

REPORT

EVALUATION AND DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Master in Communication, 120 credits, University of
Gothenburg

Final report by the External Assessment Group, 1st of June
2020

Background

The Swedish national system for assuring quality in higher education means that the institutions themselves are responsible for assuring and developing the quality of their education. In accordance with these requirements, the University of Gothenburg has produced a quality framework, including a quality policy describing the starting points and processes for quality assurance and quality development of education.

At the University of Gothenburg, the Faculty Boards are responsible for ensuring that the policy is implemented given the specific requirements stipulated by their own Faculty (Policy for quality assurance and continuous quality improvement of education at the University of Gothenburg of 27th of June 2016, revised 24th of August 2017. In accordance with the above, the IT Faculty decided that the Programme Master in Communication (MiC), 120 credits, should be evaluated using an External Assessment Group, which started its work in November 2019.

The purpose of the quality assessment is to make recommendations for development work to ensure that the Faculty's education meets the standards and reaches the goals stated of the quality framework and policy.

The policy also stipulates that the External Assessment Group shall consist of a minimum of two people that are both scientific and pedagogical experts, and both active at a university other than the University of Gothenburg; one scientific and pedagogical expert active at a faculty other than the IT Faculty; and at least one student with experience from an education similar to the evaluated education.

Given these stipulations and after consultation with the Department of Applied Information Technology and the Assessment Group, the IT Faculty appointed the following external experts as members of the External Assessment Group:

- Professor Christa Thomsen, Department of Management, Aarhus University (chair)
- Professor Jonas Stier, School of Health, Care and Social Welfare, Mälardalen University
- Assistant professor Tuomo Hiippala, Department of Languages, University of Helsinki (decided to withdraw from the group for personal reasons)
- Associate professor Nicklas Håkansson, Department of Journalism, Media and Communication, University of Gothenburg

- Student representative Alina Bodnar, Lund University.

Strengths and weaknesses of the Programme and the assessment group's reflections and recommendations

Introduction

The overall impression of the assessment group is that the MiC at the University of Gothenburg aims at achieving a high quality of teaching. The site visit and the examination of documents have largely confirmed the picture of a Programme with dedicated teachers and good student performance. By considering the individual criteria, the assessment group has been able to identify both strengths and weaknesses. In some cases, however, the assessment group has also found the evidence inadequate to draw more definitive conclusions. Thus, the comments below aim at both clarifying the assessment group's impression of the strengths and weaknesses of the Programme and at stipulating necessary and/or urgent change in a way that hopefully can stimulate the internal development. The assessment group has decided to present its reflections and recommendations in direct connection with the specified criteria. In the final summing-up, the presentation highlights a number of concrete measures that, according to the assessment group, could particularly stimulate quality development work.

In the assessment, the External Assessment Group focuses on the criteria stated in 1.1.03 Policy for Quality Assurance and continuous Quality Improvement of Education at the University of Gothenburg, p. 3):

1. Achieved study results matching intended learning outcomes and the qualitative targets of the Higher Education Ordinance.
2. Teaching being focused on student acquisition of knowledge/skills.
3. The content and form of teaching resting on good scientific and/or artistic bases and proven experience.

4. Teachers having up-to-date and adequate competence as regards their subjects, higher education pedagogics and subject didactics, and that said teacher being in proportion to the scope and content of study courses and programmes.
5. Study courses and programmes being relevant to the needs of the students/doctoral students and society.
6. Students/doctoral students having influence in planning, implementing and monitoring study courses and programmes.
7. There being a study and learning environment that is accessible and purpose-oriented for all students/doctoral students.
8. There being continuous monitoring and development of study courses and programmes.

The External Assessment Group decided on how the work should be done and what additional information on the education they needed access to. Based on this, the evaluation of the MiC at University of Gothenburg is based on the following material together with a site visit 11th of March 2020 at the University of Gothenburg:

1. Courses within MiC
2. Cooperation between Academia and Practice: Guest lectures in the academic year 2018/2019
3. Framework documents:
 - a. steering documents on university-level
 - i. The Vice-Chancellor's Delegation of Authority Policy
 - ii. Rules of Procedure
 - iii. Qualifications Ordinance for the University of Gothenburg

- iv. Policy for Study and Career Guidance at the University of Gothenburg
 - v. Procedure for complaints from students about deviations from the University of Gothenburg's rules and regulations for first-, second- and third-cycle studies and examinations
 - vi. Rules and regulations for first- and second-cycle studies at the University of Gothenburg
 - vii. Procedure for reports relating to suspicions of disciplinary offences
 - viii. Rules for first- and second-cycle programme syllabi
 - ix. Policy for the prevention of plagiarism
 - x. Action plan for the prevention of plagiarism
 - xi. Rules and regulations for first- and second-cycle examinations at the University of Gothenburg
 - xii. Rules for first- and second-cycle course syllabi
 - xiii. Policy for pedagogical development
 - xiv. Policy for quality assurance and continuous quality improvement of education at the University of Gothenburg
- b. steering documents on department-level
- i. Rules of Procedure and Delegation of Authority Policy
 - ii. Routines for Course Evaluations
 - iii. Template for Course Reports for First and Second Cycle courses at the Department of Applied IT
4. Alumni of MiC
5. The Programme MiC (programme structure and programme syllabus)

