



International evaluation and accreditation

EVALUATION AND ACCREDITATION DOCUMENTS

EUROPEAN APPROACH **Joint Master Marine Biotechnology**

European University: EU-CONEXUS
La Rochelle University, France

JULY 2021

Rapport publié le 23/07/2021

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International evaluation and accreditation

EVALUATION REPORT

EUROPEAN APPROACH Joint Master Marine Biotechnology

European University: EU-CONEXUS
La Rochelle University, France

7th JUNE – 2021



EUCONEXUS has mandated the Hcéres to perform the evaluation of its Joint Master Programme Marine Biotechnology.

The evaluation is based on the agreed "Standards for quality assurance of Joint Programmes in the EHEA", approved by the European Ministers responsible for higher education in May 2015¹.

On account of exceptional circumstances, the organisation of the evaluation was adapted (replacement of the physical onsite visit by the panel by a visit by videoconference), while remaining compliant with the fundamental principles of institution or study programme evaluation: external evaluation standard applied, the self-evaluation report (SER) and requested annexes sent by the institution, panel of experts set up by Hcéres, collegial work by the panel, interviews with the institution and its partners by videoconference, report drafted and then sent to the institution in its provisional and then final version, response by the institution to the report by the panel. This specific procedure is in line with the official position defined jointly by EQAR and ENQA.²

For the Hcéres :

Thierry Coulhon, President

In accordance with the decree n°2014-1365, November 14th, 2014, the president of Hcéres "contresigne les rapports d'évaluation établis par les comités d'experts et signés par leur président." (Article 8, alinéa 5) — "countersigns the assessment reports made by the experts' committees and signed by their president" (article 8, alinea 5).

¹ https://www.eqar.eu/assets/uploads/2018/04/02_European_Approach_QA_of_Joint_Programmes_v1_0.pdf

² <https://enqa.eu/index.php/home/enqa-statement-on-covid-19-pandemic/>

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I. STUDY PROGRAMME IDENTITY SHEET

1. Study programme name: Joint Master programme in Marine Biotechnology (JMPMB)

2. Partners institutions:
 - Universidad Católica de Valencia San Vicente Mártir, Spain
 - La Rochelle Université, France
 - Agricultural University of Athens, Greece
 - Universitatea Tehnica de Constructii Bucuresti, Romania
 - Klaipėdos Universitetas, Lithuania
 - Sveučilište u Zadru, Croatia

3. Academic degree(s) awarded: Master's Degree in Marine Biotechnology

4. Date of introduction: September 2021

5. Regular study period: September-July

6. Number of ECTS: 120 ECTS

7. Tuition fees/year: EU and EEA citizens: 4,500 – 5,500 Eur; Non EU citizens: 8,500 – 9,500 Eur (to be confirmed)

8. National and international socioeconomic partners: the programme is supported by 34 national and international socio-economic partners

9. Any useful information: the joint programme is developed and will be launched in the framework of the Erasmus+ KA2 European Universities multibeneficiaries project No. 612599-EPP-1-FR-EPPKA2-EUR-UNIV

METHODS AND RESULTS OF THE PREVIOUS ACCREDITATION(S)

This evaluation is an ex ante evaluation, following the European Approach. This is the first evaluation for this Joint Master.

HUMAN AND MATERIAL RESOURCES DEDICATED TO THE PROGRAMME

10. Human resources: the programme is delivered by the academic staff from six partner universities, associated partners and stakeholders. Each course includes the teaching collaboration to benefit from the expertise and competences in the field.
11. Material resources: the facilities (laboratories, equipment, software, libraries, etc.) are provided by all the partners universities and associated partners. They are available to the students to achieve the learning outcomes and apply the theoretical knowledge. The EU-CONEXUS Smart Campus enables the teachers and students to collaboration and virtual learning.

II. VISIT DESCRIPTION

Hcéres was mandated by EUCONEXUS, represented by La Rochelle University in November 2020.

The evaluation process follows the European Approach standards and procedure. A self-evaluation report (SER) was produced by the alliance early 2021.

The experts' panel was nominated after discussion with the quality assurance agencies of the countries represented in the alliance and they were all informed about the process.

Considering the circumstances and the pandemic situation, decision was made to organize an online visit on the 25th and 29th of March 2021. The visit was very well organised with the participation of all partners' institutions. The panel discussed with the management of the alliance, and of the programme, as well as with professors, administrative staff and stakeholders.

The panel had several meetings to prepare the site-visit, and then to draft the report.

The agenda of the visit and the composition of the experts' panel are detailed in V (see below).

III. EVALUATION REPORT

1- ELIGIBILITY

1.1 Status

x Compliant

Compliant with conditions

Non-compliant

The joint Master programme in Marine Biotechnology (JMPMB) will be delivered by **6 partner universities** (Universidad Católica de Valencia (UCV; Spain), La Rochelle Université (LRUniv; France), Agricultural University of Athens (AUA; Greece), Universitatea Tehnica de Constructii Bucuresti (UTCB; Romania), Klaipėdos Universitetas (KU; Lithuania), Sveučilište u Zadru (UNIZD; Croatia) in association with two associated partners: Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT; Ireland) and Universität Rostock (URostock; Germany).

The partners and associated partner universities are recognised as higher education institutions by the relevant authorities of their countries. Their respective national legal frameworks enable them to participate in the joint programme. These legal frameworks are clearly identified in the Annexes 4 and 5 of the SER. Likewise, the relevant external quality assurance agencies as well as the regulatory status regarding the implementation of the European Approach are clearly identified for every involved country. As a whole, all the partner universities awarding the degree ensure that the degree belongs to the higher education degree systems of the countries in which they are based, and the joint diploma and joint European diploma supplement (EDS) will be issued by UCV.

Yet, some particular cases are taken into account to warrant jointness despite of the specific conditions or circumstances of various partners or associate partners. Thus, UTCB cannot award the degree due to legal restrictions, but it is a full EU-CONEXUS partner that has contributed to every other aspect of the programme, including design and delivery. In addition, WIT and URostock contribute to the delivery of the programme as external to EU-CONEXUS and therefore at present they are associated partners; however, they are expected to join as full partners in the future, thus consolidating the consortium.

EU-CONEXUS funding lasts for three years; thus, the partner Universities should pay attention to the particular way in which the additional three years will be financed to carry through the six years of accreditation after the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes.

1.2 Joint design and delivery

x Compliant

Compliant with conditions

Non-compliant

Partner Universities and associated partner Universities designed, and will deliver, a joint programme.

A preceding experience (EU Project "A Blue Biotechnology Master for a Blue Career"; 2016-2018) of collaboration between the partners in international postgraduate education was used as reference. Partner institutions cooperated in the design and delivery of the programme, which was conceived and developed in the framework of the Erasmus+ KA2 European Universities Project 612599-EPP-1-FR- EPPKA2-EUR-UNIV (EU-CONEXUS).

The associated partners (WIT, URostock) were not main actors in the programme inception but they contributed later on, and actions are being taken for them to join as full partners in the future.

Jointness includes most pivotal aspects of the programme. Most of them are clearly explained and justified joint procedures and actions: (a) management; (b) website, promotion and visibility; (c) recruitment and admission; (d) teaching; (e) quality assurance; and (f) Internships and research activities (ARI and MSc thesis).

