

## **To the Board of the Faculty of Education, University of Gothenburg**

### **Final panel statement for the International Master Programme in Educational Research**

2024-02-19

#### **Background**

The panel (see below) has been tasked with assessing the International Master Programme in Educational Research (henceforth IMER or the programme) at the Faculty of Education; University of Gothenburg. The assessment is based on the university's criteria in accordance with the policy for quality assurance and continuous quality improvement.

On the 5th of October 2023, a preparatory meeting was held, during which the panel was introduced and the aim, background information, IMER and the assessment were discussed with the faculty members and representatives of the programme. Before the preparatory meeting, the faculty and the department submitted documents to the panel (appendix 1) and created access to the university's digital platforms for the panel members. The site visit was carried out on the 15th and the 16th of November 2023 (for the site programme, see appendix 2). Based on the documentation received, the site visit and the interviews, the panel has jointly prepared the statement via emails and Zoom meetings. The main purpose of the statement is to give recommendations regarding the improvement of the quality of the programme.

The panel had two preparatory Zoom meetings before the site visit. The panel prepared the interview questions for the students and the staff and also discussed the material received. After the site visit the panel had email contacts and two Zoom meetings to discuss the evaluation and to prepare the statement.

The panel consisted of:

Marianne Teräs, Professor of Education, Stockholm University, Sweden (chair)

Stefan Olsson, Bachelor of Political Science, University of Gothenburg (student representative), Sweden

Maria Gravani, Professor, Open University of Cyprus, Cyprus

John Eriksson, Senior Lecturer, Institutionen för filosofi, lingvistik och vetenskapsteori, University of Gothenburg, Sweden

IMER is a full-time campus-based MA programme. The panel agrees that IMER is a strong and well-functioning advanced level programme. It is also a sustainable programme that has been running for over 10 years. Furthermore, IMER has made an impact on the education research field. This is based on the panel's overview from talking to the alumni, the students, teachers and the leadership team of the programme.

Our evaluation of IMER is based on the criteria provided by the University of Gothenburg. The evaluation started by carefully reviewing the material that the panel received. Interview questions were constructed based on the material and the criteria.

The strengths of IMER are that students learn and develop strong research and academic competencies in relation to both qualitative and quantitative methods; a third of the programme's graduates have entered various PhD programmes in Sweden and abroad. The content of the programme is appreciated by the students. The atmosphere and the climate of the programme are encouraging, collaborative, collegial and supportive for both students and staff in the programme. The international component, in terms of the diversity of students and teachers, is strong and adds value to the programme. The students, the teachers, the administrators and the leadership team form a good community and there is a supportive atmosphere for study in higher education.

Even though the international component is strong, it also causes some challenges. For example, how the programme is framed now and in the future needs to be clarified as regards internalisation, especially how the programme's relation to non-Western orientation is to be understood. The mentoring project was valued as important by both the students and the panel. Possibilities should be considered to make it a permanent part of the programme. In relation to marketing of the programme, the target group could be clarified, especially for those students who are not going to pursue an academic career. In other words, highlighting different career development pathways could be strengthened. This could be done by strengthening connections to the society and working life. At the moment, there are no elective or free choice courses in the programme. This aspect could be reconsidered to furnish the students with wider career pathways. Furthermore, there could be more exploration of possibilities to enhance connections with Swedish students within the programme.

### **1. Achieved study results match intended learning outcomes and the qualitative targets of the Higher Education Ordinance**

The overarching aim of IMER is to prepare students for conducting research in education. Our judgement is that the achieved study results match the intended learning outcomes well.

**Strengths:** IMER has strong links between research and education. The international aspect of the programme is also strong. Students are encouraged to apply ideas to different cultural settings, which prompts an enhanced understanding of other cultural contexts – both in general and in relation to research. Sustainable development is included in many of the courses of the programme. Course evaluations are a natural part of the programme. Given the overarching aim of IMER, one of the main strengths of the programme is how students who successfully finish the programme are getting research positions (roughly 1/3 get accepted for a PhD programme) in Sweden and abroad.

**Weaknesses:** Although the courses and literature content match the learning/qualitative targets in general, the literature is also in some cases not up to date. One may also worry about the international aspect of the programme – in different ways. It does not seem to be a shared understanding of the sense in which the programme is international. For example, some students expect non-Western perspectives on research (see also criteria 9).