6. Previous programme evaluation BLUE 11 (self-evaluation and audit report from 2011)
7. Statistical data (applications and admission, registration and student completion rate)
8. Teachers within MiC
9. Input Documents Evaluation MiC 2019-2020 (e.g. specification of four areas of development; author: Alice Srugies, Programme Coordinator, MiC)
10. Cover letter Programme Evaluation MiC_20190826.docx
11. Theses – 3 theses with a pass and 3 theses with a pass with distinction, incl. guidelines for students who are preparing their theses as well as the criteria for assessing master theses (supplementary, on demand from assessment committee)

Link to the documents: <https://gubox.box.com/s/9a9jtyrhy9gwy3wjpro19llow9c36300>

The above documents and site visit form the basis of this report, the assessment and suggestions of ways of development to meet the set requirements. Below, the reflections of the assessment group related to each of the above criteria stated in the Policy for Quality Assurance and continuous Quality Improvement of Education at the University of Gothenburg are presented.

The assessment group submitted a preliminary report regarding the evaluation of the MiC the 4th of May 2020. It received a response to the report from the Department of Applied IT the 25th of May (appendix no 1). The members of the assessment group have discussed the response from the Department of Applied IT and addressed its most central comments in this final report.

Criterion 1: Achieved study results matching intended learning outcomes and the qualitative targets of the Higher Education Ordinance.

Criterion 1 is assessed by a) aggregated student completion rate figures from the document “Statistical data” provided by the Programme leadership, b) a qualitative assessment of a selection of master’s theses, and c) interview accounts from students and staff.

The first part of the assessment regarding achieved study results is directed towards the degree to which the students enrolled in the Programme carry out and complete their studies. The assessment group has had access to data on student completion rates for the Programme as a whole, over the time period from 2015 to 2019. The completion rate measured as number of students registered for the final term (4) divided by those registered for term 1 is around 70 percent, and those applying for their degree after finishing their studies are around 55-60 percent. Looking instead at average completion of individual courses the figures are higher (ca 90 percent). They also exceed comparable figures from the previous evaluation (BLUE11) in 2011 where 75 percent completed the courses. Most recently a drop to ca 72 percent has been registered for 2019, something which the MiC leadership connects to increasing difficulties for some students regarding their preparedness (e.g. inadequate language skills) or their social situation (e.g. difficulties finding affordable housing).

The assessment group makes no judgment about completion rates but keeps in mind that dropouts are probably inevitable in a programme recruiting internationally like the MiC. Nevertheless, the assessment group is convinced that it is worthwhile keeping track of dropouts to gain in-depth knowledge about patterns of reasons behind students not finishing their studies.

Given the focus on learning outcomes and the qualitative targets of the Higher Education Ordinance, the assessment committee has also addressed the question of progression. Progression can be assessed in the light of how courses taken together build knowledge and skills stepwise toward the requirements for the master’s degree. The assessment group sees a high level of consistency with learning outcomes and programme goals. At the same time – which is often an inherent dilemma in many multi- or interdisciplinary master’s programmes – the course literature exhibits less of a scientific progression throughout the Programme, and more of thematic width (which resembles the old “breddmagistrar”). The student interviews also indicated that the Programme comprises many ‘competing’ courses, possibly at the expense of progression and deepened knowledge.

An important aspect of evaluating fulfilment of Programme as well as course objectives lies in how *courses are assessed*. An overview of course syllabi shows a variety of examination forms which generally are well-designed to capture different parts of the requirements for the degree (in terms of knowledge/understanding, skills/competence, and judgement/approach).

The interviews with students indicate that examinations are largely perceived as fair and measuring relevant aspects of learning. Group assignments are however discussed as problematic, especially in relation to fairness and the ability to assess individuals. The Higher Education Ordinance (1993:100) does not exclude group work being graded, but rather requires that grading of examinations are done so that individual accomplishments can be discerned. According to the course syllabi, 101 out of the 120 credits of the Programme are assessed by individual examinations, and only one course builds predominantly on group work. Even though a great majority of examinations are done individually, it is advisable to further secure fair conditions for individuals to have their accomplishments assessed in those courses where group examinations are applied.

A qualitative review of six master's theses from last academic year (2019) – of which three have been given a pass grade and the other three a pass with distinction – gives the overall impression that they fulfil the requirements stipulated by Higher Education Ordinance.

Noted should be, however, that in several cases it remains unclear whether there is a separation of supervisor and examiner – which should be the case. There is also unclarity as to the formal competence of advisors and examiners.

