

Peer Review Report and Accreditation
Decision for the
Erasmus Mundus International Master of
Science in Rural Development (IMRD)

EAALS Secretariat
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12 February 2010

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A Introduction

A peer review of the IMRD degree programme was undertaken during the academic year 2007/08. The review followed the standard procedure of the preparation of the Self Assessment Report by the degree programme management team, followed by a review and visitation by the Peer Review Team and concluded with the presentation of the Peer Review Report.

The Peer Review Team, consisting of Professor Andrew Cobb (Chairman), Professor Vincent Dollé (Quality Assurance Expert), Mr Michal Przyborski (Student Member), Mr Guy Garrod (Subject Specialist) and Dr Simon Heath (Secretary), see Annex 3 for further details, visited Humboldt University on 14 – 17th May 2008, for discussions with staff and students relating to the Self Evaluation Report and the EAALS Framework. The Peer Review Team presented their Report with recommendations for enhancement on August 18 2008. The Peer Review Report is presented in Section C.

The IMRD Management Team responded to these recommendations for enhancement by submitting a report to the EAALS Board on November 19 2009 setting out how the issues for enhancement had been addressed. The EAALS Board met on 27 November 2009 to consider the enhancements that had been made to the IMRD degree programme. The EAALS Board's review of the enhancements is set out in Section D.

B The EAALS Board's decision regarding the application for accreditation of the IMRD degree programme

The EAALS Board accredits the IMRD degree programme and awards the degree programme the EAALS Label. Application for re-accreditation should be undertaken in the academic year 2012/13 and the necessary steps undertaken during that year. If no application for re-accreditation is made the EAALS Label will be withdrawn on August 1 2013.

Signed

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C Peer Review Report (18 August 2008)

1. Introduction

The International Master of Science in Rural Development is a two-year programme funded by the EU Erasmus Mundus initiative to a consortium of four European Universities widely recognised for their expertise in Rural Development education and research. These are the University of Ghent (Belgium, Co-ordinating University), Agrocampus Rennes (France), Humboldt University, Berlin (Germany), and the University of Cordoba (Spain). In addition, there are participating universities in the Netherlands (Wageningen), Italy (Pisa), Slovakia (Nitra) and China (Rural Development Institute in Beijing, Nanjing Agricultural University and Shan Dong Agricultural University). The University of Ghent has international expertise in Agricultural Economics and Food Economics for developing countries. Humboldt University in Berlin has international programmes in Rural Governance of Natural Resources, Institutional Analysis of Rural Change, International Agrarian and Political Issues, Ecological Problems and Environmental Policies, Institutional Change and Agricultural Development. The University of Cordoba in Spain has expertise in Territorial Rural Development, Processes and Technologies for Sustainable Rural Development and Integrated Approaches to Traditional Agriculture. Agrocampus Rennes in France specialises in Methodology for Rural Development, Production Systems and Sustainable Development, Sustainability and Multifunctionality of Agriculture, Organic Farming and the Participative Management of Rural Areas. Nitra University of Slovakia specialises in Public Administration and Regional Development. Pisa University in Italy has expertise in Communication and Sustainable Rural Development and Change Processes in Rural Areas. Wageningen University in the Netherlands enjoys an international reputation in Rural Sociology. Each partner has strong European and international links and networks in Rural Development teaching and research.

The International Master of Science in Rural Development (IMRD) programme started in 2004 and over 470 students, representing 70 countries, have since been offered places. Currently, there are twenty Erasmus Mundus scholarships available for non-EU candidates and a small number of students are self-funded or receive other national grants. Once enrolled, students follow their first and second semester at two of the core partner universities (Ghent, Humboldt, Rennes and Cordoba). The first semester consists of basic training modules with elements from five compulsory components, whilst the second begins the specialisation process. The first year is then followed by a compulsory practical-based case-study lasting for one month at either Nitra or Pisa for non-EU students, or in China for the EU students.

During the second year, the students specialise in their field of interest at the partner university of their choice, firstly completing 20 ECTS of specialist courses followed by the 30 ECTS research thesis. There is normally no further student mobility in the second year of the programme. Students therefore visit at least three universities during the programme and have the opportunity to become acquainted with the realities of studying and living in Europe. On completion of the programme, a joint diploma is issued by the four core university partners, recognising the other universities, where appropriate.