Indeed, the programme includes a remarkable pioneering initiative to implement the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes.

Yet, some improvement actions have been identified regarding jointness in aspects such as: (a) fees and finance management; (b) student assessment regulations; (c) Master thesis regulations and defence; (d) collaborative tracks in Semester 3; (e) diploma and diploma supplement.

a) Although there are specific tuition fees per institution, joint participation costs are agreed and a joint finance management is scheduled for this. The coordinating institution (UCV) receives the joint participation costs and distributes them to the partners including the specific tuition fees. This was clearly concluded after the feedback received during the visit but it is not so clearly seen in the SER. A rewording is advised for clarity purposes, with a concise definition of the concepts of "participation costs" and "tuition fees". Likewise, participation costs included in the joint finance management other than tuition fees should be identified and their joint management agreed.

b) Students' assessment regulations include a joint system that uses an agreed instrument to decide about the correspondence of marks³ obtained by each student at different partner universities. However, a technically detailed joint procedure for mark transfer/recognition is missing. This should provide details about who approves, certifies, communicates and manages the consensus mark and about how is mark equivalence established and revised.

c) Master thesis regulations, offer and defence also constitute an element of jointness. Master thesis research can be carried out at any of the six partner Universities or associate partner (WIT, URostock and non-academic associates). However, the defence and assessment must be performed only in partner Universities, in any of the six, on condition that they will follow joint regulations, including consensus conditions of eligibility and a joint jury made of three examiners from three partner Universities. It remains not fully clear, however, if there are joint assessment criteria and some harmonisation/calibration actions; thus, priority should be given to establish joint assessment criteria, as well as to agree and define in detail actors, tools and procedures for marking transfer/recognition. Overall, a rewording is advised for clarity purposes, avoid using the term "common" if the intended meaning is "Joint". Otherwise, define "common". This can be relevant to understand the degree of jointness and the feasibility of the joint offer of Master thesis.

d) The jointness of semesters 1 and 2 is undeniable; in contrast, the joint management of the collaborative tracks of semester 3 need to be better defined/explained.

e) It is clearly stated that UCV will issue the joint degree (diploma and EDS) in recognition of a joint programme in which UCB, which is not legally recognised by national regulations to award the degree, also participates. This solution reveals a great degree of achievement despite of the legal difficulties that arise from the diversity of the regulatory framework in the EU. This formulation can be identified as a great step forward in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) construction.

Thus, the existence of a joint degree and its management are not so clear. UCV will register a joint degree at least in Spain. However, it must be clearly stated and defined in the Consortium agreement which are the universities awarding the joint degree, and which ones will not and will award a double/multiple degree instead. For instance, LRUniv has to deliver the joint degree using an official French Paper produced in France, and UCV can not do it...thus, LRUniv has also announced that due to the French legislation, the delivered diploma will be under the form of an "university diploma awarding the degree of Master" and not a "classical" traditional Master degree.

Likewise, the registration scheme supporting the joint degree delivery needs to be more detailed (e.g., specify the universities in which each student will be registered in order to secure management and custody of his/her records and further or encoding in the Register or Degrees). Finally, in the Spanish legislation, at present, a joint diploma (degree) including logos and signatures of all the awarding universities can be issued only within the Erasmus Mundus framework. Moreover, UCV will issue a joint EDS; in this case, the current Spanish legal framework is even more obscure. However, during the visit, the information was given that the Spanish Education Ministry was on the way to get these issues solved in the new Decree to be published in 2021, which will include options for new EU initiatives to enhance the EHEA such as the European universities in which EU-CONEXUS is frameworked. Therefore, the expectations of UCV are to legally issue joint diplomas in due time for the Master programme.

Last but not least, a rewording is advised for clarity purposes, avoid using "unified" if it is "Joint". Otherwise, define "unified". This can be relevant to understand the degree of jointness and the feasibility of the student support.

³ JMPMB agreement (Annex 6) – academic toolkit 11.3 grading system, p.85.

1.3 Cooperation Agreement

- **x Compliant** Compliant with conditions Non-compliant

The terms and conditions of the joint programme are clearly laid down in the cooperation agreement.

The agreement covers the following core issues:

(a) Denomination of the degree(s) awarded in the programme: Master's Degree in Marine Biotechnology (or equivalent according to the national qualification of participating universities/countries⁴), with ISCED 05 Natural sciences, mathematics and statistics.

(b) Coordination and responsibilities of the involved partners regarding management and financial organisation: several governing bodies are established and their responsibilities are clearly identified. The Programme board (PB) is composed of one academic member for each participating university voting on behalf of his/her institution, one administrative member for each institution responsible for the administrative issues and two students. The PB chair is the Academic coordinator (AC). The PB is advised by the Joint Master External Advisory Board (JMEAB) and the Selection committee (SC).

The Programme Coordinator University (PCU) manages the administrative, legal and financial affairs of the joint programme and the Consortium, reports to the Partners all the administrative, legal and financial matters, and implements the decisions taken by the PB. The Programme Coordinator University is responsible to hire an EU-CONEXUS Master Officer (EMO) to perform administrative tasks.

The SC is composed by one expert from each Partner and its main responsibilities shall be evaluation of applications and selection of eligible students and scholarship holders to be approved by the PB. The JMEAB is composed by six stakeholders (1 per Partner country), two students and one alumni.

(c) Admission and selection procedures for students: the partners agree to apply a joint application, selection, enrolment and registration procedure for JMPMB students⁵. The procedure can be reviewed on the recommendation of the SC or the PB. The PCU is responsible to publish application, selection and admission procedures. Application procedure and timeline, admission requirements and application documents are clearly detailed in the Cooperation agreement. The selection process has different steps to ensure the involvement of every partner institution in the selection of potential students. The SC approves the pre-nomination list and submits to the PB for the final approval. A joint appeal procedure is agreed.

(d) Mobility of students and teachers: the partners agree on the joint academic calendar for the JMPMB in order to enable smooth mobility of the student and credits transfer. Management rules for teaching staff within the universities of the consortium and visiting teaching staff are agreed. The EU-CONEXUS Mobility office will assist students and the teaching staff to organize their mobility.

(e) Examination regulations, student assessment methods, recognition of credits and degree awarding procedures in the consortium: joint students' assessment principles and regulations are agreed to evaluate whether the students have achieved the intended learning outcomes of each course and of the overall programme.

The Master thesis will be assessed by the Jury composed of 3 members of different institutions (1 at least from the Consortium); and a common evaluation procedure is agreed⁶. The joint programme is based on ECTS. The students are registered at all universities throughout their studies and the credits obtained at the partners are automatically recognized by all members of the consortium.

A joint Master degree will be awarded by UCV on behalf the consortium after having successfully passed all exams and defended the Master thesis. UCV has the responsibility to issue and register the diploma and the diploma supplement, including reference to all relevant national legal frameworks in accordance to which the degree was awarded. UTCB will not award a joint degree but recognized the joint programme and its UTCB logo will be included in the joint diploma. UCV will also issue a provisional diploma and transcript of records on the Graduation ceremony, as the official Joint Degree needs six months to be processed after graduation.