Regarding the response from the Department of Applied IT (appendix no 1), the assessment group wants to put forward its central argument, i.e. that it is (legally) important to separate supervisor and examiner. The central role of the examiner is to take the final decision regarding the grade.

The selection of quality of literature (e.g. including scientific journal articles) is consistent with the master's level. The same goes for the research ambitions, design (including data collection and data analysis) and disposition.

Ethical considerations are under-developed – (The Higher Education Ordinance stipulates as a learning objective for the student to “*demonstrate the ability to make assessments in the main field of study informed by relevant disciplinary, social and ethical issues and also to demonstrate awareness of ethical aspects of research and development work*”) and reduced to rudimentary discussions without references to key documents, statutes or sites (such as Codex). Also, the trade-offs and dilemmas of doing industry-related research is largely lacking.

In the theses, the potential challenges of interdisciplinarity and integrative (theory/practice) education and research is seen. The quality of scientific analysis is, in some cases, traded for the interest for external stakeholders and practical applications.

Summing up, the assessment group finds that the Programme can be improved in terms of: (a) measurement of dropouts, (b) scientific progression and deepened knowledge, (c) securing fair conditions for individuals to have their accomplishments assessed in those courses where group examinations are applied, (d) securing formal competences of thesis supervisors and examiners, (e) development of ethical considerations, (f) balancing the quality of scientific analysis with the interests of external stakeholders and practical applications (theses).

Criterion no 2: Teaching being focused on student acquisition of knowledge/skills.

In order to assess the degree of satisfaction for this criterion, documents in the section “Courses within MiC” (Appendix 3) have been analyzed and interviews with teachers, students and alumni have been conducted.

In terms of knowledge/skills, the student shall demonstrate abilities to “critically and systematically integrate knowledge and analyze, assess and deal with complex phenomena, issues and situations even with limited information” (syllabus, p. 3). Moreover, the student shall demonstrate the ability to provide solutions to complex problems in internal and external organizational communication, identify and formulate research problems in the area of intercultural communication, and creatively investigate the opportunities for, and challenges to, communication provided by the increased role of digitalization in society. Finally, the student shall demonstrate advanced methodological knowledge in communication research (syllabus, p.3-4).

The assessment group finds that the MiC Programme structure 2018-2020 reflects the aims of the Programme formulated at a general level with its focus on more generally oriented courses within the main field of study (communication), i.e. courses in theories of communication, interpersonal communication, and communication among professionals. Also, the methodological aims of the Programme are reflected in the courses research methods in communication (which seems to be too basic, see comments under criterion no 1), multimodal communication, and rhetoric and argumentation in the digital age. With regard to the three areas of specialization, the assessment group finds that the Programme structure reflects the aims of the Programme with the courses in intercultural communication, organizational communication, and strategic communication and leadership. It can also be stated that the individual courses are designed in a way that allows students to acquire knowledge and skills. They include both lectures and practical tasks, and workshops offer exercises for students to “learn by doing” as well as to reflect upon the concepts learned. There are several guest lecturers from academia and the field of communication to ensure diversity and contribute to theoretical as well as practical learning outcomes. Moreover, some of the courses allow for group work in self-selected groups, which ensures that students can hone their skills for cooperation and teamwork in addition to obtaining specialized knowledge.

According to the students who took part in the interviews during the site visit, the courses build upon one another, thereby assuring continuous development of knowledge. Interviews with the staff showed that students are offered elective courses in order to deepen their knowledge in the chosen area. In addition, students are encouraged to take part in theoretical discussions and create links between theories and empirical material. According to the alumna we had a conversation with during the site visit, the knowledge acquired during the master’s Programme has proved useful at her workplace.

However, the assessment group also has some concerns. First, the progression is not clear in the courses “Intercultural communication 1” and “Intercultural communication 2”. Second, the focus of the two courses, communication technology and rhetoric and argumentation in the digital age is not on digital communication as a distinct field or a field in its own right, which is surprising in light of the emphasis put on this field in the syllabus. The third concern is related to the teaching group. The backgrounds of the seven teachers’ affiliated to the MiC Programme show the academic coloring of the Programme: general linguistics, language, global studies, media and communication studies. The CV’s of the teachers show that they are increasingly focusing on research within the three areas

of specialization of the MiC. However, in the light of the above-mentioned focus of the Programme on organizational and strategic communication¹, the CV's of the teachers do not reflect this focus in terms of research publications.

Moreover, the percentage of employment of the teachers dedicated to research/training differs from 0% (one among the teachers with 60% of employment), 10% (three among the teachers), 20% (one among the teachers), 25% (one among the teachers) to 40% (one among the teachers). Three among the teachers are permanently employed, whereas four among them are employed on a fixed-term basis. Based on this, the assessors conclude that the teaching is only to a limited extent research-based, if we define this concept as teaching based on the teachers' own research. This is problematic in the light of teaching in general and thesis-supervision in particular (footnote no 1). Finally, the assessment group finds that more emphasis could be made on the digitalized context as well as practical cases.

