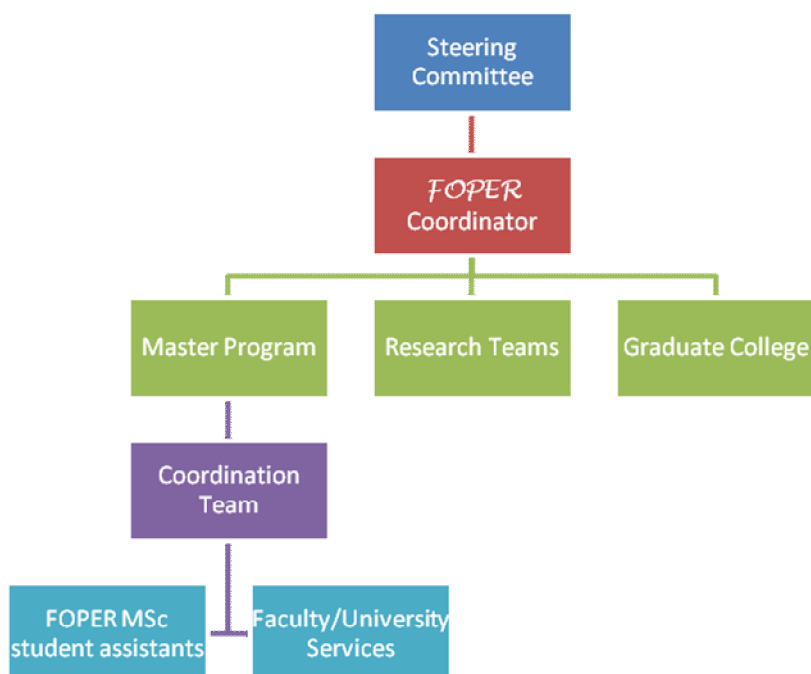


Peer Review Panel Final Report to the EAALS Board for the Accreditation of the International Master of Science in Forest Policy and Economics (FOPER MSc)

1. Introduction

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Government of Finland has financed a project entitled, “Strengthening Capacities of Education and Training for Forest Policy and Economics Development in the Western Balkan Region” (FOPER). The project is coordinated by the European Forest Institute in collaboration with the Faculties of Forestry and Forest Research Institutes in Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia. The main aim of the FOPER programme is to strengthen the capacity for modern forestry policy and economics education, training and research in South-East Europe.

The organisation chart for the FOPER project is as follows:



The Steering Committee is responsible for the execution of all aspects of the FOPER project

The Master Programme is offered by a consortium of five universities:

- the Faculty of Forestry at the University of Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina;
- the Faculty of Forestry at the University of Belgrade, Serbia;
- the Faculty of Forestry at the University of Banja Luka, Bosnia and Herzegovina;
- the Faculty of Forestry at the University of “Sv. Kiril i Metodij”, Skopje, Macedonia.
- the Faculty of Forestry Sciences at the Agricultural University of Tirana, Albania;

Whilst the Faculties at Sarajevo and Belgrade provide all the necessary facilities for teaching and student support, all partner faculties actively promote the FOPER Master degree programme, encourage students to apply and staff to teach, and provide political support for national recognition and local accreditation of the programme.

The oversight of the FOPER degree programme is the responsibility of the Steering Committee which comprises:

- Ministry of Foreign affairs of Finland:
 - Anu Rämä, Research secretary, Unit for Western Balkans
 - Vesa Kaarajakka, Forestry Advisor at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- European Forest Institute: Dr Ilpo Tikkanen
- For the MSc Program issue, Deans from all Faculties included in FOPER:
 - University of Belgrade, Faculty of Forestry: Prof. Dr Milan Medarević, the Dean
 - University of Sarajevo, Faculty of Forestry: Prof. Dr Faruk Mekić, the Dean
 - University of Banja Luka, Faculty of Forestry: Zoran Govedar, the Dean
 - University of Tirana, Faculty of Forestry: Vath Tabaku, the Dean
 - University of Skopje, Faculty of Forestry: Branko Rabadžijevski, the Dean

In 2011, the FOPER Steering Committee has sought independent accreditation for the Master degree from the European Accreditation Agency for the Life Sciences (EAALS).

The MSc Programme is administered by the **FOPER MSc Degree Programme Coordination Team** (hereinafter referred to as the **Programme Coordination Team**), consisting of the Deans of the Faculties of Forestry at the Universities of Belgrade and Sarajevo, and two Programme Coordinators located, at each Faculty. The Programme Coordination Team manage the courses, support the students and undertake quality assurance processes during the teaching year.

The FOPER Master of Science is a two year programme taught entirely in English over four semesters by regional academic staff assisted by “trainee teachers”, in collaboration with international professors from the European Union and the United States of America. It has run on two occasions; FOPER 1 (2007-2009) and FOPER 2 (2010-2012), and has enrolled in total 45 students from 55 applicants, with students from Albania (6), Bosnia-Herzegovina (16), Croatia (3), Macedonia (9), Montenegro (1) and Serbia (10). Scholarships are available for successful applicants. Once

enrolled, students follow their first semester and a half at the Faculty of Forestry at the University of Sarajevo. Here they undertake a three-day Field Course as a welcoming exercise in which key staff and students get to know each other, develop their understanding of the programme and undergo their first independent case-study. Compulsory courses include the fundamentals of scientific work and introductions to Forest Policy and Economics (30 ECTS). The second semester contains a regional excursion to the South-East European countries and advanced courses in Forest Policy and Economics (30 ECTS). All courses in the second half of semester two and the whole of the third semester are taught in Belgrade. Specialisation takes place in semester three, with further compulsory courses (12 ECTS), and the students select six out of nine specialist courses (18 ECTS) according to their areas of interest, such as research and/or employment goals. An International Excursion is undertaken to investigate the application of theories to actual issues of forest policy or economics in member states of the EU. The final semester is dedicated to the Master Thesis. Students specialise in their field of interest at the university faculty of their choice from all the universities participating in the degree programme, completing 30 ECTS of research study. The thesis is defended publicly in a rigorous, open manner.

2. Methodology

The EAALS Board selected a Peer Review Team to conduct the accreditation process according to the EAALS Handbook for the Quality Assurance and Accreditation of International Master Degree Programmes in the Life Sciences (2009). The Peer Review Team comprised of Professor Dr Andrew Cobb (Chairman), Dr Vincent Dollé (Quality Assurance Expert), Ms Eva Ortvald Erichsen (Student Member), Professor Dr Michael Suda (Subject Specialist, Forest Policy), Professor Dr Birger Solberg (Subject Specialist, Forest Economics) and Dr Simon Heath (EAALS Executive Secretary), see Annex 1 for brief biographical details.

