principle of equity, which has to be strictly respected when it comes to student matters, must apply only to the costs finally born by the students. (One should remember that specific fellowships are given to Erasmus students coming from Eastern Europe for instance, so that they can afford Western universities' costs; in the UK all students pay tuition fees apart from the Erasmus ones, while in France and most other European states, no tuition fee is asked for, only light registration costs.) It is also expected that the fees are fixed and published, so students are aware of the costs involved before they apply to the course.

In the case of the EuroAqua master's, these requirements have raised some difficulties, although they are by no means only specific to this master's. Those in control of the institutions involved had to deal with three interrelated issues:

- The cost of the programme itself that then justifies the payment of fees;
- The different financial regulations specific to the institutions involved;
- The differentiation made by the designers of the Erasmus Mundus actions between EU and non-EU students as regards to access to scholarships.

The decision to start the programme when the academic year had already begun forced the managers of EuroAqua to find immediate solutions before they were able to agree on a clear financial position. This has not been regarded by the evaluation team as a matter for criticism. Those in charge demonstrated real skill in solving a whole series of administrative difficulties. However, these difficulties did mean that the situation was not easily understandable by students and certainly led to some confusion.

The consortium members have now finalised an agreement that regulates the payment of fees and enrolment costs. The agreed policy states that non-EU students pay fees (as set out in Erasmus Mundus general rules, according to the fellowships students receive). These fees are fixed to 3000 € per semester (12000 € for the two-year programme). EU students do not pay fees but do have to pay a basic enrolment fee of 300 € per semester. The purpose of the arrangement is to make it possible for EU students to enrol in the master's at little personal cost. This differential in the treatment of EU and non-EU students is justified by the fact that EU students are not eligible for significant grants and, in particular, Erasmus Mundus grants.

This arrangement makes it possible to enrol the two kinds of applicants (EU and non-EU students). It will be valid until 2006/07 and will have to be re-negotiated afterwards. It reflects a financial effort from the five involved institutions, as shown,

for example, by UNUT, whose regulations charge fees for overseas students at £3733 (5450 €⁴) a semester and for EU students at £1083 (1581 €).

INFRASTRUCTURE

Analysis of the infrastructure by quantitative means (e.g. m² of facilities, quantity of library holdings) could not be carried out within the restraints of the evaluation. A qualitative assessment based on direct observation, interviews with students and teaching staff provided sufficient evidence to conclude that the facilities on offer, in general, were adequate to meet the needs of the programme. In addition, it was clear that the programme made good use of the facilities in place for the teaching of national programmes with analogous content. It was also observed that students on the programme were provided with workspaces similar to those only normally offered to doctoral students.

It is suggested by the evaluation team, however, that the programme should take into account the fact that in some locations access to the libraries and IT networks was not observed to be sufficient (e.g. the students asked for “post-grad” facilities, and for unsupervised learning.). Along the same lines, the panel felt there was a need to enhance the English documentation available to students who were keen to use self-learning methods.

STUDENT LIVING CONDITIONS

The cost of accommodation in some European cities, and the difficulties involved in renting apartments for less than one year in others, were the main problems encountered by students on the programme. Host institutions did try to make the search for accommodation easier.

Although some students like to manage their accommodation for themselves, one suggestion made by the institutions which could be taken up in the future, would be to encourage sharing accommodation with local students. Students from developing countries would certainly appreciate a more proactive approach in this area.

INTEGRATION OF THE STUDENTS IN THE HOST CITY AND UNIVERSITY

In general, students were extremely warmly welcomed, communication with lecturers was good, and their academic and/or personal needs were also adequately met. This does not mean there were no problems in administrative procedures; for instance, students did not always receive their academic results before leaving each institution (this situation is currently improving).

However, there is a need for thorough consideration of two points. Firstly, the supra-university administrative restrictions that can affect students from third countries need to be examined and addressed. The need for permits and visas before starting the master's, and the difficulties involved in processing them represents a waste of time for the students (and in some cases, a waste of money, because they have been forced to return to their home countries to complete the paperwork) and for the university administration. Moreover, delays in registration result in the students being temporarily excluded from using certain services on the campus (library loans, internet, university student card, etc.).