The site visit 11th of March 2020 confirmed the above picture of a Programme with some structural and cultural or priority-related challenges. First, the assessment group was given an update as a supplement to a cover letter emailed to the assessors from the Programme coordinator, Alice Srugies, one week prior to the site visit (dated 4th of March). The panel was informed that a high staff turnover has affected the three aspects the Programme considered as key for advancing the Programme in terms of: 1) developing a clear Programme identity and profile, 2) ensuring coherence and continuity in the Programme, and 3) developing the Programme MiC in a way and at a pace that is sustainable for all colleagues involved. Second, to the question raised to the students whether they feel that their expectations are met, one of the students mentioned that there is a strong focus on digital in the brochure. Thus, he had expected more focus on digital aspects of communication. The students generally felt that digital application is missing in the teaching which is more theoretical than expected. They highly praised the opportunity to present their work to a real employer and stated that they would appreciate it if there could be more similar activities. Several

¹ This focus is also reflected in theses with titles such as: "International Graduates Transitioning into the Domestic Labor Force. Retracing Experiences of Work Adjustment", "Multimodal communication Strategies in Tourism on Wechat. A Content Analysis of Visit Sweden and France.Fr Official Accounts", "Using Social Media to Build Communities and Reach Organizational Goals. An Empirical Study of Nonprofit Organizations in Germany", "Is This a PR-Trick or What? A Mixed Methods Study on the Perception of Volvo Group's CSR Communication on Social Media", "Generations in the Workforce – Is it Just a Myth? A Quantitative Analysis of Generations in the Workforce based on Emotional Leadership Styles and Employee Engagement", "Triggering Donation Intentions. A Comparative Analysis of three Charity Organizations' Official Websites".

students mentioned that they had learned in general how to apply theory and analyze communication, but they did not become more fluent in creating content. Both this issue as well as the digital competences could be resolved in case a 30-credit internship was introduced. The internship would create opportunities for students to develop their content-creation skills and provide more room for the teaching staff to do their own research. A different but promising initiative was mentioned by the Programme coordinator, i.e. a collaboration with the Digital Leadership Programme (including the introduction week), an initiative which aims at contributing knowledge to the digital communication area of specialization of the MiC.

Summing up, the assessment group finds that the Programme can be improved in terms of: a) research-based teaching, b) the balance between generally oriented areas/courses and areas of specialization, c) the prioritization of the three areas of specialization, d) the balance between theory-practice-contextual, and e) progression (see also assessment of criterion no 1 above). Thus, the assessment group sees how the concerns expressed by the Programme coordinator in her above letter of 4th of March 2020 deeply intertwine with central aspects of the Programme.

Criterion no 3: The content and form of teaching resting on good scientific and/or artistic bases and proven experience.

Overall, the interviews with students and teaching staff indicate awareness of and strategy for ensuring that teaching and the entire master's Programme rest on a good scientific base or proven experience. Thus, such a scientific base and proven experience are tangible in the everyday life of and throughout the Programme. Some teachers use personal experiences of and examples from their own research in their teaching. Also, learning outcomes are claimed to be explicit in teaching and accounted for in the selection of course literature.

When reviewing course syllabi and bibliographies, these documents seem somewhat reasonable given both overall scientific and thematic contents – with two exceptions. First, there seems to be no literature or course module of the theory of sciences, epistemology or axiology of research. This is needed in a master's programme. Second, the methods course is more of an introduction level course, not a master level course.

Despite this, there is a high level of consistency with learning outcomes and Programme goals. However, as previously noted (criterion 1), programme courses taken together demonstrate more thematic width than scientific progression.

Moreover, given the Programme's global and intercultural communication dimensions, both the theoretical and empirical corpus can be criticized for reflecting predominantly Western, male, white values and world views – a fact which the students draw attention to.

According to the Programme coordinator, proven experience is integrated into the Programme via the frequent presence of guest speakers from a variety of public sector and industry stakeholders, case-studies and best practices. Students, on the other hand, would like to see more practical applications, preferably via an internship *within* the Programme, and more focus on career and labor market relevance. As one of them exclaims: “We become good at *analyzing* communication; but can we produce communication?”. Theories, they say, are more relevant for intra-academic applications, than applications in other sectors.

Summing up, the assessment group finds that the Programme can be improved in terms of: a) theory of sciences and methods literature and/or courses, (b) scientific progression (see also criterion no 1 and criterion no 2), (c) broadening of world view, (d) increased focus on labor market relevance, e.g. through internships or similar. However, once again, these wishes are not easily joined with the master level requirements pertaining to a master level Programme (as they are specified in the Programme). This trade-off, between master's level scientific height on the one hand, and the insufficient level of non-academic applicability and relevance, on the other, needs to be discussed at more length and with a certain regularity. Altogether, this is an identity question for the Programme as a whole.