The main aim of the IMRD programme is to train specialists in integrated rural development, focussed on socio-economic and institutional aspects, not only from the European Union but also from developed, developing and transition countries outside the European Union.

2. Methodology

The QUALITY project¹ seeks to develop, test and evaluate quality benchmarks and indicators for quality assurance of international Master degree programmes in Europe. The project team have proposed a Framework for the Quality Assessment of International Master Degree Programmes for the Applied Life Sciences and the Rural Environment, and aim to establish a European Accreditation Agency for Higher Education in the Life Sciences (EAALS). The Programme Coordinator of the IMRD volunteered to participate in a quality assurance review based on the EAALS Framework. The ICA Secretary-General provided Guidance Notes and the EAALS Framework Document to the Programme Coordinator, requesting a Self Evaluation Report as a critical assessment of the programme, and proposing a timetable for the visit of a Peer Review Team.

The Framework Document consists of 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 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 a set of verifiers were used by the Review Team in order to assess whether there was evidence to show that each benchmark had been achieved. The verifiers were not disclosed to the Programme Management Team.

The Peer Review Team, consisting of Professor Dr. Andrew Cobb (Chairman), Professor Vincent Dollé (Quality Assurance Expert), Mr Michal Przyborski (Student Member), Mr. Guy Garrod (Subject Specialist) and Dr. Simon Heath (Secretary), see Annex 3 for further details, visited Humboldt University on 14 – 17th May 2008, for discussions with staff and students relating to the Self Evaluation Report and the EAALS Framework. The Review Team agreed and signed a Confidentiality Agreement with the partner universities and ICA 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.

The format of the Review was as follows (Annex 4). The Review Team met privately in their hotel on the afternoon of 14th May to prepare for the Review. In particular, they highlighted the evidence for the verification of each benchmark statement following their prior analysis of the Self Evaluation Report, and agreed questions to be asked in the meetings with staff and students the following day. During the evening, they met with members of the Management Team for an informal buffet at a local restaurant. On arrival at Humboldt University the following morning (15th May), they had a courtesy meeting with the Dean of the Faculty of Agriculture and Horticulture (Professor Dr. Otto Kaufmann). This was followed by a 90 minute meeting with the IMRD Programme Management Team, with the following in attendance, Professor Dr. Guido Van Huylenbroek (Ghent), Professor Dr. Konrad Hagedorn (Humboldt), Professor Dr. Francesco Di Iacovo (Pisa), Professor Dr. Jan Schakel (Wageningen), Ms. M. D. Garrido Garcia (Cordoba) and Ms. C. Heuze (Rennes). After a brief private meeting of the Review Team there followed a 60 minute meeting with Ms. C. Heuze, Ms. C. Leladier (both from Rennes), Ms. M.D. Garrido Garcia, Mr. G. Stassyns and Ms. E. Vandeveld (both from Ghent), Mr. U. Kummerow, Ms. B. Keitz and Ms. R. Judis (all from Humboldt), Ms. L. Drenkova (Nitra) and Ms. P. Scarpellini (Pisa) focussed to the quality assurance aspects of the programme.

Over lunch, the Review Team met a total of twelve students, seven studying their first year and five in the second year. The responses noted from a set of questions, listed in Annex 1, are detailed in Annex 2. 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. It should be noted, however, that the Review Team was unable to

¹ QUALITY Project (2006-2008): Quality Assurance and Accreditation of international Master degree programmes in life sciences and environment. European Commission – DG Education and Culture, Agreement No 2006 – 1719 / 001 -005 SO2 81AWB the

gather views of alumni and who could therefore provide a perspective on their experience with the Masters thesis and subsequent employability.