⁴ Conversion rate of £1 = 1,46 € used (valid on 02.05.2006)

Secondly, the fact that students on the programme share very few classes with local students has made their social integration more difficult. A related area of concern is that, aside from the French students, there was a notable absence of European students on the programme. This can be seen as an obstacle to meeting the programme goals of multicultural education and the transfer of knowledge between European societies.

It must be stressed that one of the most attractive features of the master's is the possibility of attending a specialised course in diverse European cultural contexts. This is a key characteristic when it comes to attracting students from third countries, when compared to other similar educational schemes, for example, in the United States.

Taking these points into consideration, apart from some occasional problems, the integration of the students into the day-to-day life of the cities where they resided was acceptable. The lack of fluency in the native language was probably the main handicap in this regard. The mobility, which is an advantage of the programme, does require extra effort from the students. It is noticeable that some of the students on the master's tended to create a social group which was self-sufficient and isolated from the environment in which they lived.

3.3 Programme and programme delivery

CRITERIA

1. The programme has established its own references points to ensure that students achieve the competence level required for a master's degree.
2. The programme ensures that all of its expected competences/ learning outcomes are achieved.
3. The programme, through its joint delivery, provides and added value as compared to similar programmes delivered at national level
4. Teachers qualifications (including opportunities for staff development) are sufficient and appropriate to the aims of the programme
5. The programme is linked to research activities and/ or recognized professional standards.
6. 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 minimum, agreed by all partner institutions.

ORIGINS AND ACADEMIC BACKGROUND OF THE STUDENTS

The programme attracted students with a good academic record, who were motivated by the contents of the syllabus. In regard to their demographic origins, in its first year of activity, most of the students on the programme were Asians, South Americans and Russians. As for students of European origin, the programme has really only attracted French students. This appears to have been a peculiarity of the first cohort, because of the late start of the programme. A further problem was the financing of the EU students examined above.

Although it is too early to assess the level of registration, it is clear that, for the moment, the programme has not achieved its target figures for student numbers. Although this low level of registration could be considered acceptable as a starting point for the programme, the consortium should pay attention to increase the intake in order to enhance the economic balance.

	APPLICATIONS		ADMISSIONS					
	Male	Female	Total	UNSA	BUTE	UPC	BTUC	UNUT
2004	23	36	17	9	2	2	2	2
2005	35	67	33	12	7	4	5	5

Until now students have been recruited through contact between teachers from the consortium and teachers from other universities. Therefore, it is very common for a student to register for the master's on the recommendation of a tutor at their current university. This represents an advantage for the programme, particularly because it speeds up student recruitment and screening, and will probably continue to be the most reliable method of student introduction during the early years of the master's programme. The system of student recruitment and screening will need to be given further consideration in the future. Recruitment to the second cohort has already benefited from promotion via the internet promotions and communication between students.

The programme co-ordinators set a series of minimum conditions for admission, that were designed to mean that only students who were able to meet the academic demands of the master's, would be admitted. In the first year, however, some of the conditions for admission were not fully applied. In spite of this the assessment did not detect any serious problems in this respect.

A different consideration is whether the strategies employed were able to ensure that the students admitted to the programme created a student body profile that was in keeping with the goals of the institutions offering the programme. To assess this it would be necessary to observe the outcomes of the programme in terms of the successful (or otherwise) incorporation of graduates into the professional research worlds.

The students recruited so far have had diverse academic backgrounds – e.g. mathematicians, economists and geologists – though the largest group has consisted of civil engineers. To take into account this diversity, the programme incorporated an academic levelling process for new students. For some students parts of the syllabus were a repetition of previous studies. This was not perceived to be a problem by either students or teachers; the diversity of academic background was something that was valued positively by many. It is recommended that future students will need to be informed of the characteristics of the programme.