Simon Heath provided the Handbook to the Programme Coordination Team. He met with the Programme Coordination Team on 14 September 2010 in Belgrade and with the FOPER Steering Committee on 28 September 2010 in Sarajevo to offer guidance to the Programme Coordination Team of the review process, including requesting a Self Assessment Report to be prepared as a critical assessment of the programme, and proposing a timetable for the visit of the Peer Review Team.

The EAALS Handbook has, at Appendix 2 page 19, a Quality Assurance framework containing six categories sub-divided into twenty seven benchmarks. Each benchmark is further defined by general and specific indicator questions which are designed to address whether (1) the master degree programme is relevant to the needs and expectations of international students, and (2) there is evidence of added value provided by internationalisation in the delivery of the degree programme. For each benchmark there is a set of verifiers which were used by the Peer Review Team to assess whether there was evidence to show that each benchmark had been achieved.

The Peer Review Team visited the University of Belgrade on 2 – 5th October 2011, for meetings with academic staff and students in order to verify the Self Assessment

Report in relation to the EAALS Framework. Each member of the Peer Review Team had previously agreed and signed a Confidentiality Agreement with EAALS to protect the confidentiality of all the information provided to the team and to preserve the anonymity of those staff and students participating in the meetings. EAALS had previously signed an agreement with FOPER setting out the responsibilities of each partner and giving FOPER confidentiality of the information provided.

The format of the visit was as follows (Annex 2). The Peer Review Team met privately in their hotel on the 3rd October to discuss course documentation and to prepare questions for the meetings. In particular, they identified the evidence for the verification of each benchmark statement following their prior independent analysis of the Self Assessment Report, and agreed the lines of enquiry to be followed in the meetings with staff and students the following day. During the evening, they met with members of the wider FOPER team for an informal buffet at a local restaurant.

On arrival at the Faculty of Forestry at the University of Belgrade the following morning (4th October), the Peer Review Team had a 90 minute meeting with representatives of the FOPER Steering Committee, The FOPER Coordinator and the Programme Coordination Team. The following staff attended, Professor Milan Medarevic (Dean of Forestry, Belgrade), Professor Faruk Mekic (Dean of Forestry, Sarajevo), Professor Margaret Shannon (FOPER Project Coordinator), Professor Mersudin Avdibegovic (FOPER Degree Programme Coordinator, Sarajevo), Mr Nenad Petrovic (FOPER Degree Programme Coordinator, Belgrade), Dr Leonidha Peri (Tirana), Dr Stjepan Posavec (Zagreb) and Dr Makedonka Stojanovska (Skopje). After a brief private meeting of the Peer Review Team there followed a 60 minute meeting with Professor Medarevic and Dr Mirjana Ockoljic (Vice-Dean responsible for teaching quality and internal accreditation, Belgrade) focusing on the quality assurance aspects of the FOPER degree programme.

Over lunch, the Peer Review Team met a total of twelve students, three graduates from FOPER 1 and more than ten current students from FOPER 2. The responses noted from a set of questions, listed in Annex 3, are detailed in Annex 4. Although this was only a sub-sample of the student body, the students generally expressed their overall satisfaction with the programme, with many positive endorsements of the philosophy and practical aspects recorded.

After lunch, the Peer Review Team had a meeting with two members of student support staff who were themselves not academic staff (Ms. Nevena Mihajilovic, library officer and Mr. Bojan Radic, IT support) followed by a meeting with academic staff, including international professors, contributing to the programme but who were not members of the Management Team (Professor Saleem Ali, University of Vermont, USA; Professor Azra Cabaravdic, University of Sarajevo; Dr Spela Malovrh Pezdevsek, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia, and Dr Jelena Tomičević, University of Belgrade). The final meeting of the day was an opportunity to address and clarify any remaining or outstanding issues with members of the Programme Coordination Team.

On the morning of 5th October, the Peer Review Team met in private to review their observations, agree items of good practice and recommendations of issues for

further attention by the Programme Coordination Team and to agree a list of outcomes for the draft report. The Peer Review Team met a further international member of the teaching team, Professor Dr Gerard Buttoud (University of Viterbo, Italy), prior to lunch.

The Peer Review Team met with the Programme Coordination Team at 2pm to give an immediate report back including items of good practice and recommendations of issues which the Programme Coordination Team might wish to address. The Peer Review Team conveyed their sincere thanks to the Programme Coordination Team for their documentation, including the Self Assessment Report and further documentary evidence requested by the team, their time allocated to the meetings with the team and their excellent organisation and hospitality during the visit. They were also asked to thank all participants for their frank and constructive comments in their discussions with the Peer Review Team.

In compiling this report, the Peer Review Team used an evidence-based approach, seeking to highlight good practice and to make recommendations for enhancement for the Programme Coordination Team to address.

3. Responses to the general and specific indicators

The Peer Review Team reviewed the Self Assessment Report against the Verifiers listed alongside each of the General and Specific Indicators for each of the Benchmarks in the EAALS Quality Assurance Framework as outlined on page 19 and following in the EAALS Handbook (2009). The report below should be read with reference to these Verifiers.

In doing this initial review, the Peer Review Team identified issues which required further clarification before a decision could be made as to whether the indicators could be verified. This section of the report addresses these issues by identifying the specific questions for each benchmark which the Peer Review Team asked during their meetings with the different groups. These questions are identified in italics at the start of each benchmark and indicator. The following text in each section provides a summary evaluation of each benchmark against the stated verifiers.

Table 1 reports the overall summary of the verification of each benchmark, good practice and recommendations for enhancement.

3.1 Needs, Aims and Learning Outcomes

3.1.1 Mission Statement:

The programme mission is clearly presented in the Self Assessment Report, set within the broader vision of the FOPER over-arching project. It is ***“to provide education for the next generation of experts and leaders in the administration of forest-related policies as well as in the development of the business and management of forests and forest-related resources in the participating countries and beyond”***. The programme is novel, unique for its interdisciplinary approach and a pioneer for the region as an international Master taught solely in English. It is international in outlook and the FOPER team is developing ambitious plans to involve additional funding bodies and partner universities in the future.

3.1.2 Needs of Stakeholders:

How do you know that the programme is needed?¹

The FOPER Master programme was designed following a detailed and thorough review of the training needs analysis of stakeholders conducted by the European Forest Institute and published in 2006. An additional consultation with stakeholders was held in Sarajevo in 2010. The Peer Review Team formed the view that further consultations should be undertaken to receive comments on the current degree programme and suggestions for updating the curriculum for FOPER 3.

3.1.3 Aims and learning outcomes:

Are you familiar with the Second Cycle Descriptors and the use of learning outcomes in course documents?