Criterion no 4. Teachers having up-to-date and adequate competence as regards their subjects, higher education pedagogics and subject didactics, and that said teacher being in proportion to the scope and content of study courses and programmes.

Criterion 4 is assessed by a) teacher CV's, b) information from department leadership, c) course curricula, d) interviews with teaching staff, students, and Programme leadership.

The teaching team consists of a group of seven people. The size of the group is rather small given that the two-year Programme consists of 13 courses. On the other hand, several of the teachers devote most of their time to teaching, and many of them are mainly focused on teaching this particular Programme. Nevertheless, external resources are continuously required, not least for supervision of theses.

The group as a whole holds a rather high degree of competence regarding higher education pedagogics/didactics : When it comes to *higher education teaching courses*, the CV's did not always give information on this. However, although some staff members are early in their careers, they have solid experience in teaching courses and to a high degree also in planning and evaluating education. Moreover, the teachers form an international group that possesses experience of teaching in several higher education institutions in various countries. The latter is an important asset to a Programme with an international outreach such as the MiC.

The team of teachers also displays a valuable amount of relevant *experience from outside academia*, for example regarding leadership/management and consultancy in various areas of communication. Together with special competences brought in by guest lecturers from different professions, these experiences adds to the teaching competences. This in turn has the potential to benefit students in their search for bridges between academic and applied, work life proficiency.

The *academic competence* level of the group shows promising traits but at the same time gives cause for concern. All teachers have academic degrees (PhD or MA) in fields of relevance for the Programme; mainly in media and communication studies and linguistics/language. On the other hand, there are no teachers with an academic degree of Professor or Associate Professor/docent, which can be seen as a shortcoming of a Programme at the master's level. This lack of seniority can also indicate that the Programme is less connected to research and less anchored in the academic profile of the department.

On the positive side, it should be noted that several teachers are active in research at least to some degree, and that their teaching is informed by and founded in recent research, which is an important aspect of quality.

The teaching team forms a coherent and devoted group, an impression that was strengthened by what the assessment group learned from interviews with teachers and Programme director, as well

as with students. However, the small size of the team makes it vulnerable to sudden changes in personnel. This vulnerability is further underlined by the fact that a majority of (4/7) the teachers work under non-permanent contracts. As all non-permanent contracts are due to expire in 2020, and the Programme coordinator leaves her position, there is a gap to be filled for the upcoming academic year (2020/21). A short-term plan has been made to hire more fixed-term staff and rely on external personnel, while more long-term positions will be announced. The above concerns for staff continuity are substantiated from the teaching group interviews which indicate that staff policy tends to be more about filling gaps than about strategic recruitments.

All in all, the assessment group finds the teaching staff to be strongly devoted to their work and to their students, possessing adequate formal pedagogic merits as well as teaching experiences relevant to the Programme. At the same time, it is clear that the Programme lacks senior academic personnel, has a low degree of connection to the department's research, and is in need of securing the future competence provision to give the Programme a more stable foundation with regard to teaching.

Criterion no 5: Study courses and Programmes being relevant to the needs of the students/doctoral students and society.

The purpose of the Programme is described in the Programme syllabus (appendix 02: Reg. Nr. G 2017/411): "Communication is key to meet the challenges of a society that is increasingly globalized, digitalized and specialized. It is essential in managing interactions between people, organizations and cultures" (p. 1). In line with this, the Programme provides students with an advanced understanding of theories, methods and issues in communication "to enable them to carry out independent research projects". Three areas of specialization, namely intercultural communication, organizational communication and digital communication prepare students for "working in today's global working environment". It is clear from this description that the Programme sees the needs of the students/doctoral students and society to arise from working in today's global working environment. Specifically, the needs are seen as a problem of managing interactions between people, organizations and cultures and doing research within this field.

The assessment group finds that the MiC Programme and the courses in the Programme reflect the overall purpose and more generally oriented focus on working and interacting in today's global working environment. However, the Programme syllabus does not give examples of specific job types or functions that are relevant for MiC candidates. Thus, it is unclear how the Programme sees the needs of the students/doctoral students in terms of employment possibilities as well as the needs of society, including businesses and organisations, in terms of manpower.

The alumni survey (appendix 07: Report Survey MiC) conducted in April 2019 provides valuable insight into the careers of former students, even though there is only a small number of respondents. Out of 21 respondents, only one was unemployed at the time of the survey. All of the 11 respondents who remained in Sweden after graduation have gained employment in diverse organisations. However, although the students find employment in communication-centric roles, "52% find little to no relevance between what they studied and their career" (p. 4). The MiC staff who instigated the survey conclude that "such imbalance further points to a need for a thorough review of the Programme's vision and mission in order to align it with the needs of the contemporary employment market" (p. 4). Thus, the report gives credence to a potential lack of congruence with the market and a poor definition of the Programme's overall vision.