After lunch, the Review Team had a meeting with tutors and student support staff who were themselves not academic staff (Ms. C. Heuze , Ms .C. Lelaidier , Ms. M.D. Garrido Garcia , Mr. G. Stassyns , Ms. E. Vandevelde, Mr. N. Zwagerman and Mr. O. Schmidt (both from Humboldt), Ms. R. Judis , Ms. L. Drenkova and Ms. P. Scarpellini , followed by a meeting with academic staff contributing to the programme but not part of the Management Team , Professor Dr. M. D’Haese and Professor Dr. L.D’Haese (both Ghent) , Professor Dr. M. G. Chandrakanth (Visiting Scholar , University of Agricultural Sciences , Bangalore , India) , Professor Dr. Juan Manuel Serradilla (Cordoba) , Dr. M Padmanabhan , Professor Dr. M . Kirschke , Professor Dr. M .Hanish and Professor Dr. W. Bokelmann (all Humboldt) and Professor Dr. D. Hulska (Nitra). The final meeting of the day was an opportunity to address any remaining or outstanding issues with members of the Management Team.

On the morning of 16th May, the Review Team met in private to review their observations, agree items of good practice and recommendations for further attention by the Management Team and agree a final outcome. This was reported to the full IMRD Management Team and Administrators after lunch. Finally, the Review Team had a meeting with the Evaluation Panel, before departing from Humboldt University.

The Review Team conveyed their sincere thanks to the Programme Management Team, Local and central Coordinators and Administrators for their documentation, including the Self Evaluation Report and annexes, their time allocated to the meetings and their excellent organisation of the visit. They were also asked to thank all participants for their frank and constructive comments in the discussions.

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

3. Responses to the general and specific indicators

The Peer Review Team reviewed the Self Evaluation Report against the General and Specific Indicators for each of the Benchmarks in the EAALS Quality Assurance Framework. In doing so, they identified issues which required further clarification before a decision could be made as to whether the indicators could be verified. This section addresses these issues by identifying the questions for each benchmark which the Review Team asked during their meetings with the different groups and a summary evaluation of each benchmark. Table 1 reports the overall summary of the verification of each benchmark, good practice and recommendations for enhancement.

The Review Team requested clarification on the terms and roles of the “core” and “satellite” partners. They were informed that the distinction was due to the EU Lifelong Learning Programme regulations and the legal positions of the partner institutions when the IMRD programme was established in 2004. Core partners were able to award joint degrees, whilst the satellite partners were not.

1.1 Mission Statement

The programme mission is clearly presented in the Self Evaluation Report and was further described by the Management Team. The objective of the IMRD programme is sustainable rural development based on strong links with society, integrating social sciences with applied agronomic and environmental sciences. The programme was international in outlook and the Management Team outlined their plans to involve additional non-EU Universities in future, in Australia (Queensland), South Africa (Pretoria) and the USA (Florida).

1.2 Needs of Stakeholders: How do you know that the programme is needed?

Whilst there are strong academic networks based on active research programmes working with stakeholders in transition and developing countries, none were formally consulted when the IMRD programme was established in 2004 due to time constraints. There is currently no formal contact with and representation of stakeholders. The Management Team reported that a new administrator had now been appointed in Ghent to follow up this issue and to widely consult with stakeholders.

1.3 Aims and learning outcomes: Are you familiar with the Dublin Descriptors?

Some members of the Management Team expressed familiarity with these descriptors which were in use at their universities. The Review Team, however, noted that the Self Evaluation Report had listed programme objectives and aspirations, rather than the specific inclusion of and reference to the descriptors. In particular, there was no explicit reference to expectations of communication skills, research and self-directed study. Whilst details of the course catalogue were available on the internet, there was a requirement for the learning outcomes of each course/module to explicitly list what a student was expected to be able to explain, achieve or do having studied the course/module. The teaching and learning and assessment strategies could then be related to specific learning outcomes.

The course catalogue contained individual module descriptors. An example was provided for Farm Management which, although a valuable description of the course, lacked learning outcomes and how they were individually addressed in the learning and teaching strategy and how they were assessed. The Review Team advised the management team that the production of a Course Handbook containing the above information, *inter alia*, was regarded as good practice in the sector.

2.1 Curriculum Planning: How did you arrive at the compulsory five modules chosen in the first year of study? How does a student decide on the modules to be followed in the first year?