Recommendation: The panel recommends that the literature is reviewed in terms of updates in order to make it more recent. In the course of the interviews, programme coordinators mentioned that the literature is updated in the platform used for the delivery of the programme (Canvas). Following this, it could be considered to have the course syllabi updated in relation to the literature. The panel also recommends consideration of how to frame the international aspect of the programme in the future (for more on this, see also criterion 9).

## **2. Teaching is focused on student-centred learning**

Student-centred learning aims to put the student's interests first, in particular by acknowledging the students' interests, abilities and different learning styles. In general, teaching within IMER seems to achieve this goal well.

Strengths: Devoted teachers that use different teaching methods that cater to different interests, abilities and learning styles. Teachers and other staff are very supportive, easy to approach and helpful.

Weaknesses: A possible weakness in relation to student-centred learning is that students' interests are not always met. Some students do not feel that they have the opportunity to investigate the kind of issues that they are interested in, i.e., there is not enough freedom of choice within the programme given that a fixed set of courses are offered. Another possible weakness has to do with the programme's collaboration with ASK (Enheten för akademiskt skrivande). Some students reported that the feedback given by teachers/examiners and ASK on their assignments was inconsistent. It is unfortunate if the feedback on an assignment is inconsistent since it risks causing confusion about what is expected.

Recommendation: The panel recommends that IMER considers how to encourage the students to be more proactive in their studies. There are at least two ways to think about this. First, IMER might want to have more elective courses. We understand that this used to be the case, but was problematic for different reasons. Second, there might be freedom within the existing courses to pursue different ideas and interests. Again, we understand (in particular based on our interviews with the teachers) that this is the case at present. However, this does not seem to be how the students understand it (at least not in the first year). If IMER wants to keep things as they are rather than introducing more elective courses, we suggest that the freedom of choice within the existing courses is made clearer.

In the context of IMER, ASK seems to us to be a valuable resource. We therefore encourage IMER to continue working closely with ASK, but also that the forms for collaboration are examined.

### **3. The content and form of teaching rests on scientific and proven experience**

This criterion reflects on the relationship between teaching and scientific and proven experience in the programme. The criterion is well taken into account in the programme.

**Strengths:** In IMER, teaching is closely tied to research, and the courses offered present clear connections to scientific and proven experience. The literature indicated for the courses is related to educational research, but in some courses it needs updating. According to the participants' responses during the interviews, a scientific approach to teaching and learning is used in the courses placing students in the centre and supporting them to become active researchers throughout the lessons. Students are trained to read, understand, conduct and participate in research as well as write academic essays as shown on their course evaluations, which are done in different ways. Diversity in course evaluations is a strength of the programme as students are provided with the opportunity, while working on their assignments, to build upon their acquired scientific knowledge, their research experience, and other competences they have developed in the programme, such as: team working, collegiality, etc. It is worth pointing out that the content of the programme offers a good basis for the students to start doctoral studies.

**Weaknesses:** The literature, as presented in the courses' syllabi, needs serious updating. During the interviews, educators mentioned that the literature is updated in the platform they are using, but not in the syllabi. The course title needs to reflect the content of the course. In particular, the course PDA085 named: "Introduction to International Masters in Educational Research" does not seem to reflect its content.

**Recommendations:** The panel recommends that consideration should be given to updating the course literature in the syllabi and also to give the students freedom to select some literature of their choice (see also criterion 2). In addition, revising the title of module PDA085 should be considered so that the title reflects the module's content. It would be beneficial to the programme to strengthen and enhance all practical aspects of the courses.

### **4. Teachers have up-to-date and adequate competence as regards their subjects and teaching and learning in higher education, and the numbers of teachers are in proportion to the scope and content of study courses and programmes**

The aim of this criterion is to ensure the quality of the teaching staff in the programme. IMER fulfils this criterion well.

**Strengths:** IMER has been delivered since its initiation by a committed and highly devoted group of academics who have worked collaboratively, collegially and harmoniously for many years. They have great experience and up-to-date knowledge in the subject they teach, and these factors have greatly contributed to the success of the programme. Educators have also participated in continuing professional development activities and have attended courses in higher education pedagogy offered by the University of Gothenburg. They also actively seek further education to broaden their

competencies. The teaching team is diverse and contributes to the international aspects of the programme.