The site visit 11th of March 2020 confirmed the above assessment. To the question raised to students whether they see a connection between the three pillars of the Programme, the students answered that the teachers helped them to establish this connection. However, they did not see the outcome of the Programme in terms of employment possibilities and specific job types or functions. To quote one of them: "but what is it all building up to? A job, a thesis?" They generally agreed that the focus is too much on the thesis and too little on future perspectives. The outcomes of the Programme are clear for the students, and they also find that the teachers are good at presenting both outcomes and assignments. However, the job market after graduation fades into darkness. The students mentioned that they had been involved in a real-life case with a company in the autumn term 2019/2020. They wanted more cases, more collaboration initiatives with future employers and internships. They mentioned that they had raised the desire for internships several times, but nothing has happened. In turn, they mentioned that they were happy to have guest lecturers (appendix no 06: Cooperation between Academia and Practice – list of Guest lectures in the academic year 2018-2019) and teachers with practical experiences.

Summing-up, the assessment group finds that the Programme can be improved in terms of: a) dialogue/collaboration with companies/future employers in order to ensure congruence with the market, b) definition of the Programme's overall vision – i.e. the identity problem mentioned above, c) real-life case work and/or internships.

Criterion no 6: Students/doctoral students having influence in planning, implementing and monitoring study courses and Programmes.

To assess the fulfilment of this criterion, the documents related to student involvement were analyzed, as well as interviews with students and teachers. Students stated that teachers take their feedback into consideration and implement it for the future courses. The students interviewed during the site visit mentioned several times that they appreciate their feedback being taken into account.

According to the input documents, students are also given the opportunity to give mid-course feedback for two courses. This is a positive opportunity and, if possible, mid-course evaluation should be encouraged in the frame of other courses as well. Moreover, the anonymous instant feedback techniques (as, for instance, the use of Mentimeter for TIA150, spring 2019) should be encouraged and used more actively for the ongoing evaluation of the different courses.

As of now, it can be seen that there are two main ways of receiving student feedback in relation to separate courses, via survey and oral feedback. However, it might be easier for students to give their feedback anonymously in written form. One way of securing this opportunity could be adding one or several open questions in the survey form.

The assessment group has noticed the comment to this in the response from the Department of Applied IT (appendix no 1), i.e. that open questions are already part of all anonymous course evaluation surveys.

In relation to the Programme-level evaluation, the end-of-term “feedback fika” seems to provide great opportunities for students to voice their opinions. Yet face-to-face feedback can be incomplete, and therefore it may be fruitful to also test anonymous possibilities for feedback during the “fika”. For instance, these could be printed hand-outs with open questions.

The student group evaluation from 2017-2018 is a positive idea for collective feedback to the overall Programme and should be continued, if possible. Here too, an anonymous add-on to the written feedback could be beneficial.

All in all, the assessment group finds that the Programme can be improved in terms of: (a) mid-course evaluations and (b) feedback forms and techniques.

Criterion no 7: There being a study and learning environment that is accessible and purpose-oriented for all students/doctoral students.

The teachers make efforts to ensure that students with varying levels of academic success are given equal opportunities to obtain new knowledge and skills. However, according to the teachers, the levels of students vary significantly, hence the time allocated to bring students with unsatisfactory academic performance outweighs that allocated to other students. This situation is caused by previously broad admission regulations and could be improved by more precise entry requirements.

The students are aware of the allocated times for supervision and feedback in advance, and the students find the feedback useful and helpful.

However, the alumni survey suggests that the Programme is not challenging enough for some students. In addition, many alumni mention their dissatisfaction with career guidance at the Department. Some of the interviewed students mentioned that they felt like the overall goal of the Programme was to prepare them for their thesis and not the future jobs. This claim, along with that very few students of MiC are interested in pursuing academic careers, hints at the mismatch between their expectations and what they receive in reality. This could be addressed by the suggestion for criteria 2 (a 30-credit internship) as well as by including more practical cases into the existing courses. Perhaps there could be external career advisors invited once at the end of each term. Employed alumni of the Programme could also be invited to share their “success stories” informally.

In addition, none of the titles mentioned in the report from alumni survey is explicitly related to intercultural communication, although there are three such courses in the frame of the Programme. Conversely, several titles are explicitly connected to managerial positions. Considering this, one

suggestion could be to introduce more courses focused on leadership and management and make the Programme more diverse.

At the site visit, the members of the assessment group had the opportunity to see the physical environment, i.e. access to study rooms, library, computers, software, etc. The assessment group got the impression that there was a lack of study rooms and facilities.

All in all, the assessment group finds that the Programme can be improved in terms of: (a) entry requirements - which should be more precise, (b) career guidance, (c) Programme identity and profile – in order to the mismatch between students' expectations and what they receive in reality, and (d) access to study rooms and facilities.