⁴ As detailed in Art 5.4 of the Consortium Agreement.

⁵ As specified in the Annex 2 Admission procedure.

⁶ Annex 8. Master thesis Guidelines.

Some of these aspects mentioned in the SER may require some tuning, based on the experience of the running programme, but this should not imply an amendment of the cooperation agreement. This has been conceived in a way in which regular updates in the terms and conditions can be agreed by amendment of the corresponding Annexes (i.e., the Annexes 2, 3, 7, 8, 9 and 10 of the Consortium Agreement); these amendments can be based on the joint Programme board decisions without the need for complex institutional procedures.

2 – LEARNING OUTCOMES

2.1 Level

- **x Compliant** Compliant with conditions Non-compliant

The joint programme aims at providing a common framework of qualifications which describes them in terms of learning outcomes and competencies, comparable and compatible Europe-wide.

The intended learning outcomes are presented in terms of *Knowledge, Skills and Responsibility and autonomy*⁷. They align with the level 7 (second cycle) of the European Qualifications Framework of the EHEA, as well as with the applicable national qualifications frameworks.

The jointly agreed learning outcomes provide the students with theoretical and professional knowledge and practical skills for the use of aquatic resources, applying them to the development of innovative products and services for the health, cosmetics, nutrition and aquaculture sectors, contributing to the Blue Bio-economy.

Learning outcomes were developed using two skill-maps carried out internationally and in consultation with professionals in the field of marine biotechnology. The correspondence between the courses and the intended learning outcomes is clearly indicated in the matrix and documents provided.

2.2 Disciplinary field

- **x Compliant** Compliant with conditions Non-compliant

Following a thorough analysis and mapping⁸ of the landscape of marine biotechnologies (economic, social, etc.) with regard to European policies and on the strength of previous experience with the BBMBC project (www.bbmbc.eu), the EU-CONEXUS consortium has developed a project to deliver a joint Master. The programme is supposed to be implemented in close cooperation with stakeholders, to define an original programme of quality focusing on the Marine Biotechnology.

It has been designed to cover the marine biotechnology pipeline from biodiscovery to market launch, “enabling the student to integrate in a variety of professional careers in the Marine Biotechnology sector⁹”.

During the first academic year, core courses (54 ECTS) are taught (at UCV for Semester 1 and at LRUniv, for Semester 2), in the areas of Marine Omics, Marine Biodiversity Prospecting, Blue Biotechnology Business and R&D Management and Bio-Chemistry of Marine Natural Products. After this first year, students will choose one of the four offered tracks (Innovative Bioproduct for Future, Blue Biomass, Marine Biorefinery, Aquaculture biotechnology) according to their specialisation.

The course will be punctuated by an internship, ARI (multidisciplinary project in relation to their specialization) and finish with a Master thesis. The description of the courses is complete and covers all the topics included in the marine biotechnology field.

The intended learning outcomes and the application of biotechnological advances methodologies to marine and aquatic environments, make this Master's degree very innovative.

⁷ Alignment table, Annexe 7 SER.

⁸ Annexe 2 SER.

⁹ SER p.15.

2.3 Achievement

- **x Compliant** Compliant with conditions Non-compliant

The programme plans to demonstrate that the intended learning outcomes are achieved by means of Joint Quality Assurance Guidelines procedures detailed in Annex 8 of the SER: these include academic performance analysis, thematic area evaluations, internship evaluation, Master thesis evaluations, admission profile evaluation, labour market integration analysis and meta-evaluation of the programme.

These procedures include surveys or reports on analysis of the marks, depending on the target area:

- Considering the diverse scenarii in the various partners (language, procedures, data management, communication/transfer procedures), it is not clear how these procedures are planned to be jointly carried out (many, maybe too many, responsibilities are given to the Programme board); actions are needed here in order to clearly determine the feasibility of these procedures and identify improvement measures to secure its realistic implementation.
- The plan is very ambitious and appealing but this demands tremendous resources; however, the partner institutions have experience in joint educational programmes, virtual learning and student mobility and they have individual Quality Assurance procedures that will be shared. There seem to be additional support: a new Master officer is allocated at the coordinating institution (UCV) and EU-CONEXUS offers a new ad-hoc platform (Smart Campus) to enhance virtual communication and facilitate information exchange. However, a realistic planning based on a small pilot experience would be helpful to properly dimension the procedures and identify suitable actors other than the Programme board.

2.4 Regulated Professions

- **x Non- applicable**

The programme does not qualify for any of the regulated professions; there is no need to address the requirements of the EU Directive 2005/36/EC.

3 – STUDY PROGRAMME [ESG 1.2]

3.1 Curriculum

- **x Compliant** Compliant with conditions Non-compliant

In terms of methods, as explained in the SER, the Intended Learning Outcomes (ILO) and JMPMB curricula were designed using the results of a previous Skills map carried out in the project "A Blue Biotechnology Master for a Blue Career (BBMBC)". For the latter, the EU-CONEXUS Programme Committees together with the Public and Corporate Relations Unit developed a questionnaire distributed among almost 400 stakeholders from the socio-economic environment in all EU-CONEXUS countries and at international level. This is how the curriculum was finally designed.

Regarding the structure and content of the curriculum, they seem to fit to enable the students to achieve the intended learning outcomes. The joint curriculum has a modular structure and comprises four components spread over four semesters (120 ECTS).

During the first year (60 ECTS), core courses (54 ECTS) provide the basis of Biotechnology applied to the Marine Environment; these are complemented with an Internship (6 ECTS; 8 weeks) and at the end of Semester 2, conceived as a professional practice:

- A detailed procedure to secure a fair offer of Internships and a feasible mobility scheme, together with joint management procedures for selection, allocation and assessment of the Internships would contribute to the excellence of the programme. A newly created tool, the EU-CONEXUS Career centre will assist in logistics but a specific joint management should be agreed, and mechanisms to secure the commitment of stakeholders would be welcome.

- The internship scheme links to the framework of potential employments in the sector; however, the stakeholders do not conceive each secondment as a potential option for recruiting a particular student if he/she responds satisfactorily during the internship. Certainly, when recruiting employees, the stakeholders consider giving priority to graduates who made the internship with them but the specific target of the internship design is a potential employment. Given the great importance of the stakeholders in the consortium and the very applied and industrial profile of the programme, efforts to promote this unique opportunity, not available in other less applied postgraduate programmes, would give a great added value to the programme.

During the second year (60 ECTS), 16 ECTS are given in virtually taught optional courses (depending on the specialisation), 14 ECTS are carried out in the face-to-face compulsory research module “Academic Research Integration” (ARI), and 30 ECTS correspond to the Master thesis.

ARI is a compulsory module that implies multidisciplinary and inter-university research practice carried out under a team-work scheme. It is ambitious and complex (organisationally and academically), which can be aggravated by institutional diversity and the uneven distribution of students amongst tracks. An effective implementation of the ARI module is a great challenge for which detailed joint procedures should be agreed.

Course information (main themes, learning outcomes, course contents, teaching and learning methodology, workload and assessment methods and criteria) are provided in the ECTS Course Catalogue¹⁰.