The Master Programme has ambitious aims to strengthen the capacity for forest policy and economics education, training and research in South-East Europe. Graduate destination data suggests that the former aim is being fulfilled. The Programme Coordination Team may wish to consider increasing the number of elective course options in future to enhance the employment prospects of graduates with more practical or administrative aspirations. Some courses that combine political and economic aspects could also be useful additions to the elective field.

The Self Assessment Report presents clearly identified expected learning outcomes for each year of the FOPER II Master Programme.

The Peer Review Team noted, however, that the individual course outlines were often limited to descriptions of content rather than an explicit list of Learning Outcomes that a student was expected to know, understand and be able to do after successful completion of a process of learning. The Peer Review Team advised the Programme Coordination Team that the production of a Course Handbook containing the above information for each course was regarded as good practice in the European higher education sector for the benefit of both academic staff and students.

3.2 Educational Process (Teaching, Learning, Assessment, Guidance)

3.2.1 Curriculum Planning:

The curriculum for the programme was designed in 2006 by an experienced team of professors from Western Europe and the region, taking account of the detailed training needs analysis of stakeholders. Compulsory courses offering an introduction to forest policy and economics are followed by more advanced and specialist courses in the discipline. Elective courses then permit some choice (six from nine) according to student preference and the final thesis is based on a defined research topic.

¹ An example of the specific question asked in connection with this Benchmark and Indicator during the Peer Review Team's visitation on 2 to 5 October 2011. The other specific questions asked during the visitation are listed in italics against the relevant benchmark and indicator.

The Peer Review Team was advised by the international professors interviewed and the Peer Review Team subject specialists that the courses are highly appropriate, well-matched, challenging and very relevant to the discipline.

The Peer Review Team subject specialists advise the Programme Coordination Team to consider updating the curriculum for FOPER 3 with the introduction of new topics, including bio-economic modelling, carbon sequestration and eco-labelling, to attract more international students and to be more in line with present international research in forest economics and policy

The students met by the Peer Review Team commented that there was some overlap in course content, but this was minor and seen by them as enriching rather than repetitive. More course choices as electives may serve to increase employment prospects.

3.2.2 Teaching and Learning Process:

What teaching methods are used? Is there an over-reliance on formal lectures?

A range of teaching methods is employed in the programme. Most courses use a mix of formal lectures, group-work, action learning, seminars and case studies. It was noted that experience-based, self-learning and problem-solving approaches also feature in the delivery of the programme. The case-studies were more practically-based teamwork approaches to relevant issues in forest policy and economics.

The combination of international professors and regional teachers on courses allows the students to benefit from a wide range of expertise and knowledge that effectively challenges their different personal and cultural experiences. This approach to teaching and learning is commended by the Peer Review Team. The further inclusion of research students in the teaching team, ie “teacher twinning” allows trainee teachers to expand their discipline knowledge and to gain an in-depth understanding of regional, national and international contexts in relation to forest policy and economics. This approach will also increase with time the number and capacity of academics and researchers in these disciplines in the region.

Meetings with the students indicated that they had experienced a steep learning curve at the start of their programmes. A particular reason for this was identified as difficulty with the demands, understanding and use of scientific English. The Peer Review Team formed the view that the introduction of “bridging” courses in scientific and technical English prior to enrolment might be of value and, if advertised widely, might also serve to increase the number of future applicants.

A further contributor to this steep learning curve was perceived as the varying academic backgrounds of the students. Whilst the majority had previous bachelor or equivalent experience in forestry, some had backgrounds in horticulture or agriculture. The Programme Coordination Team may wish to consider means to ease the introduction of these non-forestry candidates into the programme, such as the inclusion of a bridging introductory programme.

3.2.3 Assessment of Learning Outcomes:

Is there a common assessment strategy? Are students clear and familiar with the assessment process?

The Peer Review Team as noted above observed an inconsistent use of learning outcomes in the course documentation, the course often being described only in terms of the content rather than indicating what students are expected to know, understand and be able to do after successful completion of a process of learning. It was not always clear as to how the course outcomes are assessed. The Programme Coordination Team is advised to introduce a table into each course description illustrating how each learning outcome is to be assessed. This will greatly benefit the focus of the contributing academic staff in executing the assessment and students in clarifying how they will be assessed.

FOPER students follow the assessment regulations of the Universities of Belgrade and Sarajevo. Assessment criteria are course attendance, participation in class, group work and a final examination that usually counts for 50% of the final mark. Thus, student work is marked using the assessment process in operation at each University and subsequently converted to ECTS grades. The Peer Review Team could find no evidence of the criteria which determined the mark for participation. They also formed the view that marks given solely for attendance was uncommon in current international Master programmes in Europe. It is suggested that other inducements for attendance should replace the current practice.

Whilst noting that the programme uses an ECTS marking scale, the Peer Review Team was concerned that the grade descriptors appeared brief and vague. They suggested the need for more rigorous descriptors so that the distinction between, for example, “minor errors” and “some errors” was transparent to both academic staff and students and consistently applied.

The Peer Review Team was informed that all student work is double-marked. In the assessment of the Master thesis, a subject specialist takes the role of an external assessor, either from the region or internationally, and provides an independent view of the assessment process.

The discipline experts in the Peer Review Team read five Master theses in forest economics and five in forest policy. The experts were satisfied with the standard overall, the wide range of topics considered, the challenging and appropriate use of both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, and the awareness and appropriate use of primary literature. They were in large agreement with the marks awarded, although they found that often the final grading was higher than that awarded in their own institutions. There was, however, clear evidence of synthesis and appropriate conclusions, addressing practical policies, informing forest policy and economics both nationally and internationally.

3.2.4 Guidance in the Learning Process:

Are students given guidance of their progress on the programme?

The Programme Coordinators provide a “soft-tutoring” system to monitor student progress during the entire programme, offering mentoring and advice to each

student across a broad range of issues. Examples include guidance on additional reading, choice of elective courses and selection of a suitable topic and supervisor for the Master thesis. The Peer Review Team was informed that, together with the students, the Coordinators develop a Personal Development Plan for each candidate, which is monitored regularly. The Programme Coordinators also strongly encourage the students to seek advice and guidance from the international staff contributing to the master programme, either by email or direct contact. In meetings with the students, the help and support provided by the Coordinators, for both academic and personal reasons, was considered to be outstanding.

The Programme Coordination Team meet frequently on an informal, operational basis. There is no student presence at these meetings. No written record of the meetings is made. In the interests of communication and disseminating good practice in future, the Team are advised to consider preparing minutes of meetings, to be published as widely as necessary, perhaps on the intranet, for access to both staff and students.

3.3 Educational Resources and Partnership

3.3.1 Staffing:

Curricula vitarum were made available to the Peer Review Team and tabulated information in the Self Assessment Report demonstrated that the academic teaching staff are suitably qualified, invariably at PhD level. The Subject Experts on the Peer Review Panel were able to confirm that they had published relevant papers and articles in the international press. The international teachers are well known specialists in their fields of forest policy and forest economics.