LEARNING OUTCOMES AND PHILOSOPHY OF THE PROGRAMME

The learning outcomes and the overall philosophy of EuroAqua were clearly posted in the presentation of EuroAqua to the EU and in the booklets for students. Nevertheless, most teachers and students did not have detailed knowledge of them. Regarding individual components of the programme, in some cases, objectives and detailed curricula had been fixed after the programme started. The evaluation panel considers that students deserve to know more upfront about the consistency of the “integrated study programme” which is intended to “deliver curriculum or full recognition of

modules which are developed and delivered separately but which together make up a common standard master's course" (quoted from EuroAqua documentation).

Erasmus Mundus requires an integrated programme and this is often considered as a guarantee that students will grasp the core of knowledge and practice in the field by undertaking a master's designated under the scheme. Programme co-ordinators had confidence in the capacity of their pre-existing network to be able to provide job opportunities for these students who had been specifically selected for their intellectual capacity to adapt easily to their new roles despite originating from various professional backgrounds. Most people involved or concerned with EuroAqua trusted this tailor-made programme based on a specifically designed curriculum, monitored by high profile teachers to prepare the students for entry into a niche job market.

This impression is based on the students' assessments. Student reaction was positive when they were asked if the master's complemented their previous academic experience. The majority of students from third countries also positively valued the possibility of studying a speciality which is not offered in their own countries and, in a considerable number of cases, declared their intention to apply their new-found knowledge on returning home. In addition, there are students who indicated that they were contemplating starting their professional careers in Europe. One must remember that EuroAqua intends to produce individuals who will be capable of managing projects in the field of hydro-informatics, but at the same time it provides students with the possibility of working in other domains that are not directly connected to hydro-informatics: job possibilities seem broad.

It would not, however, be good practice to retain such soft definitions of learning outcomes, as this could lead to problems in the understanding of the purpose of the programme and so a loss of clarity for students and potential employers.

EuroAqua is capable of answering both the demands and the needs of companies and it should develop its links with both industry and the public sector. Programme co-ordinators referred to an "upcoming" club of professionals in industry or to future network of EuroAqua alumni. A better relationship with industry and the professional sectors would have to be organised, or even institutionalised, with better communication among partners for this to take place.

A further area relating to the philosophy of the programme worth commenting on is the lack of comprehension with regard to the BSc/MSc structure by employers. EuroAqua fits the Bologna definition of a master's but as the BSc/MSc structure is new in many countries (e.g. Germany) it is not always understood how it fits within the academic framework. As part of the Bologna agenda, however, the new nomenclature will become gradually integrated and an understanding of the level of education required by BSc and MSc programmes developed. On a similar point, although familiar with the BSc/MSc academic structure, students in the UK can obtain a master's degree in the same field in one year and the advantages of undertaking a two year programme must be explained to these students.

LEARNING METHODS AND WEB-BASED INFORMATION

The opportunity to teach internationally and collaborate with ambitious third country students are major points of attraction offered by EuroAqua and teachers were very keen to participate. Teachers demonstrated their capacity to innovate with course content and provide extra courses to fill in gaps in students' knowledge. This resulted

in very positive feedback from students with regard to the academic level of the programme.

Taking this positive feedback into account, the panel would nevertheless like to highlight the need for EuroAquaе to implement a consistent pedagogical strategy. The programme lacked room for reflection and academic co-ordination. The evaluation panel remains doubtful about the role of the groups of teachers set up in each institution. As explained earlier, the teachers on the programme were recruited on a voluntary basis and did not participate frequently in the monitoring of the programme, nor operate at the consortium level. Moreover, they did not collaborate frequently on pedagogical matters within the university, except within the framework of EuroAquaе.

The evaluation panel wonders whether pedagogy is co-ordinated and academic matters are considered enough at the overarching level of EuroAquaе and if procedures exist that could ensure the consistency of content and coherence of education pathways. The panel also underlines the fragile capacity of the ability of the programme co-ordinators to react when a problem occurs (e.g. how to bring a teacher's English up to standard? How can the programme co-ordinators spot possible education failures among a larger group of students?). The "soft" pedagogical policy at EuroAquaе's overarching level may have an impact negatively on the recruitment process.

For the moment, the lack of relationships between teaching staff at the different universities makes it difficult to improve this process and so effectively appraise the skill levels of applicants (e.g. in mathematics, English or programming), or to take into account their prior skills and abilities in the selection process.