The curriculum provides the students with flexibility to choose the internship, tracks, ARI and Master’s thesis. Students will express their track preference in the beginning of the programme, but as a part of the EU-CONEXUS Smart Campus, strong mentoring system will be developed so that the students get all the necessary info on all tracks. Also, there will be the possibility to change track. Specific tracks have limited number of students depending on the available infrastructure. Professors from all partner institutions will be included in teaching of core courses in first two semesters, providing possibility to learn more about different tracks.

It should be clearly detailed how students decide on the track they want to choose, whether it is made a priori on the base of the program, or later on after some live experience following the programme. Likewise, details about how the offer of courses or tracks is decided would be welcome: e.g. how many students are needed to keep a track running or whether those of no interest are retained in the offer or removed, etc.

3.2 Credits

- **x Compliant** Compliant with conditions Non-compliant

The European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) is described in the ECTS Course Catalogue¹¹. The ECTS is applied properly and the distribution of credits is clear. (See also 3.1).

3.3 Workload

- **x Compliant** Compliant with conditions Non-compliant

The workload and the average time to complete the programme will be monitored as a part of the Quality Assurance Guidelines¹². The students will have to study in at least in two universities of the consortium. The core courses are taught at host universities UVC, Spain and LRUUniv, France.

The program sounds very ambitious and challenging considering the different backgrounds of the students. The nine core courses are very specific and a good background is needed for the students to follow it successfully. Also, during the virtual site visit, it was stated that the students will have the possibility to bridge eventual gaps in knowledge by taking courses from the other programmes. The question that arises is how much time the students will have for extra courses.

¹⁰ SER Annex 7.

¹¹ Ibidem.

¹² SER p.19.

4 – ADMISSION AND RECOGNITION [ESG 1.4]

4.1 Admission

x Compliant

Compliant with conditions

Non-compliant

The admission process is a seven step process of application¹³. It includes selection (based on submitted application documentation and interview), enrolment and registration. It will be a joint process in order to “(1) assure the involvement of all partners in the admission process, (2) apply transparent and consistent admission criteria for all applicants, (3) perform a joint JMPMB communication, marketing and recruitment strategy”¹⁴. Also the partners agreed on joint eligibility requirements, application documents, a selection procedure, and a final nomination, enrolment and registration and appeals procedure.

The admission requirements and selection procedures¹⁵ seem to be appropriate in light of the programme's level and discipline. Minimum admission requirements are well defined as (1) recognised University Bachelor's or equivalent degree (min 180 ECTS) from a recognised higher education institution providing the access to the Master cycle; (2) undergraduate study in the fields of Natural Sciences, Mathematics and Statistics, Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction, Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries and Veterinary or other; (3) sufficient proficiency in English and motivation.

A total of 40 students can be enrolled, and the selection is done by a Selection committee (SC). The final decisions on the assessment of applicants and nominated students shall be reached in consensus by the partners.

The selection is based exclusively on the quality of the students, ranked by the SC according to a precise list of criteria weighted by a point system: 50% of the student application evaluation consists in Bachelor grade (or equivalent), while the student's motivation is assessed through the quality of their statement of purpose (30%), their professional/research experience in the related subject (20%) and extracurricular merits (10%)¹⁶.

The programme coordinator University is responsible to publish the application, selection and admission procedures and the timeline for the next intake on the EU-CONEXUS website (<https://www.eu-conexus.eu/marinebiotech/>) until 30 November (for the intake of 2021 the admission rules will be announced publicly after the accreditation of the JMPMB). The EU-CONEXUS Academic council shall approve any new admission procedures and requirements until 15 November for the next intake, based on the Programme board proposal. The dates may be influenced and corrected according to timelines of external scholarships like Erasmus Mundus.

Some concerns might arise regarding the very diverse background of the students. But the existence of regulations for equal opportunities and also the need to select students with backgrounds diverse enough to enrich the learning process might help. A majority of admitted students is expected to come from a biotechnology BSc background which should limit the gaps between individual students. There might still be concerns about the wish to diversify the admitted student profiles (as stated in the agreement) whilst seeking the lowest knowledge gap.

In addition to this issue, the selection of the members of the SC also raises questions, since the procedure is not as well defined as concerning the Programme board selection. But information was given to the panel that the SC will be changed and revised every year and there is always a possibility to have some of the Programme board members within the SC. From the panel's perspective, it is highly recommended that at least one member of the Programme board is also in the Selection committee.

The EU-CONEXUS Quality Assurance 'IQP 06 Admission profile evaluation' procedure¹⁷ will be used to ensure a better adequation of the enrolment rate (admission profile) and the progression (academic results) of students.

¹³ As illustrated in the SER p. 20.

¹⁴ Ibidem.

¹⁵ As described in the annexes 2 and 3 of the EU-CONEXUS JMPMB agreement.

¹⁶ Admission procedure, Article 4.2.

¹⁷ Annex 8 SER.

4.2 Recognition

x Compliant

Compliant with conditions

Non-compliant

As explained in the SER, the aim of the alliance is that each of the credit obtained at one of the partner university will be automatically recognised by all members of the consortium¹⁸.

Recognition of qualifications and of periods of studies (including recognition of prior learning) is applied in line with the Lisbon Recognition Convention and subsidiary documents¹⁹.

Recognition of qualifications for admission purposes will be performed by the selection committee following partners' national legislation requirements. In case of doubt, it is possible to include external advisors. The equivalency between different international diplomas and grade systems will be transferred into the Spanish grading system (0-10 points) by each partner university in order to homogenize international grading systems²⁰.

5 - LEARNING, TEACHING AND ASSESSMENT [ESG 1.3]

5.1 Learning and teaching

• **x Compliant**

Compliant with conditions

Non-compliant

The JMPMB program was created with the identification of key teaching and learning goals²¹.

- interdisciplinary training aligned with the marine biotechnology pipeline,
- thematically specialisation via thematic areas and four tracks of the programme in the 2nd year,
- individual study plan via individual professional practice (internship), individual research (ARI and Master thesis) and flexibility,
- student-centred learning approach methodology.

This has an impact on the teaching methodologies. "Innovative pedagogical methodologies²² "shall be applied: problem-based learning, research-based learning, learning communities, e-portfolios.

Regarding projects, an " immersive system of project and research-based learning in the 'real world' economy will allow the students to share their way of solving complex problems, and to develop interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral problem-solving capacity²³ ". This will be implemented through the internship, ARI and Master thesis.

To achieve these goals, two intensive trainings for EU-CONEXUS teachers have already been organised on (1) Development of Innovative Study Programmes and Courses (June 2020), (2) Virtual and Blended Teaching (November 2020) and will be offered regularly in order to promote and develop highly innovative teaching methods.

Moreover, teaching methods also rely on teaching collaboration between the partners, and on the participation of stakeholders (visiting professors from other HEI, industry experts, etc.). Diversity of partners and richness of the networks will benefit to the students.

Finally, in case of slight knowledge gaps, the EU-CONEXUS Minor in Blue Economy and Growth courses (sector of Marine Biotechnology) are available for the students as bridge courses. Also, students will get personalised attention and support through on line platform – Smart Campus.