There had been opportunities in the past for staff from the Western Balkan region universities to attend staff development courses held at the University of Joensuu, Finland to support the teaching and learning process.

Whilst there was evidence of informal staff communication between the partner faculties and joint research underpinning the programme, the Peer Review Team noted that there had been no formal workshops nor seminars in the region to discuss and share the good practice in teaching and learning developed in the FOPER Master programme.

3.3.2 Facilities:

Do the available facilities affectively support student work?

Discussions with staff and students revealed that appropriate teaching, library and electronic facilities were available in the faculties and that most students had their own personal computers with full access to the internet. Students have access to one-to-one support from skilled library and computing staff. The wider FOPER project is also building a specialised library of key texts in English in the fields of forest policy and economics, to supplement the libraries in the teaching faculties. The Peer Review Team considered that faculty staff could add value to the programme by providing courses on preparing presentations, guidance on writing for the Master thesis and publication and how to manage references.

3.3.3 Resource Allocation:

Are the resources adequate to deliver the programme?

The FOPER Programme has been well funded from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Finland and coordinated by the European Forestry Institute. Funding covers the provision at Belgrade and Sarajevo, including scholarships and health insurance for students. Partner faculties provide in-kind support, facilities and regional teaching staff. The broader FOPER team is currently seeking additional and new funding to finance a FOPER 3 Master programme. Discussions have recently commenced with international funding organisations and potential new academic partners.

The Peer Review Team was informed that FOPER provides support for staff and Master students to attend and present papers at international conferences. Funding had also been provided in the past for students to attend courses to improve their command of English.

3.3.4 Interactions with External Organisations:

The FOPER Degree Programme originated from a detailed needs analysis performed by the European Forest Institute following meetings with the private and public forestry sectors in the region, research institutions and academic faculties. Subsequently, the twinning process of local and international teachers working together has generated a rapid increase in knowledge and teaching capacity in the fields of forest policy and economics in the region.

The Self Assessment Report details current interactions with stakeholders and some organisations host students as interns for periods of time in addition to their timetabled studies. Case studies with stakeholders are a regular feature of the Master programme.

The Peer Review Team was told in meetings with students, however, that it was currently easier to find a job in academe, as a PhD student, than in the forestry professions and administration, perhaps reflecting the current economic climate in the region.

3.4 Student Progression

3.4.1 Student selection:

How are suitable candidates selected?

The Self Assessment Report describes in detail the rigorous operational procedures used for application to the FOPER Master degree programme, the selection of students and how their progress is monitored and acted upon. Successful applicants must have an adequate first degree or equivalent in forestry or a related discipline, competence in written and oral English, good previous grades and recommendations, and a demonstrable commitment and motivation to the programme. The Peer Review Team discussed the possibility of establishing more transparent English entry requirements defined by the TOEFL/IELTS scales, in keeping with other International Masters in the EU.

Student selection is the responsibility of the Programme Selection Council, consisting of the Programme Coordination Team and the FOPER Project Coordinator. All applicants are interviewed in person. Individual proficiency is noted and assessed against clear criteria.

The two iterations of the Master programme have enrolled 21 and 24 students, from a total of 25 and 30 applicants, respectively, with a maximum targeted enrolment of 30 for each year. The Peer Review Team was concerned at the relatively low number of applications compared with similar well-funded degree programmes elsewhere in Europe. Following detailed discussions with the Programme Coordination Team, the Peer Review Team considered further means to increase applications to the Programme, including wider advertising in Europe and perhaps globally.

A further suggestion was to offer conditional enrolment to existing students prior to the successful attainment of their bachelor degree, based on an expected undergraduate performance, competence in English and prior interview. This would allow students to progress directly from their Bachelor programme to the Master, instead of an enforced delay in the application process. The Peer Review Team were informed by the students that an intensive English language course would be helpful prior to the commencement of study on the FOPER Master programme.

3.4.2 Progression from application to graduation.

How do you identify students at risk?

The Peer Review Team noted that effective, but informal, procedures are in place to monitor student progression. The marks of each student are recorded and regularly discussed by the Programme Coordinators. The performance of each student is regularly monitored and discussed. Extenuating circumstances are fully taken into account when monitoring student progress.

3.4.3 Completion Rates:

Do you consider the current completion rates are satisfactory?

Whilst noting that only one cohort had graduated to date, the Peer Review Team observed high completion rates. Four students did not submit a final thesis, due to a range of personal reasons, though three of them found employment during Semester four. The Peer Review Team was informed that FOPER students presented higher average marks and overall success rates than other students on similar study programmes. The Programme Coordination Team was of the view that this was primarily due to the high standards and criteria used for student selection.

3.4.4 Employability:

Are you tracking the employment prospects of alumni?

Of the 19 FOPER 1 students who presented a Master thesis, 15 had found employment after graduation, whilst 1 remained unemployed. There was no evidence of an organisation to track the career development of alumni, although of course only one cycle of the programme had been completed. It is suggested that this should be considered for the future development and support of the degree

programme. Alumni can be very important in advertising the benefits of the degree programme for prospective students.

3.5 Student support

3.5.1 Pre-induction arrangements

Do language skills, or a lack of them, restrict student applications?

The selection process is transparent according to agreed criteria and the best students are offered places on the Master Degree Programme. The students met by the Peer Review Team considered that the information provided to them before enrolment was sufficient and appropriate. They informed the team that they would have benefitted by a greater proficiency in especially technical English. It is suggested that a threshold value for acceptable English, measured by TOEFL and/or IELTS testing, would be beneficial aid in the selection process of future students. Conversion courses for candidates coming from a non-forestry background might also be of value.

A systematic analysis of student performance according to the region of origin and academic background has not been undertaken. Such information may be of use to the Programme Coordination Team in monitoring student progress and their support needs.

3.5.2 Induction Arrangements:

How are students from different cultural backgrounds brought together? Are local arrangements appropriate and consistent?

At both teaching faculties FOPER students are welcomed in ceremonies hosted by the respective Deans and attended by local staff and regional dignitaries. The Programme Coordinators play a key role in student integration and support. Students receive a steady flow of detailed information regarding all aspects of the programme from the Programme Coordinators. Whilst there is no dedicated FOPER MSc Course Handbook which is designed to support the incoming students, the website www.foper.net provides useful information. The current FOPER Course Concept and Curriculum document, whilst being essential for students once they have arrived is too extensive for the purposes of supporting the induction of students. It is suggested that the Programme Coordination Team should review the ERASMUS Exchange Handbooks provided by EU universities for this purpose.

The Programme Coordinators and their administrative support staff are based in both teaching faculties and provide the academic and administrative foci for the programme.