The evaluation panel suggests it would be good practice to open the management board of EuroAquaе to other academics, with a view to designing a pedagogy strategy at programme level.

THE EUROPEAN DIMENSION

The evaluation panel questions the level of enthusiasm among EuroAquaе's promoters towards the European and multicultural dimension of the programme. It is acknowledged that the student body is very diverse, highly qualified, ambitious and capable of self-learning. However, the panel has gained the impression that this European and multicultural aspect has not been addressed fully in EuroAquaе. For instance, the balance between attending courses and home working depends on the cultural characteristics of the learning processes of each country. A quick survey of the different modes of teaching around the five sites shows these sorts of cultural nuances.

The evaluation panel understood that the first semester of the programme was designed to smooth out differences between students no matter at what university they begin the course. All students undertook the second semester at UNUT in order to get used to common hydro-informatics tools. The panel considers that EuroAquaе presents an opportunity to gear teaching methodologies to a multicultural audience that arrives with high expectations. It believes that EuroAquaе could reinforce innovative teaching approaches based on renewed didactic, balanced between theory and practice and between lecturing in situ and distance learning. The panel is aware that the programme has only just begun and accepts that it will require some time to become embedded.

EuroAquaе offered a new kind of multidisciplinary curriculum, the possibility to combine different curricula spanning the five universities, and the opportunity to improve the quality of courses through benchmarking. The programme should

seek to better integrate areas of synergy among the various sites and curricula, in particular through the use of web-based applications and teaching staff contacts. A better understanding and treatment of student's skills (i.e. homogenisation) should also be considered in future development of the master's.

WEB-BASED PLATFORM

As regards the online platform and its access through the web, it should be noted that although its development is an innovation in this kind of international programme, its incorporation into the programme is far from complete. Two problems have occurred: content and access.

Firstly, the evaluation panel was initially surprised by the under-use of the website for pedagogical purposes and for the exchange of lecture materials, considering that academics and professional networks have long taken advantage of information and communication technology (ICT). The reality is, however, that teachers produce few electronic materials in hydro-informatics or in related fields. As already mentioned above, most students enrolled on EuroAqua were capable of self-learning and this required the most up to date information. The content of the website relied on the willingness of teachers to contribute to it. They often preferred to use the internal internet of their university as a means for distributing e-learning materials. BUTC was responsible for the website, but the consortium had not appointed an academic administrator to collect information from all the universities. The evaluation panel suggests that the efforts made at BUTC to implement this important innovation need to be complemented by an adequate provision of resources.

Secondly, the access was sometimes difficult for students who were keen to work both night and day or whenever possible, e.g. for UNUT owing to the online security measures adopted by this university or for Nice since internet rooms close at 8 pm. Students also pointed out that the mobility aspect of the programme means it would be preferable to use computer-based files accessible from every location rather than to move hard copies every six months.

STUDENT GUIDANCE

Student guidance services are also operated differently in individual institutions. Few students referred to the availability of personal tutors. The programme co-ordinator was usually the person who helped the students with practical and possibly pedagogical issues. Informal relationships with teachers were considered helpful enough to solve most pedagogical problems. Since the number of students involved remains small, the need for personal tutors has not yet been addressed and the students did not complain about their absence. Some students in the second semester were starting to consider their preferred area of specialisation or trying to comprehend the professional dimension of EuroAqua. In this case they would possibly need access to personalised counselling on the programme's educational and outreach strategy. For example: how to get in contact with UNUT for help with research careers or UNSA for professional integration? Do these institutions have special information and guidance services? How can contacts with companies and employers used for parallel programmes (such as in UK) be accessed for the benefit of EuroAqua students?

The evaluation panel insists on the necessity of support services to be recognised and that academic staff should provide efficient processes for academic and careers guidance.

THE QUESTION OF LANGUAGE

Although the language barrier was not a serious problem for the smooth operation of the programme, it should be pointed out that the language policy could have been better implemented. Student assessment concurs with the goals set by the programme in this field, but warns that failure to achieve these goals affects those students with a poor knowledge of second languages. On the other hand, it acknowledges that this goal is not easily achieved in those institutions with less experience in teaching in English. Concerning this there is a recommendation to institutions to put in place appropriate resources to facilitate teaching in English.