Criterion no 8: There being continuous monitoring and development of study courses and Programmes

In order to assess this criterion, we have analyzed documents in appendix 3, in specific steering documents on university-level (*policy for quality assurance and continuous quality improvement of education at the University of Gothenburg*) and department-level (*routines for course evaluations and template for course reports for first and second cycle courses at the Department of Applied IT*). Moreover, we have analyzed documents in appendix 7 (*report survey MiC*) and conducted *interviews* with the management of the IT Faculty, the Programme manager and the study administration at the site visit.

The policy for quality assurance and continuous quality improvement sets out the bases of, and the processes in, the University of Gothenburg's system for quality assurance and continuous quality improvement of education for first, second and third cycle. Continuous monitoring and quality improvement is carried out at faculty and department level. It is directed towards study courses and programmes submitted to the goals stated in national statutes, local objectives and standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European higher education area (i.e. the eight criteria used for assessing the MiC). Using external review like the one used for the MiC contributes to developing the quality of the University's study courses and programmes. External review is used to check that the study courses and programmes are satisfying the eight continuous monitoring criteria mentioned above and used for assessing the MiC. In dialogue with the faculties, the vice-

chancellor is to annually monitor the policy's bases and the external review. Prior to the dialogue, the faculties are to give a summary report of reviews that have been carried out and of ongoing measures and development activities.

A self-evaluation of the MiC conducted back in 2011 (BLUE 11) as well as an audit report dated November 18, 2011, has been made available to the assessment group. The assessors have not had access to more recent evaluations of the MiC. The audit report from 2011 highlights several strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to the Programme. Overall, the report states that the Programme has a good future, new courses are planned, criticisms from student representatives are hard to find, and course evaluations are favourable. In terms of weaknesses, however, the report raises the question "What is the overall vision and purpose of the Programme?" In terms of opportunities, the report states that being part of the Applied IT Institution, "the Programme has a great opportunity to be on the cutting edge in communication technology if more of the expertise in IT will be integrated more fully into the Programme". In terms of threats, the report states that "it might become increasingly difficult to attract students from countries outside the EU/EEA if those students will not be able to pay the tuition, ...". Another threat would be "if the Programme will not be able to learn from and take advantage of the dramatic changes in technology and usages of communication technology in an increasingly globalized world."

At department-level, *the routines for course evaluations* document specifies that course evaluations must be conducted after every concluded course. The education officer is responsible for conducting course evaluations and for compiling the results and sending them to the course leader. The course leader is responsible for analyzing the results and for incorporating the students' views in the course development work. A template (*template for course reports for first and second cycle courses at the Department of Applied IT*) is used for the evaluation.

An analysis of the results of course evaluations related to the MiC has not been made available to the assessment group. In turn, the group has had access to an *online survey with the Programme alumni* instigated by the MiC staff and conducted in April 2017. The survey results provide valuable insights into the experiences of former Programme students (see the group's assessment of criterion 5). However, it is not clear how the results are used in the monitoring and development of the Programme.

Regarding the response from the Department of Applied IT (appendix no 1), the assessment group has seen the compilation of course evaluations but no *course reports, analyses* or *synthesis* of these documents – i.e. what were the lessons learned, what changes, modifications or pedagogical measures taken. In short, a living quality culture.

Statistical data is also used in the continuous monitoring and development of the MiC (appendix 8), e.g. data related to applications, admitted applicants and applicants on waiting list, registered students over the four semesters, ratio of students from EU/EEA and paying students starting the Programme, and student completion rate. Surprisingly, data on drop-out is missing even though this can give important information, e.g. about how students identify with the Programme (see also comments related to criterion no 1). To the question raised at the site visit whether drop-out is monitored, the the study administration's and management's answers were that drop-out is not monitored, apparently because this is not seen as a problem. However, student interviews gave the opposite impression.

Regarding the response from the Department of Applied IT (appendix no 1), the assessment group puts forward its main argument, i.e. that knowledge about why students drop out can provide useful information and learning. Is there for example a pattern why people leave the Programme? Moreover, in the case of paying students, the financial risk of students leaving the Programme needs to be taken into consideration (see also page 7).

Summing-up, the assessment group finds that formalities for continuous monitoring and development of the MiC are taken care of. The Programme structure has been updated, a revised Programme syllabus being valid as from 03-09-2018, i.e. from the autumn semester 2018. It makes sense to consider that the revision is justified by the monitoring of the Programme. However, the assessment group also has some questions and concerns: a) the definition of “continuous” is unclear – at which intervals are study programmes evaluated/reviewed by alumni, external assessors and others, e.g. a panel of potential employers? b) how are the results of course and programme evaluations/reviews used in strategy work and actual practice? c) can measurement of drop-out give valuable insight, e.g. in students' expectations? The assessment group believes that the Programme can be improved if the above concerns are taken care of.

Final recommendations

The assessment group has presented its reflections above in direct connection with the eight criteria. In this final part of the report, five concrete measures are highlighted, that, according to the assessment group, could particularly stimulate quality development work. In addition to these five concrete measures, the assessment group has designated two other measures of lesser or secondary importance. The seven measures are presented below in a descending “rank” order of urgency and importance.