These modules constitute the basic training that underpins the IMRD programme, providing an insight into applied quantitative and qualitative research methods, agronomy and environmental sciences, social sciences applied to rural development, rural development and planning, and the European dimension to the discipline.

Students are required to take at least five credits in each of the five disciplines. The emphasis between the five depends on the previous experience of the student and their interests. This flexibility is attractive to the students. The students commented that there was some overlap in module content, but this was minor and seen by them as enriching rather than repetitive.

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. Some universities employ a mix of lectures and student-centred learning, whilst others are more theoretically based using conventional lectures. It was acknowledged that experience-based, self-learning and problem-solving approaches also feature in the delivery of the programme. The case-studies in Beijing, Nitra and Pisa were more practically-based teamwork approaches to relevant issues influencing rural development.

Discussions with both academic staff and students revealed that although the curriculum was presented in English in Ghent, Humboldt and Wageningen, it was only delivered in Spanish in Cordoba and in French in Rennes. Some students felt disadvantaged by this if they lacked these additional languages and did not have the time nor the inclination to learn them. They expressed the opinion that they would have liked to have studied at these universities had English been the preferred language. This observation may also contribute to the reason why relatively few IMRD students studied at these locations. Representatives from Cordoba and Rennes recognised this issue and informed the Review Team of their intention to deliver 20% of the curriculum in English within the next two years.

The issue of overlap of module content is monitored by both the local and central secretariat checking the study track of each student.

Inter-cultural elements are included in the curriculum. It was noted that ten classes are offered by the partner universities, and strongly recommended, although on a voluntary basis.

2.3 Assessment of Learning Outcomes: Is there a common assessment strategy? Are students clear and familiar with the assessment process?

IMRD students follow modules taught with local students at each partner university. Their work is marked using the assessment process in operation at that university, converted to ECTS and then to a Ghent scale. This has created considerable confusion and misunderstanding with the students. Indeed, the Review Team were informed of several apparent inconsistencies with the conversion process in which the students believed that they had been disadvantaged. The programme Management Team was aware of this ongoing issue and is implementing a uniform, consistent and transparent process of assessment for the 2007/8 academic year.

This already is the case with the assessment of the Master's thesis, where there exists a common assessment scale and the use of an external examiner to provide an independent view of the process.

2.4 Guidance in the Learning Process: Are students given guidance of their progress on the programme? How do you ensure the quality of the guidance across the partner universities?

Local guidance is offered at each partner institution and coordinated by the central team in Ghent. Consistency is provided by the presence of student representatives on the Management Team, ensuring that the student experience is considered appropriately.

The Management Team meets three or four times each year for two or three days with a different partner university acting as host. The team is supported by the secretariat based in Ghent. The agenda of each meeting follows standard items, with variations at different times of year and the minutes are published on the internet for access to both staff and students.

3.1 Staffing:

Although full curricula vitarum were not available to the Review Team, tabulated information in the Self Evaluation Report demonstrated that the teaching staff was suitably qualified, invariably at PhD level, and the Expert Panel member was able to confirm that they had published relevant papers and articles in the international press. There was evidence of staff exchanges between the partner universities and joint research underpinning the programme. There were also three Visiting Scholars each year of international standing, funded for three-month periods by the Erasmus Mundus scheme.

3.2 Facilities: Does the availability of facilities affect student choice of study track?

The Review Team was unable to comment about specific facilities in the partner universities and a lack of time prevented a tour at Humboldt. Discussions with staff and students revealed that appropriate library and electronic facilities were available. Choice of study track seemed to be influenced more by academic options than by available facilities.

3.3 Resource Allocation: Are the resources adequate to deliver the programme?

Yes. The Programme Coordinator and four Administrators (three full-time) with experience of international student issues are provided from core funding. Half of the tuition fees paid by students are allocated to each partner university, according to student numbers, and partly used to fund local administrative staff.

Non-EU students receiving Erasmus Mundus scholarships are well funded. The scholarship adequately covers all the costs of the programme and individual mobility. Conversely, EU students lack such funding and have to rely on private funding or apply for local scholarships.