This situation was specific to the first set of students whose initial level of English was not sufficiently taken into account during the recruitment process. The design of the programme syllabus, however, included a stay in Newcastle during the second term, an experience which is of great value when it comes to improving students' English.

Considering the use and need for second languages, it should be noted that the programme makes no clear requirements in this area. Although the possibility of learning these languages on courses offered by the universities existed, their use during in the teaching syllabus was neither organised nor integrated. For example, it was unclear whether students should learn technical vocabulary in second languages. Also, the programme gave international students few opportunities to socialise with local students studying similar courses. The panel points out that it is impossible to learn a second foreign language while staying only for one semester in the country. However, students could get some basic tuition in technical vocabulary in different languages, in order to clarify the definition of terms and to prepare them to work at international level within various non-English speaking countries.

The issue of second languages in the programme is important and requires analysis that links it to informative procedures and the recruitment of new students.

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. Quality assurance practices involve students, staff and other stakeholders from all participating institutions.
3. The programme evaluates whether its aims are met and standards upheld.
4. Quality assurance includes coordination of assessment across the whole programme to ensure that all of its expected competences/learning outcomes are achieved.
5. The programme develops mechanisms for follow-up and continuous improvement.

Self-evaluation is now considered to be the starting point of all external evaluation procedures that begin from the premise that that quality in higher education is first of all the responsibility of the individuals running the programmes or the institutions.

The purpose of self-evaluation is to make visible and documented the quality assurance mechanisms of the programmes under review. In this evaluation, the key points to assess were:

- The degree of integration of a joint quality assurance strategy within the five sites;
- The involvement of the students, teaching and administrative staff;
- Mechanisms which contribute continuous improvement.

THE SELF-EVALUATION REPORT

In the case of EuroAqua, the outcome of the self-evaluation showed that evaluation and quality assurance are sounding notions for the programme co-ordinators at programme and site levels. The self-evaluation report was clear, well documented and easy to read.

The site visits allowed a comparison to be made between what was appraised in the report and what a short period of time makes it possible to note. As regards this point, no important discrepancies were noted. The self-evaluation report appears sincere and gave a realistic picture of the programme.

THE INTERNAL QA MECHANISMS: IMPLEMENTATION AND ACHIEVEMENTS

The management board of the programme (i.e. programme co-ordinators) has set up a cyclical external evaluation procedure. Two renowned external experts, one academic and one coming from industry, have been asked to join the management board with regards to quality assurance related issues. They have participated in the design of the terms of reference of four cyclical QA mechanisms:

- An evaluation of the programme by students, teaching staff, consortium member universities, end-users (present and potential future employers of the graduated students and other Academia) through self-evaluation questionnaires;
- An evaluation by the external experts of the published information about the programme;
- An evaluation by the external experts of the feedback given by questionnaires to students and teaching staff;
- An evaluation of adequacy between the programme and professional and academic demands.

The external experts have already written two reports. The first, dated March 2005, covers the evaluation of the programme by students and teaching staff after the first semester of activity of the programme. The second, dated September 2005, covers all the QA mechanisms. These reports demonstrate clearly the quality and value of the QA mechanisms set up. The evaluation panel considers that the programme can rely on its external experts for well informed, frank and direct recommendations.

From the evaluation panel point of view, the QA mechanisms in place should provide the management board with all the information needed for assuring quality management and thus improve the programme as regards content, running and relevance. The management board needs to make full use of all the potential improvement from these tools.

3.5 Institutional issues

THE ISSUE OF THE NATURE OF THE DEGREE TO BE DELIVERED

The award of true European joint degrees is a part of the purpose Erasmus Mundus project. As written by its promoters in the FAQ answers available through the web sites of National Education Ministries: “Erasmus Mundus also supports the intergovernmental Bologna Process by helping to converge European university degree structures, which will make European higher education more transparent and attractive to students and academics both within and beyond the European Union.”