**Weaknesses:** Teachers are struggling with many other tasks in the university, as all academics usually do. This might be considered as a weakness of the programme. The workload of teachers does not seem to match the number of teaching hours given to them, which is a broader problem also in other programmes.

**Recommendations:** The workload of the teaching staff needs to be considered and monitored in order to ensure a good work environment for the teachers.

## **5. Study courses and programmes are relevant to the needs of the students and society**

The aim of this criterion is to reflect on the needs of the students and also the needs of the wider society. This criterion could be strengthened in the programme.

**Strengths:** IMER gives a good and valuable foundation for doctoral studies worldwide. Sustainable development is integrated well and thoroughly into the various courses in the programme. The programme attracts hundreds of students from different countries yearly for its ca 25 study places. The students are not only given strong academic skills, but are also trained in generic skills such as critical thinking, collaboration and communication. International networks that are created during the programme are much appreciated by the students and the alumni. The programme's contribution to the wider society is realised according to the selected research problems and areas. The courses and examinations cover intended learning outcomes. There are some working life-related elements in the programme.

**Weaknesses:** The application process can be demanding for the staff due to the heavy application pressure. The link between working life and the programme is fragile. If a student wants to access working life outside academia, the programme has limited connections to other types of working environments and potential employers. Outside stakeholders or alumni are not directly involved in the monitoring of the programme. The interviewees pointed out that the literature of the programme is mostly Western.

**Recommendations:** The link between the programme, the wider society and working life could be strengthened. This could be realised through stakeholders and alumni who could be involved in the programme structure. Internships, workshops and seminars with different parties could be other options to strengthen this. Non-Western literature could be added to course literature when appropriate.

## **6. Students have influence in planning, implementing and monitoring study courses and programmes.**

The aim of this criterion is to evaluate students' influence on different structures of the programme. The objectives of this criterion have been well achieved.

**Strengths:** The programme has created good practices in relation to students' influence such as a programme council having student representatives as well as regular monitoring of the courses in the programme. The students feel like their voices are heard when they address an issue and are not afraid to speak their mind. Furthermore, the strong sense of community is a strength which opens channels for communication between students, teachers and others, both formally and informally.

We were informed that there is a vacancy for a representative from the department of education, communication and learning in the program council as well as for an external member.

**Weaknesses:** The students proposed several possible changes that they would like to see implemented, such as the possibility of internships and elective courses. While it is not a weakness that the students have differing opinions, directly asking them about what changes they would like to see and considering implementing some of them could be of interest.

**Recommendations:** Explore possibilities for filling the vacancies within the program council.

## **7. The study and learning environment is accessible and purpose-oriented for all students**

The aim of this criterion was to examine the learning environment from different perspectives. IMER fulfils this goal well.

**Strengths:** IMER, as part of the University of Gothenburg, has good physical premises and infrastructure that supports students' studying and learning, and the learning environment is accessible for all students. The digital learning environment (the Canvas room) allows easy access to materials needed in studies such as course descriptions, syllabuses and literature. In addition, students have access to services provided by the university. Study administration personnel, study counsellors and tutors are easily approachable and ready to help students. The mentorship project was much appreciated by the students.

**Weaknesses:** According to the latest programme report, the progression rate from the first year to the second was 60% (2021) and the completion rate was 54% (2020). The mentorship activity was project-based.

**Recommendations:** The presence of some form of "early warning system" or procedure whereby students who are lagging behind are noticed could be considered. The mentorship activity could become a permanent part of the programme.

## **8. The study courses and programmes are continuously monitored and developed**

**Strengths:** The programme has regular, systematic and stable practices for monitoring the quality of the courses and the programme, such as evaluations (both discussions with students and anonymous surveys), course reports and programme reports. The material of evaluation is used for the development of the programme. The programme council forms a forum for collegial discussion about the results of the evaluations and changes needed in the courses/programme. Two student members are part of the programme council.

**Weaknesses:** Course reports are available for students, but it is not clear how the results of course evaluations are fed back to students.

**Recommendations:** How course evaluations are fed back to students and how possible changes according to evaluations are visible to students could be strengthened.