3.5.3 Welfare Support Services:

What services are provided for international students?

Programme Coordinators and their administrative support teams, in addition to academic tutors in each partner faculty, are available to resolve personal and academic problems, as and when they occur. Helpful support with accommodation needs, visa applications and legal help were cited by the students in meetings with the Peer Review Team.

3.5.4 Cultural and Social Needs:

Are international students left to their own devices?

Each partner University is familiar with the needs of international students and promotes a multi-cultural study and social environment. FOPER students have access to the sport and other social facilities at each University and benefit from the local services applicable to local students.

3.5.5 Financial Information and Support:

Is financial advice and support provided for international students?

The Master programme offers a generous financial scholarship and a health insurance plan to each successful candidate that covers residency in Belgrade and Sarajevo. This is supplied by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Finland and students sign a contract with the European Forest Institute regarding their funding. Thus, scholarships are paid monthly on proof of appropriate attendance and performance on the programme.

3.6. Quality Management and Enhancement

3.6.1 Institutional Environment:

According to the Self Assessment Report, all five university faculties in the FOPER partnership are committed to the Bologna process and the signed Memorandum of Understanding is regarded as a commitment to internationalisation that will secure and enhance the quality of their educational and research provision.

The Programme Coordination Team ensures the full integration of the programme into faculty administration and local quality assurance frameworks in Belgrade and Sarajevo. They also ensure that university legislation is appropriately applied. The Peer Review Team, however, was not aware of a dedicated quality assurance document related to the FOPER Master programme. Furthermore, the Peer Review Team was not aware of any delegated authority from each university to the Programme Coordination Team for quality assurance. Instead, they were informed that existing faculty process had precedence.

The FOPER degree programme Coordinators report to the FOPER Project Coordinator every 15 days.

3.6.2 Decision-making Process:

What processes are in place for the division of responsibilities amongst the Management Team?

The Peer Review Team was not aware of formal Terms of Reference for the duties and operational responsibilities of the Programme Coordination Team. It is suggested that the Terms of Reference should be codified and available to all contributors to the FOPER degree programme and to the senior managers of the partner universities.

3.6.3 Quality Assurance and Enhancement Systems:

*What is your process for reflecting on the quality and standards of the programme?
How does your system of quality assurance and enhancement work?*

Discussions revealed that Belgrade and Sarajevo universities and faculties have their own systems and practice of quality assurance. The Peer Review Team was informed that at Belgrade the quality assurance process for the FOPER Master Degree Programme was assured along with all other degree programmes in the Faculty. There is a similar process at Sarajevo. The Degree Programme Coordinators meet with the Belgrade quality assurance team every six months to discuss the evaluation of the FOPER degree programme but there are no formal minutes taken.

However, the Peer Review Team expressed their concern that they were not presented with any documents to demonstrate internal formal mechanisms and guidelines for the overall internal quality assurance of the degree programme. The Peer Review Team were not shown any minutes of meetings demonstrating the review of the Degree programme, identification of agreed and timed Action Plans for the enhancement of the degree programme, and records demonstrating the completed execution of the agreed changes. Instead, it was evident that a pragmatic operational approach was used by the Programme Coordination Team, resolving issues on an *ad hoc*, informal basis. This lack of documentation was acknowledged by the Programme Coordinators.

Furthermore, whilst it was clear that students provided feedback on individual courses, there was no documented evidence of specific actions taken to improve custom and practice. Feedback is collected from students, although the forms are customised to individual courses with evaluation forms produced by the international academic staff. This data is analysed and discussed by the Programme Coordinators alongside feedback from the teaching staff. However there was no evidence of an Annual Monitoring Report with timed Action Plans resulting from this feedback, nor indications of personal responsibility for achieving the required actions, nor was there any evidence of feedback to students. Indeed, the students met by the Peer Review Team informed them that filling in the forms was the end of their involvement.

Without the necessary formal and documented Annual Reports, Action Plans and cohort analysis, it was difficult for the Peer Review Team to ascertain the extent of ongoing enhancement of the FOPER Master degree programme across the institutions involved. The Peer Review Team recognised that this process was probably taking place, but on an informal and *ad hoc* basis. This *ad hoc* process does not provide the necessary internal quality assurance rigour.

The Mid-term Review of the FOPER Master programme, conducted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland also identified that “clear guidelines and objectives (for quality assurance) are lacking”.

The Peer Review Team considered that the Programme Coordination Team may wish to review how they ensure that appropriate and equivalent standards and quality are maintained and sustained across both Belgrade and Sarajevo, the teaching faculties, to ensure the internal quality assurance of the integrated FOPER Master Degree Programme. The Peer Review team recognised the need to formalise this process by codifying the procedures for a unified internal quality assurance process that operates across all the partner institutions.

3.6.4 Inclusion of the Student Voice:

Are students involved in the decision-making processes of the programme?

There are no elected student representatives and no student membership of formal committees relevant to the Master programme. Students are encouraged to comment on various aspects of the programme both formally in questionnaires and informally to both academic and administrative staff. As such they are informally able to influence the decision-making process. There does not appear to be a formal Programme Committee attended by both staff and students.

One incident was raised with the Peer Review Team in several of their meetings as an example of action being taken resulting from a complaint from the students. In this case, a tutor with insufficient skill in English was removed from the teaching team.

3.6.5 Appeals:

Have there been any particular issues or recurring themes for appeals by international students?

Appeals related to individual courses are dealt with locally, utilising existing faculty procedures. The Programme Coordinator is the initial contact for complaints and appeals and they resolve most issues quickly and amicably.

It was not clear to Review Team whether students were able to appeal against their overall results to the FOPER Coordinating Team.

A standard procedure for detecting plagiarism was yet to be established.

3.6.6. Ethics/Equal Opportunities:

Any problems noted and how have you dealt with them?

The FOPER Project arose out of the desire of the government of Finland to help heal and mend the cultural and equality rifts in the region following a period of warfare. Consequently, issues of gender and ethnicity have been important in the design and implementation of the FOPER MSc.

Women are well represented in the FOPER Master Degree Programme and no equality issues have been reported. On the other hand, ethical issues were noted, particularly in relation to language difficulties experienced by students from Albania. Thus, students from Albania feel excluded and disadvantaged since they do not understand the Serbian and Croatian languages used by many in the region as a common language. On the other hand, meetings with students indicated that there were no conflicts amongst the students on the programme, nor did they feel any discrimination from the staff.

3.6.7 Staff Development:

*Is there a staff development programme for staff contributing to the programme?
Are staff trained to deliver courses to international students?*

The Peer Review Team was informed that the professional development of the regional teaching staff was supported by several activities. These included

attendance at the University of Joensuu regional teachers training programme (2006-2009), subject-specific learning through the teacher-twinning approach and FOPER 2 teacher training. The Peer Review Team was not aware of any staff development strategy or personal development planning for academic staff involved in the FOPER Master programme.