Smart Campus sounds very important since it does provide each student the same work environment and all the needed tools to work remotely with any students of any institution, as they would do in a classroom. This is crucial because of virtual courses and many choices that the students have. It also facilitates the creation of virtual collaboration platform between the professors from different partners.

¹⁸ Procedure and principles for the transfer of credits are also defined in Annex 6 EU-CONEXUS JMPMB agreement Article 4.8.

¹⁹ EU-CONEXUS JMPMB agreement Article 4.4.

²⁰ EU-CONEXUS JMPMB agreement, Toolkit, paragraph 11.3.

²¹ SER p.23.

²² SER p.20.

²³ SER p.23.

In addition to this, the mentoring program that includes a network of buddies, tutors, personalised academic, research and career mentors, is of great importance.

5.2 Assessment of students

- **x Compliant** Compliant with conditions Non-compliant

Student assessment procedures are clearly presented in the UE-CONEXUS JMPMB agreement document (annexes 7 and 8). Students could also find it the Student toolkit or on the EU-CONEXUS website.

Guidelines have been established and accepted by all consortium partners to "ensure fairness, consistency and equity"²⁴ towards the students. This regards course exams as well as for the Master thesis defence. A grading system has therefore been set up in order to convert and compare each national grade into a local grade.

All assessment methods are listed (Annex 7 of JMPMB agreement document) and clearly mentioned for each course in the ECTS Course Catalogue, (written exam, report, peer assessment, oral presentation...). Exams are coordinated by the teacher in charge of the course. The exam schedule is known one month in advance and a complementary exam session (2nd chance) is planned in case of failure.

The Master thesis guidelines document is complete and precise (annex 8 of JMPMB agreement document). The students will find all information about the manuscript preparation, defence timeline and assessment (jury, criteria evaluation).

All regulations are clearly explained as well as the right of appeal system for students.

6. STUDENT SUPPORT [ESG 1.6]

- **x Compliant** Compliant with conditions Non-compliant

The strategy defined to support JMPMB students is organised into two aspects: support for program mobility and support to achieve the intended learning outcomes. Both structural resources (joint committees, Mobility office, Public and corporate relations office, EU-CONEXUS students' board...), and material resources (students' toolkit, webpage etc...) illustrate this strategy.

The student toolkit²⁵ is addressed directly to the students as a help during the different steps of the programme. It focuses on academic issues as well as mobility, thus approaching all main aspects of guidance offered to students. The toolkit contains contact information of the different partner universities and the detail of the study programme and localisations. The mobility toolkit deals with issues such as local accommodation either within the university facilities or close-by, and advises for visa, insurance and bank accounts issues. The academic toolkit states the course calendar and presents the different tracks and exam policy. The format of the document is well structured and written in a non-bureaucratic manner, thus fully accessible for students.

Besides the written toolkit, the programme includes social events for interactions among students and with other international students and other partners' staff, as well as with local students. Amongst others, the events include a Welcome Week at the start of Year 1 in UCV, and one Welcome Day at the beginning of each semester, as well as links with Local Student Associations and the emerging network of EU-CONEXUS students. Moreover, staff and students from all the partners have the opportunity to meet each other in the EU-CONEXUS Festival that is organised every year. In the context of restrictions due to sanitary regulations, it seems that the organisers shifted their focus towards online social media, thus optimizing the networking process prior to students' recruitment.

Moreover, individual support for disabled students will be assured by an assigned working team. The joint working group on disabilities aims at establishing an internal mapping of all services offered by the different partner universities, in order to offer the best advice for students with particular needs and help choosing the campus that best fits the student's individual needs. However, a specific contact channel would be

²⁴ SER p.25.

²⁵ EU-CONEXUS JMPMB agreement, annex 5.

appreciated, as the phrase “if you notify us in advance²⁶” remains very vague, especially in the context of disability. The indicated students.MB@eu-connexus.eu email address seems to be associated to academic tutors only and not linked to physical handicap for instance.

Further, another important component of student support consists in research and career guidance. The consortium and every partner have experience in international programmes and hosting EU Programme and partner country students, to whom they provide services and proper access to facilities. Moreover, these will be improved with additional support within the framework of EU-CONEXUS. For instance, internship counselling and a mentor programme are planned. To complete the Master's academic study programme, several annexe courses are offered to students, such as free of charge national language courses and minors helping students to fill academic gaps. These minors consist in existing courses already established in the partner universities. The panel encourages this offered support but is highly concerned about the supplementary work load for students if the minor training is in parallel to the Master programme.

The last important category of student support concerns the employability and career prospects that seem to be within the focus of the close-knit alliance of the Master Programme to international stakeholders. Stakeholders seem to be prone to employ graduates of this programme likewise to the previous framework of postgraduate programmes offered by the Partner universities (at least UCV and LRUniv). However, their degree of commitment in this respect appears to be very limited. To date, there are no scholarships offered by stakeholders for students.

The individual follow-up of students might be a source of concern. The JMPMB is a very demanding programme of high academic expectations and international mobility, including a very high number of academic and administrative staff. Struggling students might not dare to seek help in an international context and find themselves lost in the high number of possible contact persons. A written and extensive formalised procedure binding selected academic tutors to a restricted number of students and including a regular personal follow-up initiated by the tutor (possibly on a monthly basis), in addition to the buddy system would be appreciated.

The Master is very applied and strongly linked to industry, as it mainly deals with the application of biotechnology to enhance the production of marine products, taught courses include competences related to entrepreneurship; however, some stakeholders do not seem to foresee at the moment any specific action to promote entrepreneurship or start-ups. This would be a challenging area of improvement.

Stakeholders provide support in kind (staff, resources, etc.). A specific plan to support the programme with grants, scholarships, co-funding would reinforce the role of stakeholders in such an applied Master in which they are major recipient and beneficiaries of the formation of excellent graduates in their field of interest.

7. RESOURCES [ESG 1.5 & 1.6]

7.1 Staff

- **x Compliant** Compliant with conditions Non-compliant

Scientific but also administrative staff are clearly identified in the project.

Staff seems to be sufficient and adequate (qualifications, professional and international experience) to implement the study programme. They have experience in teaching in English and in the thematic of the programme at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

The consortium and each partner individually commit to assist the teachers to reach C1 English level within a jointly agreed period at the expenses of the consortium or individual partners.

²⁶ Mobility Toolkit, paragraph 4.8 Services for students with disabilities.

However, this qualification will not be compulsory and the partners should implement specific mechanisms to promote it for the teaching staff, as well as to assess the degree of achievement of this commitment; "a jointly agreed period at the expenses of the Consortium or individual Partners" which is not sufficiently specific.

A large contribution in the teaching process will be realised by guest lecturers from academic and non-academic sectors. These are mainly selected according to their professional qualifications rather than by their language skills. But a minimum English level should be maintained and secured in addition to the technical qualifications.

Whilst this is fully acceptable in the context of this applied programme, special efforts should address counteracting communication hurdles in the lecture room (e.g. clearly stating which is the minimum acceptable level of English language use, giving priority to guest lecturers with sufficient level of English if there is a choice, or providing simultaneous translation if needed, etc.).