## **9. Other views from the panel**

### *The international aspect of the programme*

The international aspect of the programme is one of its most important strengths. However, at the same time, this aspect can also be seen as a weakness. A recurring theme in our discussions with the staff and the students concerned the international aspect of the programme, but there was no shared understanding of what the international aspect is. The panel recommends that this issue is considered. How does IMER want the international aspect to be framed? (1) Is the international aspect ensured as a result of the students and teachers? (2) Is the international aspect ensured as a result of the course content? (3) Is the international aspect a result of a combination of (1) and (2)? (4) Something else?

A further worry about the international aspect concerns the recruitment of students. Since the programme started there has been a shift in where students come from – from Sweden to EU countries to non-EU countries. One of the strengths of the programme is that it has students from all over the world, but in order to ensure this continues, the programme needs to ensure that students are recruited from different parts of the world. At present, the majority of students are from non-EU countries. Of course, whether this is a weakness depends on how the international aspect is understood. We nevertheless encourage the programme council to work on strategies to achieve a more balanced recruitment of students.

### *Connections to the society and to Swedish students*

The panel recommends that the connection to society could be made both more evident and stronger. One suggestion that might help with this is to have stakeholders or other external parties as part of the programme council. This would be a way of ensuring input from stakeholders that could be useful for developing a clearer and stronger connection to

society. Many students are also interested in internships. Perhaps it is worth considering whether this could be facilitated. This would also be a way of strengthening the connection to society. In addition, the international students of the programme wished for more connections to Swedish students at the university. This might be a problem from the language point of view; however, some joint activities could be arranged.

### *Wellbeing of the students*

**Strengths:** Internal stress factors within the programme such as the workload vary from course to course and from individual to individual, but the students are informed about which services they can turn to and they have the necessary support structures to handle stress and other issues which may arise and affect their learning process. Furthermore, stress is personal, and these individuals seem to be provided with the support from the university that they need. The programme has a strong sense of community in which there is a high level of support from all parties involved.

**Weaknesses:** When asked about stress in relation to their studies, the students pointed to vague instructions as something that generated stress and confusion among them. Some of the informants brought up that the stress level of students is high, especially during the first year of studies. While stress is common at all levels within academia, the issue should be addressed. External stress factors that could impact the students' learning capability, such as finding housing in Gothenburg and getting a visa were addressed during the interviews. However, in some cases, housing is an issue most new students, both international and Swedish, face in Gothenburg and is something that the University of Gothenburg as a whole should address. While these issues are not directly tied to the programme, students cannot separate their private lives from their lives as students entirely and this impacts their learning capabilities and how they perform academically. External factors such as this seem to be the main source of stress for the students.

**Recommendations:** A workshop with students on how to cope with stress could be organised, and meetings with older students and alumni could be organised to support peer learning. The first course given within the programme is supposed to give the student a sense of the whole programme. The mentorship scheme is encouraged.

Documents for the panel (Appendix 1)

Site visit programme on 15<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> of November 2023 (Appendix 2)



## Appendix 1. Documents for the panel

Documentation that is available on programme functioning follows guidance set out in Faculty guiding documents. Documentation in relation to the following three areas is therefore available to the evaluation team: (i) policy, rules and procedures; (ii) course and programme evaluations and reports; (iii) student work, feedback and grading, and (iv) other information. (i) Policy, rules and procedures Under this heading, documents are available at both University and Department level.

### (i) University policy, rules and procedures

Policy (e.g.) • Policy for quality assurance and continuous quality improvement of education at the University of Gothenburg • Policy for the development of teaching and learning in Higher Education • Language policy Rules (e.g.) • Rules and regulations for first- and second-cycle examinations at the University of Gothenburg • Rules for studies at first- and second-cycle studies • Rules for student influence Procedures (e.g.) • Procedure for handling complaints from students • Administrative procedure for reports relating to suspicions of disciplinary matters

Departmental policy, rules and procedures (e.g.)