This stated ambition means that the pedagogical project is one shared and performed in cooperation by several institutions located in different countries. From this perspective, there should at the end of the two-year course, be a single award delivered to successful students. This is clearly a goal that the EuroAqua managers wanted to achieve. However the delivery of such a degree has been problematic up until now because of different national legislation.

At the time of the last meeting of the evaluation panel, the only possible legal support framework is the multiple degree option. In this case, the institutions involved deliver the degree simultaneously. From a practical point of view, it means that the students should be given several degrees, one for each institution involved rather than one corresponding to the single education he or she received. This creates difficulties and is not the option Erasmus Mundus advocates.

The solution for EuroAqua is to award a single degree engaging the academic responsibility of all the institutions involved. This option must determine with precision the conditions under which a joint degree can be delivered and most notably with regard to quality assurance issues. This stumbling block regarding achieving this end varies between countries. In the UK, for example, the issue surrounds the authority of the university itself. In France, the issue concerns both the institution and the Ministry of Higher Education because of its role in the “*procedure d’habilitation nationale*” (accreditation-like procedure by which the State gives its guarantee as regards to the quality of the programme”).

The present situation must find a solution which suits:

- the students, who deserve the European degree they have applied and worked for;
- the institutions, which have to take care of the value of their awards and names;
- the quality assurance which has to be effective and trustworthy in order to protect all stakeholders.

At the moment, the situation is (at the time of the last site visit by the evaluation panel) also problematic because the students still don’t know exactly what kind of degree they are going to get. The evaluation panel insists on the fact that a solution needs to be in place before the end of the academic year 2005–2006.

EQUITY BETWEEN NON-EU AND EU STUDENTS: THE GRANTS ISSUE

The accessibility of the programme for EU students is an issue that the managers of the programme often put forward in connection with the question of grants.

The Erasmus Mundus rules were clear. The EU students were not supposed to receive specific scholarships during the two-year course in Europe. But at the same time Erasmus Mundus is supposed to give opportunities for the building of sustainable

relationships between the EU and the rest of the world. With regard to this goal, there is probably no better way than mixing EU and non-EU students in the same course. It is therefore crucial to make the enrolment in the programme possible for EU students.

EU students are eligible for a grant through action 3. Action 3 can send them, for instance, for between 1 to 5 months to an associated University in a third country. It is a valuable opportunity they are aware of but doesn't answer to the practical and day-to-day financial requirements that they have to deal with during two years.

In addition to the classic problems of student finance, all EuroAqua students had to face the mobility required during the programme. This and the substantial academic demands of the programme did not facilitate student employment and increased the costs to be supported, notably, travel and accommodation. There is a danger that applications from EU students will be limited by the cost of studies. As regards to the financing of their studies, the EU students have for the moment to cope with non-specific help negotiated by the managers of the programme.

The main support on offer has been the possibility of receiving an Erasmus grant. These grants are given once only, and for one or two semesters within the whole academic year spent abroad, and at the same university. This provision doesn't fit very well with a programme designed to entail one-semester mobility such as EuroAqua. In this case, a grant of the same amount (300 € per month) but given for 12 months would be more suitable. Nevertheless, until now all EU students have benefited from an Erasmus grant. The principle of making students eligible for a second grant if they have already had Erasmus mobility in the context of another educational programme has been demonstrated. But still, there is no possibility of having two Erasmus grants during the same programme.

To be offered an Erasmus grant makes the students enrolled in a UNSA programme eligible to a second grant of the same amount given by the local authorities. This grant is the result of an agreement passed between the local authority (Conseil Général des Alpes Maritimes) and the University of Nice. All the EU EuroAqua students benefited from this.

A third possibility negotiated with a regional authority (Région Provence-Côte d'Azur) opened up the opportunity for grants given to students present in Nice according to academic excellence and social criteria. This is a one-off amount, specific to each personal case and varies from 300 € to 3 000 € as a maximum. In 2005–2006, all EU students but one have benefited from this.