4. Outcomes of the Review

General Observations

The Self Assessment Report, as a critical and evaluative document, was helpful to the Review Team. It addressed each Benchmark and Specific Indicator in the Framework Document often with sufficient detail to inform and guide the Peer Review Team in their selection of questions for each meeting. In some instances, however, the report contained generalised statements, unsupported by evidence. Helpful, supporting details were provided to the Peer Review Team on request.

The academic staff involved in the programme are well qualified, many having a PhD. There was considerable evidence of research underpinning the Master theses.

The Peer Review Team noted and acknowledged the helpful and constructive tone evident in each meeting in response to their questions. Answers were invariably candid, relevant and pragmatic. It was evident that the partners are committing considerable time and energy into the operation and evolution of this successful Master programme.

Inevitably, the Peer Review Team focussed its questions to the Programme Coordination Team located in Belgrade and Sarajevo. It should be noted, however, that sufficient comments and observations were provided by faculty members from the partner universities present to allow for a fair overview of the partnership strengths and weaknesses

Table 1 presents a summary of the outcomes of the Review, indicating where evidence has been provided to show that each benchmark has been achieved, with an overview of areas of good practice and recommended for enhancement.

In conclusion, the Peer Review Team expressed Broad Confidence in the quality and standards of the International Master in Forest Policy and Economics, as viewed from an international perspective. They identified the following features of good practice and recommendations for further consideration.

Good Practice

- The FOPER MSc Programme is unique in the disciplines of Forest Policy and Economics. It offers an international, high-level curriculum, based on a thorough needs analysis, delivered in English and represents a pioneering intercultural programme for the region.
- The discipline experts in the Review Team read 5 Master theses in forest economics and 5 in forest policy. The experts were satisfied with the standard overall, the wide range of topics considered, the challenging and appropriate use of both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, and the awareness and

appropriate use of primary literature. They were in large agreement with the marks awarded, although they found that often the final grading was higher than that awarded in their own institutions. There was, however, clear evidence of synthesis and appropriate conclusions, addressing practical policies, informing forest policy and economics both nationally and internationally.

- Students are very well supported by efficient Programme Coordinators utilising soft skills and attention to personal development planning. They are taught by well qualified and committed regional academic staff, many of whom are research-active. The use of visiting academics of international expertise and status is highly commended. Thus students are exposed to both international thinking and local case-studies.
- There are clear, effective and rigorous procedures for managing the application and selection process. This contributes positively to the high rates of student completion and achievement.
- The FOPER MSc Programme is delivered using a range of teaching methods, including formal lectures, practical classes, group presentations, case-studies and seminars, indicating a good balance of pedagogic approaches.

Issues: Recommendations for Enhancement

- Whilst the Peer Review Team recognised that the staff teaching on the FOPER MSc Programme had well established personal and research networks, they considered that there is a need to formally and regularly consult both regional and international stakeholders on the evaluation and future development of the programme and to regularly update the training needs analysis. This would also ensure that future developments continue to meet the career aspirations and employment opportunities of students.
- In keeping with existing good practice in the European higher education sector, the Programme Coordination Team is encouraged to produce a FOPER Handbook for incoming students as a one-stop-source of key information about the degree programme, the universities they will be attending and the local environment. This document should include, *inter alia*, details on course structure, learning outcomes, progression and location, assessment processes and procedures, contact details of key personnel, careers advice, etc. It is also anticipated that a separate course/module catalogue will be provided, as at present.
- The Peer Review Team noted that the degree programme was embedded into the internal quality assurance processes of the universities of Belgrade and Sarajevo. However, whilst a range of informal processes exist, the Peer Review Team could find no evidence of a formalised, documented, quality assurance process dedicated to the FOPER MSc Programme operating across all the faculties involved. It is suggested that a formalised, programme-wide, internal quality assurance strategy should be introduced at the earliest opportunity. This strategy should provide explicit details of the quality assurance assessment criteria, the monitoring and review processes to be adopted, and timed action plans for both courses and the overall programme. The outcomes of this process should identify and highlight both good practice and enhancement opportunities,

including procedures for student support and pastoral care, and staff pedagogy and personal development. Furthermore, an explicit, consistent and transparent process of assessment and its reporting should be adopted for the benefit of all associated with the programme at each Faculty. Student and teaching staff representatives should also be members of all Committees established to formalise the internal quality assurance process across all the faculties involved in the degree programme.

- The Peer Review Team expressed concern that there was a lack of explicit learning outcomes in all course documentation. Learning outcomes describe what a learner is expected to know, understand and be able to do after successful completion of a process of learning. Furthermore, both the teaching and learning strategies and the assessment strategies need to indicate how they are addressing the learning outcomes.
- The Programme Coordination Team should develop assessment descriptors to clearly separate the grades within the local and ECTS grades provided to the staff and students. The descriptors identified in the Table in section 2.3, on page 23, of the self assessment report are considered inadequate and are likely to lead to inequality in the assessment process between assessors.
- The Programme Coordination Team is strongly encouraged to ensure the presence of elected student representatives at all fora where decisions are taken about the FOPER Master degree programme. In particular, students should be involved in the formal internal quality assurance programmes. The introduction of a formal staff-student consultative committee and an alumnus association are also recommended.
- The Peer Review Team recommend that a promotion and advertising strategy is established, based on risk management and stakeholder needs, to ensure the recruitment of a viable cohort for FOPER 3 and beyond.
- The Programme Coordination Team is advised to consider updating the curriculum for FOPER 3 with the introduction of new topics, including bio-economic modelling, carbon sequestration and eco-labelling, to attract more international students and to be more in line with present international research in forest economics and policy.

4 January 2012

Dr Simon B Heath

EAALS Secretariat, 46 Tour des Caves, 34120 Tourbes, France

Table 1: Summary of the Review Outcomes

Categories	Benchmarks	Evidence of Verification	Good Practice	Recommendations for enhancement
1. Needs, Aims and Learning Outcomes	1.1 Mission Statement	Yes	Regular updating with stakeholder needs.	<p>Need to distinguish between the outcomes of the FOPER MSc degree programme and the other components of the FOPER Programme.</p> <p>Enhanced and uniform definition of learning outcomes at the course level and show how the learning outcomes at the course level build to the delivery of the degree programme learning outcomes</p>
	1.2 Needs of stakeholders	Yes		
	1.3 Aims and learning outcomes of the degree programme	YES		
2. Educational Process	2.1 Curriculum planning	Yes	<p>Teacher twinning and involvement of international professors.</p> <p>“Soft skills”, use of professional development planning and key role of the programme coordinators.</p>	<p>Improve expertise in scientific English and an Introduction to Forestry for candidates from non-forest backgrounds.</p> <p>Need to clearly demonstrate the link between assessment methods to each of the learning outcomes at the course level Need to improve the discriminators text that are used to differentiate the grades</p>
	2.2 Teaching and learning	Yes		
	2.3 Assessment of learning outcomes	NO		
	2.4 Guidance in the learning process	Yes		
3. Educational Resources and	3.1 Staffing	Yes	A well resourced, supported and administered programme, taught by	
	3.2 Facilities	Yes		