Ensure quality through coherence and continuity

As mentioned above, a high staff turnover has affected three aspects of the Programme considered as key for developing the Programme. The coherence and continuity in the Programme is one of these aspects and an important one. The lack of coherence and continuity manifests itself in quality problems such as a low degree of connection of the Programme to the department’s research and an unstable foundation when it comes to teaching. Other quality problems are: the lack of scientific progression and deepened knowledge, the missing theory of sciences and methods literature and/or courses, and the absence of supervisors and examiners with higher academic degrees. The Programme clearly lacks senior academic personnel, and is in need of securing the future competence provision to give it a more stable foundation. Thus, the first recommendation to management is crucial for the short-term survival of the Programme, i.e. to ensure quality through coherence and continuity. In order to do this, a long-term staffing plan/recruitment strategy is needed.

Ensure relevance through dialogue and collaboration with employers

As pointed out above, the unclear identity of the Programme results in a job profile which may be too broad for the labor market. This relevance problem manifests itself in the uncertainty of the students in relation to the labor market – to repeat a quote by one of them: “but what is it all building up to? A job, a thesis?” It also manifests itself in the imbalance of scientific analysis with the interests of external stakeholders and practical applications (theses). At the site visit, the

students expressed for example a strong wish for real-life case work, internships and career guidance. Overall, the connection of the Programme to the labour market does not seem to be very strong. Thus, the second recommendation aimed at Programme managers and coordinators is to ensure relevance and congruence with the market through dialogue (advisory board?) and collaboration with companies and potential employers. This recommendation is closely linked to the next recommendation related to the identity of the Programme.

Take a brand initiative

Identity and profile is another aspect affected by the high staff turnover mentioned above and a very crucial one. The lack of a clear Programme identity manifests itself through the imbalance between generally oriented areas/courses and areas of specialization and between theory-practice-contextual, including the apparently narrow world-view which characterizes the Programme. It also manifests itself through the missing or implicit trade-off between the master's level scientific height on the one hand, and the insufficient level of non-academic applicability and relevance on the other. All of this leads to other – major – problems, in particular a mismatch between students' expectations and what they receive in reality, and a very (too?) broad job profile. Thus, the third recommendation to the management is ambitious but important for the long-term survival of the Programme, i.e. to take a brand initiative, aligning strategy (programme/department/university), culture (teachers), and image (potential students, employers and others) as shown in the VCI model by Hatch & Schultz (2008).



Hatch, Mary Jo & Schultz, Majken, Taking brand initiative, Jossey-Bass, 2008

Reconsider entry requirements and external communication

As pointed out above, the unclear identity of the Programme leads to a mismatch between students' expectations and what they receive in reality. The problem manifests itself in a lack of motivation and, ultimately, dropouts (according to the interviews with students, as dropouts are not measured at the moment). Thus, the fourth recommendation aimed at Programme managers and coordinators is to reconsider entry requirements and external communication. Ideally, the revision shall take place in two steps, i.e. as soon as possible and again, after the Programme management has implemented measures strengthening the Programme identity (see "Taking a brand initiative" above).

Profit more from Programme and course evaluations

The assessment group believes that evaluations and reviews by students, alumni, external assessors and others, e.g. a panel of potential employers and/or a so-called advisory board, help to continuously improve the Programme. However, as mentioned above, the assessment group has found that in some cases, the evidence is inadequate to draw more definitive conclusions. This is the case when it comes to Programme and course (mid)evaluations and feedback. Thus, recommendation no 5 is formulated as questions: (1) at which intervals are study programmes evaluated/reviewed by alumni, external assessors and others? (2) how are the results of course and programme evaluations/reviews used in strategy work and actual practice? (3) how can the Programme benefit from measurement of drop-outs? The assessment group recommends that Programme management and coordinators critically reflect upon these questions.

Other measures

In addition to the above prioritized measures, the assessment group has identified two other measures of lesser or secondary importance. First, as mentioned above, The Higher Education Ordinance stipulates as a learning objective for the student to "*demonstrate the ability to make assessments in the main field of study informed by relevant disciplinary, social and ethical issues and also to demonstrate awareness of ethical aspects of research and development work*"). The

assessment group finds that the *ethical considerations* related to theses and course exams are underdeveloped and reduced to rudimentary discussions without references to key documents, statutes or sites. Also, the trade-offs and dilemmas of doing industry-related research are largely lacking. Thus, the recommendation to Programme managers and coordinators is to develop ethical considerations. Second, as for recommendation no 5, the evidence is also inadequate to draw more definitive conclusions regarding the *physical environment*. However, at the site visit, the members of the assessment group got the impression that there is a lack of study rooms and facilities which can be used by MiC students. As study rooms and facilities are important for the study environment, the assessment group recommends that management takes this up for critical reflection.

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Alina Bodnar, Nicklas Håkansson, Jonas Stier, & Christa Thomsen