Additional support, incentives and promotion actions, aimed at motivating and stimulating the participation of teaching staff would deserve some attention in the short term; meanwhile the partners promote staff mobility using EU-CONEXUS and own funding, as well as participating in regular Erasmus Programmes for staff mobility and in educational cooperation projects (an EMJM is under preparation).

Regarding the balance and distribution of professors, each compulsory course has a course coordinator, who is also in charge for the rotation of professors from year to year. There is a risk that the compulsory courses depend too much on the course coordinators (one professor coordinating many courses) which may be an issue of sustainability of the programme in the future.

In addition, there is no clear written procedure on the involvement of professors from other universities to teaching of compulsory courses. Having in mind that the students have the obligation to study in at least two partner institutions, and since the first semesters are in two different universities, there is a question of interest of the students for choosing a track at other university.

The course Academic Research Integration (ARI) was also a subject of discussion, since the way how it is organised was not clear enough in the self-evaluation report. ARI is a compulsory course that will be led by a professor from the chosen track. A group of 5-7 students will work together on a shared and transversal research project in the second year. Each student will have his/her supervisor from one of the partner Universities and will contribute to the interdisciplinary project carrying out the research activities related to his/her specialisation. All students from different specialisations and locations will generate joint results. The leader of the ARI can be any professor from a partner university and every course will be track specific.

7.2 Facilities

x Compliant

Compliant with conditions

Non-compliant

EU-CONEXUS consortium has listed the facilities offered in the programme²⁷: Partners' libraries, working spaces, EU-CONEXUS Smart Campus with its virtual learning environment, spaces for sports and socio-cultural activities etc.

The facilities provided seem to be sufficient and adequate in view of the intended learning outcomes. Through the mobility scheme and the ARI module, the student has the opportunity to benefit from the diversity of the laboratory premises and research equipment that each university uniquely offers. Likewise, the laboratories of partners and associates, fully featured with modern equipment to facilitate multidisciplinary research, are available to carry out the Master thesis project.

UCV has (a) general labs for chemistry, physiology, microbiology, and biology; (b) core services such as a cool room, aquaria, algae culture, and research databases; and (c) specific technological platforms for microorganisms culture, chemical and biochemical analysis, and genomics. Likewise UCV provides access to the Marine Station of IMEDMAR (Institute of Environment and Marine Sciences Research; Alicante) to use general laboratories near the port and a wet lab, including seawater re-circulating systems and tanks, and a small oceanographic vessel for observation, exploration and sampling in the sea.

²⁷ SER Annexe 10.

LRUniv research infrastructure is available at the LIENSs Laboratory, which runs 7 analytical platforms including IR-MS, ICP-MS, geomatics, molecular biology, cytometry, LC-MS, GC-MS and data analysis and has 7 core labs (organic chemistry, chromatography, ecophysiology, marine geophysics, microbiology, cell culture and radioecology). Field equipment includes cars, research vessels and marine and aerial drones, and they provide access to a large-size field experimental facility in the L'Houmeau saltmarshes (Charente- Maritime).

In AUA, the Department of Hydrobiology has aquaculture research and production facilities with supporting laboratories for biochemical analysis and cell technology.

UTCB facilities available for the students are at the thermal sciences laboratory and include refrigeration systems and biogas equipment.

KU resources are available at two labs of the Marine research Institute, and include modern equipment for observational and experimental research from the gen to the ecosystem level. In addition, the facilities include a seawater RAS for full cycle fish production, a mesocosm, an experimental flume and an experimental shrimp cultivation system. At UNIZD, the Marine Research Lab and the Microbiology Lab hold seawater recirculating aquaria, equipment for microscopy, water analysis, spectrophotometry, chromatography..., and a boat and drones and sampling instruments. URostock and WIT also contribute with chemical and biological labs.

For the courses under core thematic areas, namely Marine Biodiversity Prospecting and Marine Omics, more details on the facilities would be helpful because it is difficult to assess and to determine whether the outcomes are feasible. Courses are focusing on the use of advanced genomic tools, such as NGS and microarrays, there are at least 15 hours of laboratory work planned, but the only listed equipment that would be available is Oxford Nanopore MinION, which is very poor representative of the instruments used in the field. This might lead to the course being data analysis focused and jeopardize the achievement of the Intended Learning Outcomes. A better organisation, or the use of facilities from other universities might also help to overcome this challenge.

8. TRANSPARENCY AND DOCUMENTATION [ESG 1.8]

- **x Compliant** Compliant with conditions Non-compliant

There is a stated commitment to transparent communication of all the processes between the partner universities. Communication with future students is achieved via webpage, which seems adequate for an international programme.

The programme webpage eu-connexus.eu contains well-structured toolkits for applicants, students and management. In our view all procedures are in place and are well documented. Relevant information about the programme like admission requirements and procedures, course catalogue, examination and assessment procedures etc. are published by taking into account specific needs of mobile students.

Quality assurance is a good example of a comprehensive set of documented procedures, clearly describing most of the quality aspects of the JMPMB – parameters, indicators, evidence and even providing templates for quality control and monitoring.

Few notable exceptions, in terms of transparency, are related to staff selection criteria and visibility of the partners:

- There is no clear information or documented criteria, describing minimal qualification requirements for a teaching staff at least at key positions (professors etc). It is unclear, how replacement of current teaching staff would be performed. The virtual site visit did not shed more light on this aspect, even if the information was given that there are plenty talented researchers to choose from both in academia and among industry partners.
- There is also a concern that dominant partners – UCV and LRUniv – will attract the majority of students. While according to the agreement, partners are individually responsible for advertisement and recruitment, there is a risk of certain courses being less popular. That would lead to lower engagement, motivation and might negatively affect the intended learning outcomes. Ensure symmetrical involvement of all partners is a key of success that has to be taken into account.

9. QUALITY ASSURANCE [ESG 1.1 & PART 1]

- **x Compliant** Compliant with conditions Non-compliant

The EU-CONEXUS joint quality assurance guidelines²⁸ include appropriate implementation procedures that are based on two key aspects:

- each partner has a well-established QA process on site,
- jointly agreed QA procedures have been designed based on the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes.

The cooperating institutions apply joint internal quality assurance processes in accordance with part one of the European Standards and Guidelines.

Relevant documentation is in place and well thought through – procedures provide guidelines of behaviour during the entire course of programme and are supplemented with relevant forms.

Implementation of the rules and guidelines is facilitated by the presence of vertical reporting and accountability system capped by the EU-CONEXUS Governing board reporting into it. There are a joint Management board, External Advisory board and Student board. Joint financial, administrative, academic and research councils that cover most of the daily routine questions of programme development and sustainability.

Besides that, there is a European Education Area Working group, responsible for all internal evaluation procedures. Involvement of each partner university and jointness of the programme is ensured by representation of each participating entity in each of the governing bodies.

JMPMB QA procedural documents have been designed according to the ESG and are grouped into 13 procedures²⁹, IQP 1 through 13. They cover areas such as academic performance, admission, teaching staff, transparency etc. List of data to be collected and indicators to be provided are clearly stated. Provided set of procedures and documents should lead not only to quality assurance, but also to quality enhancement, as multiple quality indicators are monitored, quality evidence is collected, analysed and recommendations are recorded.