The situation remains uncomfortable and not sustainable for the following reasons:

- The basis of the system is the Erasmus grants which do not cover a two-year degree;
- The Erasmus grant provisions are not adapted to a multi mobility programme;
- The arrangements with the local and regional authorities are time-limited (They are not specific to EuroAqua and run for the academic years 2004–2005 and 2005–2006 only).

4. Conclusion and recommendations

In the view of the evaluation panel, EuroAquaе has a real potential for becoming a leading master's programme in a developing field of activity. The quality of the students who have applied to the programme is remarkable. And they expect a lot from the programme. That said, the evaluation panel cannot make any significant conclusions as to the outcomes of the programme, as the first graduates will receive their degrees at the end of the 2005–2006 academic year.

Nevertheless, it is possible to assess the relevance and coherence of the programme and to bring to attention to some issues important for the sustainability of the programme. The main points the evaluation panel wish to emphasise are the following:

- Management of the programme: the evaluation panel concludes that this is effective. The programmed co-ordinators share a vision and work well together. This good cooperation has already allowed problems to be solved quickly and has made it possible to give students effective support. The main concern is the fact that in this starting phase of operation, the programme relies on the great personal commitment of a very small number of people. It is a weakness, at least until the programme moves beyond the start-up period.
- The important role of IT in education has been positively recognised by the programme. However, the programme website requires deeper implementation, and probably extra support from the institutions to build it up. This could ensure greater benefits for the teaching and learning methods, or even in the development of some quality assurance mechanisms.
- With regard to the content of the programme, the general consistency of the education and of the different educational pathways within EuroAquaе should be enhanced. This needs greater coordination between the five pedagogical teams.
- In relation to the delivery of the programme, the language issue has to be very seriously taken into consideration. The organisers have made the choice to conduct the programme in English. This is a challenging choice for non-native English speaking teachers. The success of this choice cannot rely only on personal skills and commitment. Ways have to be found in order to help the teachers not only to speak in English but also to teach and educate in English. The solution of this issue is not exclusively in the hands of the programme co-ordinators but is also a question for the institutions themselves.
- Considering the quality of the students, it could be worth giving them good opportunities for self-education at each site. From this point of view, easy and full access to Internet and to libraries with substantial collections of professional documentation in English should be guaranteed at each site. On the other hand, it could be interesting to promote a collaboration of some local students in a mentoring action devoted to enhance academic and social integration of the Erasmus Mundus students.
- With regard to the professional integration aspect of the programme, the relationships with the industry and more generally the professional milieus have to be organised and to a certain extent institutionalised.

- With regard to the purpose of the Erasmus Mundus project, the evaluation panel would like to draw attention to the fact that this kind of programme functions, from the point of view of student, as a benchmarking of European institutions.
- The access of EU students to the programme is limited by the fact that they are not eligible for Erasmus Mundus grants. This situation is detrimental to the programme and to the Erasmus Mundus goals. The solutions in place at this time imply a lot of time and effort for the managers of the programme and are complicated and precarious. No doubt the situation introduces a real and difficult question on how to justify discrepancy between the living conditions of the students. A fair solution is needed in order to give all the students the same conditions during their studies. It is a part of what is needed in order to achieve the Erasmus Mundus goal of favouring meetings between non-EU and EU students.
- The issue of the degrees to be delivered is crucial. It is of course one of the goals of the Erasmus Mundus project to push forward the emergence of European joint degrees. The recognition of these programmes will oblige different national systems to find ways to help mutual confidence in particular as regards to quality assurance matters. Considering the diversity of the different national higher education systems it probably means that innovative systems will have to be developed in order to strengthen cross-confidence in national QA systems. In addition, EuroAqua is a new programme but a solution has to be found before the end of 2005–2006 academic year and before the graduation of the first cohort.

Annex I.