3.4 Interactions with External Organisations:

Whilst academic staff enjoy academic collaborations with their counterparts in many international universities and operate exchange arrangements, there are only occasional contacts with industry and non-governmental organisations, largely on a research basis. The Management Team has appointed an additional coordinator for external relations and hopes to strengthen these contacts in the future, especially to establish opportunities for internships and graduate employment.

4.1 Student Progression from Application to Graduation: How do you identify students at risk?

The Self Evaluation Report describes in detail the operational procedures used for applications to the IMRD programme, the selection of students and how their progress is monitored. The Review Team noted that effective local and central procedures are in place to monitor student progression. The marks of individual students are discussed at each Management Team meeting and progress is noted and acted upon. Thus local administrators discuss performance with each student and, in the case of failure or under-achievement, warnings are issued, which may result in the discontinuation of the scholarship if no improvement is noted after two semesters. These funds are then redistributed to students on the reserve list or to those with financial difficulties, in agreement with EACEA rules and following their official authorisation. Extenuating circumstances are fully taken into account in monitoring student progress.

4.2 Completion Rates: Do you consider the current completion rates a problem?

Whilst noting that only two cohorts had graduated to date, the Review Panel noted high completion rates. Indeed, compared to students co-attending national courses, the IMRD cohorts presented higher average marks and overall success rates. The Management Team were of the view that this was primarily due to the high standards and criteria used for student selection. They commented that those receiving the lowest marks in the evaluative application were those who performed the weakest on the programme. The previous professional experience of some students was also considered to influence the completion rate.

4.3 Employability: Are you tracking the employment prospects of alumni?

From the lack of evidence provided both in the Self Evaluation Report and in meetings, it was clear that there was no current tracking of IMRD graduates. The Review Team were informed that 44% of graduates return to their country of origin, 47% are located outside their home country and the whereabouts of the remaining 9% is not known. Whilst at least seven of the thirty seven graduates to date had started PhD programmes at the partner universities and an undisclosed number at other universities, employment opportunities were not recorded. The Review Team was informed that the Management Team had plans to monitor the employability of alumni in the future and would establish a database of job prospects.

At the present time, after only two cohorts, there was no comparative assessment or indication of the progress nor employability of EU versus non-EU students. A systematic evaluation was to be initiated.

5.1 Pre-induction and Selection Arrangements? Do language skills, or a lack of them, restrict student choice?

Initial selection of students is achieved collectively by the Management Team and each partner university receives information on each candidate. The selection process is transparent according to agreed criteria and the best students are offered places via the Coordinating Institution.

The Review Panel noted that there had been 1023 applicants to date, of whom 470 had been offered places, with an enrolment of 30-40 each year. Applications are received from a wide range of countries and continents. An additional call for EU applicants is issued though the number remains low, most likely due to financial reasons and specifically a lack of dedicated scholarships.

Whilst the programme Management Team aims to allocate an equal number of students to each of the four core universities, the statistics reveal an overwhelming bias towards Ghent and Humboldt rather than to Cordoba and Rennes. This appears to result from the need to have competent language skills in Spanish or French, in order to study at Cordoba or Rennes, respectively. It was noted in meetings that staff at both Cordoba and Rennes are planning to present 20% of their programmes in English within the next two years. It is anticipated that this will result in a more equal distribution of IMRD students amongst the four core universities in future.

A systematic analysis of student performance according to continent of origin has not yet been carried out. Such information may be of use to the Programme Team in monitoring student progress and their support needs.

5.2 Administrative Support: How are administrative activities within the consortium managed?

The Programme Coordinator and Central Administrators are based in Ghent and provide the academic and administrative foci for the programme. They are in regular contact with the local coordinators in each partner university who help with visas and local arrangements. Since students arrive for their first semester at different partner institutions, it has been difficult to provide consistent and relevant information to all students at all sites. The Management Team is considering the resolution of this problem by introducing a common location for semester one for all students.

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

IMRD students are welcomed at each university by the local secretariat. Cultural events were mostly organised by the students themselves. Some inter-cultural activities were organised by academic staff who invited both local and IMRD students to join in. The students noted that there were non-obligatory lectures on local history and culture offered to all foreign students (not specifically for IMRD students) at both Cordoba and Ghent. These activities would be strengthened if all students were to start their studies at a common location. This would also reinforce a common IMRD identity.