Presented documentation is clear and comprehensive. That being said, raising awareness of the existing documents and quality assurance procedure among all staff members might be a challenge and still need to be performed. It is critical that everybody, at every partner site, is following JMPMB QA procedures; recommendations, lessons learnt, good practices should be shared between universities in order to ensure true jointness of the programme.

²⁸ Included into the EU-CONEXUS JMPMB agreement.

²⁹ Annex 8 SER.

IV. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The European Blue Growth Strategy considers Blue or Marine Biotechnology as one of the five sectors with the greatest potential for growth and sustainable generation of highly qualified jobs.

The JMPMB is a transnationally integrated, multidisciplinary programme that provides high-quality academic education and professional competencies for professional intended to work in the area of Marine Biotechnology. The jointness of the programme offers solutions to fit into diverse systems, as proposed in an international environment. Management and international aspects, combined with the different skills and backgrounds of the partners will benefit to the students, considered as the most important stakeholders of the project.

STRENGTHS

- There is a strong institutional support and commitment with the framework of a relevant Erasmus+ action (European Universities).
- It is an excellent joint program, broad exhaustive, and multidisciplinary. The curriculum complements existing Master programmes in the EU, by focusing onto the biotech pipeline for marine products rather than to marine issues with biotech potential.
- It is a students centred programme with excellent students support (mentoring, student toolkit...) and also the possibility for them to choose their tracks after a global overview.
- The programme is very praxis-orientated, it provides experience in working in the field of biotechnology. It is closely related to sectoral stakeholders of the biotech pipeline, with strong networking. This close connection to a high number of stakeholders will optimise employability of students and their networking possibilities.
- True international programme, providing plethora of views, study styles, interactions and experiences, with the support of professional administrative staff that also seems to be a close-knit international team.
- The facilities are excellent: offering sufficient and adequate possibility for student to meet learning outcomes of the programme.

WEAKNESSES

- The role and involvement of the partner Universities is somehow biased towards a greater weight of the two leading institutions (UCV and LRUniv), which might cause that some track options may not be sustainable if a sufficient number of students does not chose them on a regular basis. Solutions, response actions or alternative tracks/plans are missing.
- Core courses depend on one or a few professors, and there appears not to be any visible control including other partners. Mechanisms for coordination amongst professors or to facilitate student-teacher interactions are not clearly stated.
- The lack of transparency around selection and admission of students with different backgrounds and measures taken for them to succeed might be a serious obstacle in the success of the program.
- Study tracks are built around current research focus areas of the participating Universities and not necessarily are based on market needs or a clear strategy.

- A Joint Diploma is scheduled and will be registered in recognition of a Joint programme in the Spanish Register of Degrees (at least) but mechanisms to be an official Diploma registered in the other countries are not so clear or not realistic enough.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Increase communication mechanisms between academic staff and programme board, but also in the teaching staff and develop tools to guarantee the sustainability of the program. A system or mechanisms to support professors may be necessary due to the differences in administration, grading systems among partners and expectations from the students. Online platform (like Smart campus for students) for professor support should be further developed.
- Develop clear list of necessary qualifications for the teaching staff to make sure these programmes are viable in the long run.
- Clarify students' admission (background, minor courses to fill the gap, additional courses...).
- Student support and sustainability plans should take into account that the success of the programme will most likely depend on attractiveness of non-EU students (e.g. within the EMJM KA2). Additional efforts are needed in this area, as well as regular individual follow-up initiated by the staff.
- Run a set of post-graduation surveys to assess overlap between graduates qualifications and market needs.

V. COMPOSITION OF THE EXPERTS PANEL AND AGENDA OF THE VISIT

COMPOSITION OF THE EXPERTS PANEL

- **M. Lionel Cladière**, Associate professor, Laboratory of Integrative Biology of Marine Models (UMR 8227), Station Biologique de Roscoff (France),
- **Ms. Carla Geisen**, as student member, Doctorate candidate in marine biogeochemistry, Laboratoire d'Océanographie et du Climat, LOCEAN-IPSL (UMR 7159), Sorbonne University (France),
- **M. Arunas Leipus**, Senior Product Manager, Next Generation Sequencing Library preparation for Illumina, Thermo Fisher Scientific (Lithuania),
- **Ms. Zrinka Ljubešić**, Associate Professor, University of Zagreb, Faculty of Science, Department of Biology (Croatia)
- **M. Ionan Marigomez**, Professor in Cell Biology, University of the Basque Country (UPV/EHU), Universidad del País Vasco/Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea University (Spain)

Hcéres was represented by **Solange Pisarz**, Head of project.

AGENDA OF THE VISIT

Hours	Thursday 25/03/2021
8:45 – 9:30	EU-CONEXUS Governance: Governing Board + Academic Council + Executive Director
9:30 – 10:15	Administrative staff I: services to students (<i>mobility, internships, buddy/alumni networks, admission,...</i>)
10:15 - 10:45	BREAK
10:45 – 11:30	Administrative staff II: learning environment and quality assurance (<i>Smart Campus and Quality Assurance</i>)
11.30 - 12.00	Internal debriefing of the panel

Hours	Monday 29/03/2021
9:00 – 9:45	JMPMB Programme Board/programme developers
10:00 – 10:45	Academic Staff
10:45 - 11:30	Internal debriefing of the panel
11:30 - 14:00	BREAK
14:15 – 15:00	Employers/stakeholders
15:00 – 15:45	Additional session of Q&A: JMPMB Programme Board/programme developers + Executive director
15:45- 16:30	Internal debriefing of the panel

VI. ACCREDITATION PROPOSAL

The panel concludes that the standards are fulfilled and recommend the accreditation of the programme for six years.

In the following table an overview of the assessments is shown:

Standard	Assessment
Eligibility	Compliant
Learning outcomes	Compliant
Study programme	Compliant
Admission and recognition	Compliant
Learning, teaching and assessment	Compliant
Student support	Compliant
Resources	Compliant
Transparency and documentation	Compliant
Quality assurance	Compliant

VII. COMMENTS OF THE INSTITUTION



Joint Master Programme in Marine Biotechnology (JMPMB) POLITICAL LETTER

We would like to thank you for the positive report received from the HCERES evaluation panel. This very first experience by the newly created Alliance of having its first joint Master programme evaluated following the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes is exemplary for the further development of the European University for Smart Urban Coastal Sustainability and the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

We appreciate that the proposed programme is considered by the evaluation panel as an example of jointness, multidisciplinary, innovative, praxis-orientated, student-centered, involvement of stakeholders and solid student support. Furthermore, the evaluation panel recognizes that important and pioneering steps have been performed towards a construction of the EHEA such as joint recruitment and admission, joint teaching, joint quality assurance and a joint degree, in which one Partner (UTCB), which is not legally recognised by national regulations to award the degree, also participates.

Moreover, the HCERES report includes very relevant recommendations regarding important aspects of the programme.