Categories	Benchmarks	Evidence of Verification	Good Practice	Recommendations for enhancement
Partnership	3.3 Resource allocation 3.4 Interactions with external organisations	Yes Yes	experts in the field, including visiting international professors.	
4. Student Progression	4.1 Student selection 4.2 From application to graduation 4.3 Completion rates 4.4 Employability	Yes Yes Yes Yes	Clear, rigorous and effective processes for application and selection.	Set TOEFL/IELTS requirements for English. Offer careers advice and actively monitor alumni to gather data on employability.
5. Student Support	5.1 Pre-induction arrangements 5.2 Induction arrangements 5.3 Welfare support services 5.4 Cultural and social needs 5.5 Financial information and support	Yes Yes Yes Yes	Good local student support provided by Programme Coordinators.	 A comprehensive course handbook should concisely document all the support available.
6. Quality Management and Enhancement	6.1 Institutional Environment 6.2 Decision-making Process	YES No		Introduce formal Terms of Reference for the FOPER Degree Programme Coordinating Committee.

Categories	Benchmarks	Evidence of Verification	Good Practice	Recommendations for enhancement
	6.3 Quality assurance and enhancement systems	No		Provide formal written guidelines to monitor and review the internal quality and standards of the FOPER MSc on an annual basis, utilising clear Action Plans and review of progress.
	6.4 Inclusion of the “student voice”	No		Student representatives should be included in the decision-making processes.
	6.5 Appeals	Yes		Establish rules for plagiarism.
	6.6 Ethics and equal opportunities	Yes		
	6.7 Staff development	Yes		Develop staff development programme to share good practice between teaching staff at all universities involved in the FOPER degree programme

Annex 1 Brief Biographical Details of the Peer Review Panel

Emeritus Professor Andrew H Cobb, (Chair and Chair of the EAALS Board)

Ingmire Lodge, Marthwaite, Sedbergh, Cumbria, LA10 5HW, UK.

Andrew Cobb was formally Dean of Academic Affairs and Director of Research at Harper Adams, the leading, specialist, land-based University in the UK, delivering higher education degree programmes in the fields of agriculture, land management and agricultural engineering. He is currently an independent Consultant, advising, assessing and auditing higher education in the UK and EU.

Andrew Cobb is an internationally recognised researcher and educator in the applied plant sciences, especially in relation to the post-harvest physiology of potatoes and the modes of action of agrochemicals. He also has extensive experience of teaching plant sciences to mature students and work-based learners via the delivery of Open University courses and Summer Schools.

He has been Chair or a member of quality assurance review and validation panels at several Universities and Colleges since 1987. He has been a Specialist Reviewer for Organismal Biosciences (1998-2000) and Institutional Auditor for universities since 2003 on behalf of the UK's Quality Assurance Agency (QAA). He recently participated in a QAA audit of the higher education provision of 18 UK Universities delivered in Singapore.

He was actively involved in the development of the European Accreditation Agency for the Life Sciences (EAALS) by participating with the working teams in the EU funded QUALITY project. He was Chair of the Peer Review Teams for the evaluation of the Erasmus Mundus Masters in European Forestry and International Master in Rural Development. He is Chair of the EAALS Board.

Dr Vincent Dollé – (Quality Assurance Expert)

CIHEAM-IAMM, Mediterranean Agronomic Institute of Montpellier, 3191 route de Mende, 34093 Montpellier, Cedex 5, France.

Vincent Dollé, engineer in Agronomics and PhD in Agronomic Sciences is an expert in international cooperation for rural and agri-food development and expert in quality process management on higher education.

Vincent Dollé is currently Director of the Mediterranean Agronomic Institute of Montpellier (MAIM – www.iamm.fr), an Institute from the International Centre for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies (CIHEAM), an inter-governmental body which provides high level education for rural development to executives from public and private sectors of the Mediterranean. CIHEAM-MAIM is certified ISO 9001 for the management of Masters of Science and continuous professional short term training.

Former Head of Quality for the International Cooperation Centre (CIRAD) and for the French Ministry of Higher Education and Research, he was involved in the implementation of quality process of major research and higher education public bodies.

At the head of the MAIM since 2005, he set up a system of quality management for educational processes in Master degree. The MAIM obtained the ISO 9001 certification for its trainings in 2008.

Vincent Dollé is founder member and president of the association for the promotion of quality in research and higher education (QuaRES – www.quares.fr) since 2006. He is also member of the Board of EAALS, European Accreditation Agency for the Life Sciences, since 2009.

Eva Ortvald Erichsen – (Student)

Nyborggade 11b, 12lejl-367, 2100 Kobenhavn, Denmark.

Eva Ortvald Erichsen is a MSc student in Forest and Nature Management at the University of Copenhagen where from she also holds her BSc in Nature Resources. Furthermore she is the head of the Forest Education Commission in IFSA (the International Forestry Students' Association). She has been a part of IFSA since 2007 and was in 2009-2010 a part of the IFSA board. The past two years she has mainly been involved with IFSA's work within the field of forest education. Along with the work in IFSA she has also been a student representative in the Euroleague for Life Sciences for the University of Copenhagen for four years, ending last fall. She has been introduced to different ways of teaching through a stay as an exchange student at the University of British Columbia, Canada

Dr Simon Heath – (EAALS Executive Secretary)

46 Tour des Caves, 34120 Tourbes, France.

Dr Simon Heath is an independent Consultant working to develop a European dimension in teaching and learning in higher education in disciplines relating to the life sciences and the rural environment. He received his PhD from the University of Reading, UK. He has been working with the Association for European Life Science Universities (ICA) since 1998. Currently he is the part-time Secretary General of ICA. He led the development of the European Accreditation Agency for the Life Sciences (EAALS) which has a focus on the accreditation of European international degree programmes. He acts as the Executive Secretary of EAALS.

Formerly he was a senior lecturer in the Department of Agriculture and Director of the Centre for Computer Based Learning in Land Use and Environmental Sciences (CLUES) at the University of Aberdeen where he holds an Honorary position.

Professor Dr Birger Solberg – (Subject Specialist, Forest Economics)

Department of Ecology and Natural Resource Management, Norwegian University of Life Sciences (UMB), P.O.Box 5044, 1432 As, Norway.