Students receive a steady flow of detailed information regarding all aspects of the programme. Whilst there is no dedicated IMRD Course Handbook, the website www.imrd.ugent.be provides useful information for students prior to their arrival.

5.4 Welfare Support Services: Are additional services provided for mobile international students?

The Erasmus Mundus programme offers to all scholarship holders medical insurance, accident cover and assistance in cases of lost documentation, such as travel tickets and passport. Students are, however, advised to take out additional cover for theft and personal. Scholarships are paid monthly into Euro accounts on proof of appropriate attendance and performance on the programme.

Administrative support teams and academic tutors in each partner university are also available to resolve personal and academic problems, as and when they occur. Guidance is given on personal safety and advice on local situations to avoid.

5.5 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. It is the responsibility of the student representatives to organise local excursions and social activities.

5.6 Financial Information and Support: Is financial advice and support provided for international students?

Once selected, prospective students are given detailed information relating to fees, living costs and scholarships available. The students reported that their annual Erasmus Mundus allowance of €21,000 provided sufficient funds to meet all costs and personal mobility whilst studying. Indeed, some students noted that this sum was particularly generous and one former student had saved from her scholarship to support her first year PhD programme. On the other hand, EU students

reported personal financial difficulties and the need to apply for national grants to support their studies. In cases of hardship, students can follow an established procedure enabling them to apply for a partial waiver of tuition fees or student fees.

6.1 Institutional Environment:

The Self Evaluation Report describes how the IMRD diploma is issued and its production coordinated amongst the partner universities.

6.2 Decision-making Process: What processes are in place for the division of responsibilities amongst the Management Team?

The Rector of each partner university has signed a contract for the IMRD programme, delegating authority for decision-making to the Programme Management Team. This Committee meets formally four times each year and members remain in regular contact via telephone and email. The Team consists of at least one member from each university with both management and quality assurance responsibilities. Student representatives are also in attendance. Amendments are adopted when a proposal is unanimously carried. Meetings focus on curriculum issues, student selection and recruitment, preference for the location of the second year, course evaluation, student feedback and note the progress of the new and continuing cohorts. Other topics are discussed as and when necessary, with assessment as a recurring theme. Minutes, containing timed action plans, are circulated widely for discussion.

The Review Team was not aware of formal Terms of Reference for the duties and operation of the Programme Management Team.

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, whilst each partner university worked to its own systems and practice of quality assurance, there were no written guidelines regarding the IMRD programme for use by the Management Team. One core partner (Rennes) is certified to ISO standards for all its activities, but this had no impact on the IMRD programme. Instead, a pragmatic approach was used by the team resolving issues on an *ad hoc*, informal basis. The Review Team expressed concern that there were no formal guidelines in place, nor agreed and timed Action Plans, apart from the minutes of the previous meeting of the Management Board.

Furthermore, whilst it was clear that students provided feedback on both individual courses and their overall views of the programme, there was no evidence of an Annual Monitoring Report with timed Action Plans and indications of personal responsibility for achieving the required action. There was little documented evidence of specific actions taken to improve custom and practice. Feedback is clearly collected from students, but in an *ad hoc* manner. This is discussed by the Management Board in the presence of the student representatives and evidence of corrective action is noted in the minutes.

Without the necessary formal and documented Annual Reports, Action Plans and cohort analysis, it was difficult for the Panel to ascertain the extent of ongoing enhancement of the programme. They recognised that this process was probably taking place, but on an informal and *ad hoc* basis.

6.4 Inclusion of the Student Voice: Are students involved in the decision-making processes of the programme?

Yes. Elected local student representatives are members of the Management Team and 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 able to inform and influence the decision-making process via a dedicated agenda item at each meeting. Whilst there does not appear to be a formal Course Committee attended by both staff and students, the students

themselves expressed their general satisfaction with the programme in questionnaires and in discussion with the Review Team.

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 local procedures. The Management Team does not intervene in local issues where the student is bound by the procedures of the institution where a course was delivered. Appeals are therefore considered according to national arrangements.