Timetable of site visits

SITE VISIT	TIME	VISITING PANEL MEMBERS
University of Newcastle upon Tyne	16–17 June	Péter Bakonyi Miquel Salgot Esther Huertas Bruno Curvale Josep Grifoll
Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya	26–27 September	Péter Bakonyi François Laulan Esther Huertas Bruno Curvale Josep Grifoll
Budapest University of Technology and Economics	6–7 October	Jan-Erik Gustafsson Ignasi Rodríguez-Roda Csilla Balogh Gemma Rauret Fabrice Hénard
Brandenburg University of Technology at Cottbus	17–18 October	François Laulan Ignasi Rodríguez-Roda Esther Huertas Fabrice Hénard Josep Grifoll
University of Nice Sophia Antipolis	17–18 November	Miquel Salgot Péter Bakonyi Csilla Balogh Gemma Rauret Bruno Curvale

Annex II.

Feedback letter from EuroAqua

**Faculty of
GEOGRAPHIC
SCIENCES**



Dean

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Nice, 1 June 2006

Philippe Gourbesville

to

ENQA
Attn. Mrs Emmi HELLE
Unioninkatu 20-22
FI – 00130 Helsinki, Finland

Subject: TEEP II project – Answer to report
V/ REF:

Dear Mrs. Helle,

Following your request, you will find in the attached document the comments about the last version of the EuroAqua report for the TEEP II project.

Yours sincerely,

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TEEP II project

Answer from EuroAqua Consortium

Programme report: the report established by the experts, following the self assessment report and the different site-visits, has underlined some of the main aspects, constraints and expected results of EuroAqua.

The task of the expert group was difficult especially with the understanding of the Erasmus Mundus philosophy that was completely new and very far from the international programs commonly developed in Europe until now. This difficulty to understand the Erasmus Mundus spirit – "society of knowledge" - and the geo-strategical dimension – "competitive higher education environment, support of economical development and key action for economical partnership with Europe" – is reflected by the proposed methodology which still organized in a traditional, static and academic way without any consideration for the strategical vision.

The understanding of the Erasmus Mundus objectives and rules by the experts team from the very beginning would have help to develop a more accurate analysis and especially to follow the permanent developments of the EuroAqua activities (organisation, scientific content, partnership with professionals, participation, management,).

The report doesn't go into the details of the quality assessment procedure established by the EuroAqua consortium. To answer to the challenge of the permanent development, the institutions have decided to establish a specific quality assessment program for the master course. This essential activity is carried out by the management board members and by the two external experts who are in charge of the quality procedure for the master course. During the last 2 years, the different procedures have been formalized by terms of reference and applied to the participants, to the teachers, to the contractors and to the professionals involved in the EuroAqua activities. This tool provides today a clear picture of the situation with an identification of weaknesses and efforts to develop. The definition of this quality control procedure was not deeply investigated or reported by the expert's team. The procedures which are today implemented offer today the possibility to organize and to bring coherence of the different national systems. This aspect is for sure, one of the key element for the successful implementation of a joint degree. The work realized by EuroAqua on the subject represents an available tool, which can be easily used and duplicated by others courses.

Joint degree: The objective of the EuroAqua consortium was from the very beginning to establish a real joint degree awarded jointly by the five institutions and with the full national recognitions. This possibility was not offered in 2004 due to some lacks into the different legal environments. Since the end of the first semester 2005, the possibility to establish joint degrees has been opened with a constant

pressure of the members of the consortium. The strategy for the consortium was then to establish a procedure, to finalize the agreements for the end of the academic year 2005/2006 and to be able to award this new degree to the first generation of EuroAquaE students in September 2006. All these steps were achieved successfully and concluded in May 2006.

Professional project & partnership with professionals: 14 of the 17 first students of EuroAquaE have decided to go for a professional practice during the last semester of the master course. All of these students have joined leading world companies – all European as Wallingford, Halcrow, Danish Hydraulic Institute, Veolia Water, Suez, ... - in the field of hydroinformatics and water resources management. The professional community has very well received the opportunity to welcome some EuroAquaE participants and has clearly identified the high interest of third countries participants who are potentially keys factor to penetrate new markets especially in Asia. All of the students will receive at the end of the semester at least a proposal for a job and the possibility to continue to collaborate with European industry and companies. The achievement was possible only due to the deep relationship established with the professionals and the consortium since many years through a fruitful collaboration.

Nice, 1 June 2006



Philippe Gourbesville
EuroAquaE Coordinator



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