Birger Solberg is currently full professor in forest economics at the Norwegian University of Life Sciences. He has been Research director in forest economics at the Norwegian Forest Research Institute, member of IUFRO's Executive Board, and Director General of the European Forest Institute, Finland. He has been a review editor of IPCC's Third Assessment Report and a lead author of IPCC's special report on LULUCF. He has published extensively on forest sector modelling related to international forest policy issues like biodiversity, climate change, illegal logging and trade policies. He has participated as leader of the forest sector modelling part in the EU-financed projects "Tools for sustainability impact assessment of the forestry-wood chain"- EFORWOOD (EU project 618128-2, 2005-2009) and "Methods and tools for integrated sustainability assessment" – MATISSE (EU-project 004059-2-IP, 2004-2008). Since 2005 he has been leader of the Forest Sector Model research group of IUFRO.

Professor Dr Michael Suda – (Subject Specialist, Forest Policy)

Wirtschaftswissenschaftliche Fakultät, Technische Universität München (TUM), Hans-Carl-von-Carlowitz Platz, D-85354 Freising, Germany

Dr Michael Suda has studied forest science in Munich. He is the head of the Chair of Forest- and Environmental Policy at the Technische Universität in Munich. He is member of the School of Management and the School of Forestry and Resource - Management.

The chair of Forest- and Environmental Policy is working on 4 main topics:

- Forest Policy – forest owners, extension, implementations studies, institutions
- Environmental Communication
- Natural Hazards
- Governance

He is teaching in several study programmes like forestry, environmental engineering, landscape planning, sustainable resource management, agriculture.

Annex 2 Timetable of the Review

Monday 3 rd October	0900	Private meeting of the Peer Review Team at Hotel Sumadija
	1900	Informal meeting over dinner with the FOPER MSc Programme Management Team and other contributors to the programme at the Hotel Sumadija
Tuesday 4 th October	0900	Formal meeting with the FOPER MSc Programme Management Team at the Faculty of forestry, University of Belgrade
	1045	Private meeting of the Peer Review Team
	1100	Meeting with persons responsible for the internal quality assurance of the programme
	1200	Informal meeting with twelve FOPER MSc students in two groups (3 from FOPER 1 and 9 from FOPER 2), over a sandwich lunch
	1330	Meeting with non-academic support staff representing library and IT facilities
	1445	Meeting with academic staff, including international professors, contributing to the programme who were not part of the Programme Management Team
	1530	Private meeting of the Peer Review Team
Wednesday 5 th October	1600	Final meeting with the FOPER MSc Programme Coordinating Team
	0900	Private meeting of the Peer Review Team to finalise the overall findings and outcomes of the Review
	1200	Meeting with an International Professor (Dr, Gerard Buttoud) contributing the Programme
	1400	Meeting with FOPER MSc Programme Coordinating Team to provide initial oral feedback on the findings of the Review

Annex 3 Questions to students

1. Why have you come to this degree programme and/or country?
2. Was the background information sent to you before arrival about the degree programme and the university both accurate and helpful?
3. Was the induction process helpful?
4. Has the course lived up to your expectations?
5. Did your previous knowledge, understanding and skills allow you to follow this degree programme?
6. Is the course delivery and workload acceptable?
7. Is the balance between lectures, seminars and self learning appropriate?
8. Do you know how you are assessed?
9. What teaching methods are used?
10. How do you rate the staff both academically and for personal support?
11. What do you do if you have a problem, academic or pastoral?
12. How can the degree programme be improved? What have been the best 3 aspects and the worst 3 aspects?
13. Would you recommend this course to others?
14. How do you manage financially?

Annex 4 Responses by the students

1. Why have you come to this degree programme and/or country?

The students were attracted by the international aspects of the degree programme and that it is taught in English. It is a unique master programme for the region.

2. Was the background information sent to you before arrival about the degree programme and the university both accurate and helpful?

The students found out about the FOPER Master programme by word of mouth, from staff, their employers and from existing students. FOPER students were the main promoters of the FOPER degree programme. Some students had problems in the need to get documents translated for enrolment purposes.

Information received was accurate and helpful, especially the Introduction to Forestry documents issued by the European Forestry Institute.

3. Was the induction process helpful?

Yes. They were welcomed and the transfer between the teaching faculties was satisfactory.

Students from Albania had problems with language. They noted that conversations were in local languages rather than in English, as were all official forms

4. Has the course lived up to your expectations?

Yes. There was a steep learning curve in adapting to scientific and technical English and the intensive approach to teaching. One student commented that several courses had exceeded his expectations.

5. Did your previous knowledge, understanding and skills allow you to follow this degree programme?

Yes, The need for an understanding of English, and especially scientific English was challenging to some candidates.

6. Is the course delivery and workload acceptable

Yes. One issue for the students was the time taken to adjust to the styles and English delivery and dialect of the international staff. They had adjusted normally within a day.

Some students in FOPER 1 commented that the examination timetable had occasionally been very demanding. In response the Programme Coordinating Team had allowed an examination to be delayed, so permitting more time for preparation.

7. Is the balance between lectures, seminars and self learning appropriate?

Yes. Students considered there was a good balance between lectures and group work. They particularly valued the local and regional case studies. The students liked the block-teaching approach. They noted some overlap between courses but this was not considered to be a problem, more an opportunity to examine the same topic from a different perspective.

8. Do you know how you are assessed?

Yes. Most assessments are based on in-class presentations rather than from written assignments. Candidates were usually informed directly from the international staff on what was expected of them in their assessments. Students received feedback on their work, but were not always certain of the basis for the marks achieved.

9. What teaching methods are used?

A lot of emphasis was placed on teamwork and presentations. This approach was valued by the students.

10. How do you rate the staff both academically and for personal support?

Students commented on the knowledge and expertise of the international staff. They had all been helpful and responsive to student comments. The Programme Coordinators were particularly helpful in resolving personal issues.

11. What do you do if you have a problem, academic or pastoral?

The “soft tutors” and the Programme Coordinators were most helpful on an informal basis. They met formally with their tutors every three months to review and discuss their Personal Development Plans. The students also acknowledged support from Professor Shannon, the FOPER Project Coordinator.

12. How can the degree programme be improved? What have been the best 3 aspects and the worst 3 aspects?

Best aspects

The students were pleased that they had the opportunity to present their work at conferences, both locally and abroad, and were financially supported to do so. They also acknowledged opportunities for internships, over short periods.

Worst aspects

The FOPER Master Programme could be improved by better advertising. Students also commented that the language used by the teaching faculty in documents relating to registration and examination were in a language often foreign to them and not in English. A perceived need for more practical case studies rather than courses focussing on theoretical frameworks.

13. Would you recommend this course to others?

Yes. FOPER has changed our lives.

14. How do you manage financially?

The 450 euro scholarship per month was considered generous.