Vision 2023–2025 IPS (Dr.nr GU 2022/3696) • Riktlinjer för programråd • Handlingsplan för examensarbeten • Handlingsplan för kursvärdering • Rutiner vid misstanke om plagiat/fust • Likabehandlingsplan IPS 2020–2023

### (ii) Course and programme evaluations and reports

Under this heading, documents are made available at programme level. They are archived in the IMER programme's pages in Canvas, which is also available to IMER students. The evaluation team will be given access to the programme pages and its document archive, located at the following URL: <https://canvas.gu.se/courses/33784> Programme documentation is located in Canvas under >Files (in the left menu), including: • Course reports • IMER programme year reports (no year report was required for 2021 following a Faculty change in procedure) • IMER programme council meeting notes • IMER programme initiatives (> Files > Other reports): o IMER and sustainability goals (2019–2023) o IMER and academic mentoring (2021–2023)

### (iii) Student work, feedback and grading

A selection of student work and assignment feedback and grading is available. We propose to make available three final course assignments for each of four IMER courses, for the last completed academic year (2022). The four course samples contain one example of work that is graded outstanding (VG), one graded pass (G) and one graded either border-level or not passed (U). Of those texts that were not passed, we also include a later resubmission. The samples are anonymised. Further samples of student work is of course available on request. The four courses concerned are: o PDA085: Introduction to IMER o PDA084: Qualitative approaches to educational research o PDA182: Academic writing and research design o PDA183: Academic reading in education • Completed IMER theses are available via the IMER programme Canvas pages: they are all listed under >Modules >Completed IMER thesis. Examiner feedback and grading is available on request.

(iv) Other information

This folder contains information on staffing, on student recruitment, and students' independent critical commentary based on the evaluation documents.

Evaluation of International Master's in Educational Research (IMER)

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**November 15:**

Time	Purpose	Participants	Location	Zoom link
12.00	lunch	Marianne Teräs Maria Gravani John Eriksson  Maria Svensson Karin Fogelberg Karin Wass Ilse Hakvoort Ernst Thoutenhoofd Adrianna Nizinska Frida Sjöström Anna Nyberg	A3 319	
13.00-13.45	Internal meeting	Panel of assessors	A3 319	<a href="https://gu-se.zoom.us/j/61688307245?pwd=cm8reDIGY3FzN21zc0E4RTFYemZ5dz09">https://gu-se.zoom.us/j/61688307245?pwd=cm8reDIGY3FzN21zc0E4RTFYemZ5dz09</a>
14.00-15.00	Meeting students	Panel of assessors,  Pouya Tavakoli, Mutiu Adekunle, Theoni Spiliopoulou (yr1); Anna Moret, Shani Anuradha Xiaona Lu (yr2)	A3 319	Same as above
	Coffee break	Panel of assessors,	A3 319	
15.15-16.15	Meeting teachers	Panel of assessors,  Dimitrios Papadopoulos,	A3 319	Same as above

		Dawn Sanders, Victoria Rolfe, Kajsa Yang Hansen, Sally Windsor		
16.30-17.30	Meeting programme leadership/coordination	Panel of assessors  Karin Wass Ilse Hakvoort Ernst Thoutenhoofd Adrianna Nizinska Giulia Messina Dahlberg Frida Sjöström Tina Mathé	A3 319	Same as above
18.00	Dinner pre-booked	Panel of assessors		Same as above

**November 16:**

Time	Purpose	Participants	Location	Zoom link
8.15-9.00	Meeting Alumni and Doctorial students	Panel of assessors  Saba Monirzadeh, Amoni Kitooki, Panagiotis Patsis, Elpis Grammatikopoulou	A3 319	Same as above
	Coffee break	Panel of assessors	A3 319	
9.15-10.00	Meeting Undergraduate, Graduate and Post-Graduate Education leadership, Department of Education and Special Education.	Panel of assessors  Giulia Messina Dahlberg Ernst Thoutenhoofd Stefan Johansson Kajsa Yang Hansen	A3 319	Same as above
10.15-12.00	Observation PDA084	Classroom observation	A1 336	Same as above
	Lunch	Panel of assessors	A3 319	
13.00-14.45	Prepare feedback	Panel of assessors	A3 319	Same as above
	Coffee break	Panel of assessors  Karin Fogelberg Karin Wass	A3 319	

		Ilse Hakvoort Ernst Thoutenhoofd Adrianna Nizinska Frida Sjöström Anna Nyberg		
15.00-16.00	Feedback to Faculty, Department and Programme leadership	Panel of assessors  Karin Fogelberg Karin Wass Ilse Hakvoort Ernst Thoutenhoofd Adrianna Nizinska Frida Sjöström Anna Nyberg	A3 319	Same as above