First, there is a concern regarding the sustainability of the programme after the funding of the first period of European Universities initiative. In this respect, we would like to highlight that a new call for European Universities is expected from the European Commission and that, at the same time, further funding schemes are being explored such as Erasmus Mundus. Yet most importantly, by submitting a European university project the partners have engaged in implementing a long-term structured cooperation to which they firmly committed in an official "Mission Statement" that is not limited to the 3-year project duration.

Secondly, we appreciate that the laboratories and equipment available for the programme have been considered as excellent. However, agreements with external institutions are foreseen in order to meet the specific recommendations from the panel to provide the students with the most advanced equipment.

Lastly, regarding the comments referring to the coordination of the courses, we would like to clarify that coordination mechanisms among the professors are considered; each of the programme courses will have a different coordinating professor. Besides, as reflected on the Annex 9 of the SER at least eight professors in each thematic area, from different institutions, will be involved in the teaching of the core courses. Therefore, enough participating teaching staff will be guaranteed.

Overall, the EU-CONEXUS Governing Board and Academic Council will guarantee that all needed resources are deployed to ensure that the recommendations identified by the evaluation panel to improve the management and the implementation of the



International evaluation and accreditation

ACCREDITATION DECISION

EUROPEAN APPROACH **Joint Master Marine Biotechnology**

European University: EUCONEXUS
La Rochelle University, France

JULY 2021

SCOPE OF THE ACCREDITATION GRANTED BY HCERES

HCERES has implemented the European Approach, as adopted by the Ministerial Conference in 2015.

The accreditation committee, meeting his accreditation decision, has wholly taken into account the final evaluation report of the experts panel. This accreditation decision is the result of a collegial and reasoned process.

The accreditation decision issued by HCERES shall not grant any rights whatsoever, whether in France or abroad. The decision to accredit a programme confers an accreditation label and does not infer recognition in France of the accredited qualifications. The HCERES accreditation process therefore has no impact on the qualifications recognition process in France.

ANALYSIS OF THE ACCREDITATION CRITERIA

1. ELIGIBILITY

Accreditation criterion

1.1 Status

The institutions that offer a joint programme should¹ be recognised as higher education institutions by the relevant authorities of their countries. Their respective national legal frameworks should enable them to participate in the joint programme and, if applicable, to award a joint degree. The institutions awarding the degree(s) should ensure that the degree(s) belong to the higher education degree systems of the countries in which they are based.

1.2 Joint design and delivery

The joint programme should be offered jointly, involving all cooperating institutions in the design and delivery of the programme.

1.3 Cooperation Agreement

The terms and conditions of the joint programme should be laid down in a cooperation agreement, including dedicated items

Criterion assessment

Compliant

2. LEARNING OUTCOMES

Accreditation criterion

2.1 Level [ESG 1.2]

The intended learning outcomes should align with the corresponding level in the Framework for Qualifications in the European Higher Education Area (FQ-EHEA), as well as the applicable national qualifications framework(s).

2.2 Disciplinary field

The intended learning outcomes should comprise knowledge, skills, and competencies in the respective disciplinary field(s).

2.3 Achievement [ESG 1.2]

The programme should be able to demonstrate that the intended learning outcomes are achieved.

2.4 Regulated Professions

If relevant for the specific joint programme, the minimum agreed training conditions specified in the European Union Directive 2005/36/EC, or relevant common trainings frameworks established under the Directive, should be taken into account.

Criterion assessment

Compliant

3. STUDY PROGRAMME [ESG 1.2]

Accreditation criterion

3.1 Curriculum

The structure and content of the curriculum should be fit to enable the students to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

3.2 Credits

The European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) should be applied properly and the distribution of credits should be clear.

3.3 Workload

A joint bachelor programme will typically amount to a total student workload of 180-240 ECTS-credits; a joint master programme will typically amount to 90-120 ECTS-credits and should not be less than 60 ECTS-credits at second cycle level (credit ranges according to the FQ-EHEA); for joint doctorates there is no credit range specified.

The workload and the average time to complete the programme should be monitored.

Criterion assessment

Compliant

4. ADMISSION AND RECOGNITION [ESG 1.4]

Accreditation criterion

4.1. Admission

The admission requirements and selection procedures should be appropriate in light of the programme's level and discipline.

4.2. Recognition

Recognition of qualifications and of periods of studies (including recognition of prior learning) should be applied in line with the Lisbon Recognition Convention and subsidiary documents.

Criterion assessment

Compliant

5. LEARNING, TEACHING AND ASSESSMENT [ESG 1.3]

Accreditation criterion

5.1 Learning and teaching

The programme should be designed to correspond with the intended learning outcomes, and the learning and teaching approaches applied should be adequate to achieve those. The diversity of students and their needs should be respected and attended to, especially in view of potential different cultural backgrounds of the students.

5.2 Assessment of students

The examination regulations and the assessment of the achieved learning outcomes should correspond with the intended learning outcomes. They should be applied consistently among partner institutions.

Criterion assessment

Compliant

6. STUDENT SUPPORT [ESG 1.6]

Accreditation criterion

The student support services should contribute to the achievement of the intended learning outcomes. They should take into account specific challenges of mobile students.

Criterion assessment

Compliant

7. RESOURCES [ESG 1.5 & 1.6]

Accreditation criterion

7.1 Staff

The staff should be sufficient and adequate (qualifications, professional and international experience) to implement the study programme.

7.2 Facilities

The facilities provided should be sufficient and adequate in view of the intended learning outcomes.

Criterion assessment
Compliant

8. TRANSPARENCY AND DOCUMENTATION [ESG 1.8]

Accreditation criterion

Relevant information about the programme like admission requirements and procedures, course catalogue, examination and assessment procedures etc. should be well documented and published by taking into account specific needs of mobile students.

Criterion assessment
Compliant

9. QUALITY ASSURANCE [ESG 1.1 & PART 1]

Accreditation criterion

The cooperating institutions should apply joint internal quality assurance processes in accordance with part one of the ESG.

Criterion assessment
Compliant



FINAL ASSESSMENT

Considering the accreditation criteria analysis detailed above, the accreditation committee issues the following decision:

“Six-year unreserved accreditation decision”

and draws attention on the following recommendations:

1. The accreditation commission kindly invites the institutions to pursue the quality assurance process further and to proceed to a self-evaluation of the Master after three years;
2. Increase communication mechanisms between academic staff and programme board, but also in the teaching staff and develop tools to guarantee the sustainability of the program. A system or mechanisms to support professors may be necessary due to the differences in administration, grading systems among partners and expectations from the students. Online platform (like Smart campus for students) for professor support should be further developed;
3. Develop clear list of necessary qualifications for the teaching staff to make sure these programmes are viable in the long run;
4. Clarify students' admission (background, minor courses to fill the gap, additional courses...);
5. Student support and sustainability plans should take into account that the success of the programme will most likely depend on attractiveness of non-EU students (e.g. within the EMJM KA2). Additional efforts are needed in this area, as well as regular individual follow-up initiated by the staff;
6. Run a set of post-graduation surveys to assess overlap between graduates qualifications and market needs.

SIGNATURE

For HCERES and on behalf of



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T. 33 (0)1 85 55 60 10



Thierry COULHON,

President

Date: Paris, July 1st, 2021



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