Students are able to appeal against their overall results to the central IMRD coordinating secretariat. General complaints are resolved by the Programme Coordinator. It is the intention that all disagreements shall be dealt with in a conciliatory manner by the Programme Coordinator, with a final and binding decision to be made by the Management Team.

Hitherto, only four minor appeals have been lodged, in which three cases involved the correction of mistakes and the fourth followed a personal complaint that was subsequently withdrawn.

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

The Review Team considered that the programme Management Team may wish to review how they ensure that appropriate and equivalent standards and quality are maintained and sustained across the consortium for students on the IMRD programme.

6.6. Ethics/Equal Opportunities: Any problems noted and how have you dealt with them? Is research ethics included in the curriculum?

Each partner university has written guidelines on equal opportunities, enshrining the rights of each student. Enrolment statistics show an equal division of students according to gender. IMRD applies positive discrimination towards students from least developed countries, female students and disabled persons.

There was no evidence of any recorded equal opportunity issues with the IMRD programme mentioned to the Review Team.

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?

No. Discussions revealed that staff development issues have taken low priority in the development of the programme. The Review Team was informed that there was no IMRD policy on pedagogy and staff development for academic staff contributing to the programme. There was no evidence of staff meetings or conferences to share pedagogic approaches and good practice, based on their experience of teaching on the programme. Intercultural training for staff and students was considered to be unnecessary, given the international activities of the academic staff involved in the programme. On the other hand, there was evidence of local staff training and development at Humboldt and Wageningen, though on a voluntary basis.

4. Outcomes of the Review

4.1 General Observations

The Self Evaluation 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 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 often provided in annexes to the report and at the IMRD website, www.imrd.ugent.be.

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

The 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. Indeed, there was evidence of enhancement in the wish of the Management Team to reflect, improve and refocus the IMRD programme.

Inevitably, the Review Team focused its questions to the Programme Coordinator and Administrators, mainly located in Ghent and Berlin. It should be noted, however, that sufficient comments and observations were provided by the other university members present to allow for a fair overview of the partnership strengths and weaknesses. In addition, the students were able to reflect and comment about all the partner universities and their case studies in China, Slovakia and Italy. It may be helpful for a future review visit to be held at another of the partner universities.

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 Review Team expressed Broad Confidence in the quality and standards of the International Master in Rural Development, as viewed from an international perspective. They identified the following features of good practice and recommendations for further consideration.

4.2 Good Practice

The IMRD Programme Management Team were commended on their willingness to change and adapt to prevailing good practice in the sector and to resolve outstanding course issues, including, for example, the current issue to change from a dynamic to a fixed process of marks conversion.

The Review Team saw twelve and read nine Master theses. They were impressed by the high 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. There was clear evidence of synthesis and appropriate conclusions, addressing practical policies, informing rural policy both nationally and internationally. Indeed, the Review Team was not surprised to discover that perhaps as many as one third of the graduates had registered for PhD, both at the partner universities and elsewhere.

Students are well supported by an effective local and central administration and taught by well qualified and committed staff who are research-active. The use of Erasmus Mundus-funded visiting scholars of international expertise and status is also highly commended.

It was evident to the Review Team that there were clear and effective procedures for managing the application and selection process. This contributes positively to the high rates of student completions and achievement.

Students are included at all stages in the decision-making process. Their opinions are listened to by the IMRD Management Team and can effect positive change.

The IMRD Programme is delivered using a range of teaching methods, including formal lectures, practical classes and workshops, indicating an appropriate balance of theory and content. The value of the practical case-studies in Beijing, Nitra and Pisa was highlighted by the students.

4.3 Recommendations for Enhancement

Whilst the Review Team recognised that the staff teaching on the IMRD Programme had well established personal and research networks, they considered that there is a need to formally consult both national and international stakeholders on the evaluation and future development of the programme. This would also ensure that future developments meet the career aspirations and employment opportunities of students.

In keeping with existing good practice in the European higher education sector, the Programme Management Team is encouraged to produce an IMRD Handbook as a one-stop-source of key

information about the programme. 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 Review Team noted that a range of formal and informal processes exist, but could find no evidence of a formalised, documented quality assurance process dedicated to the IMRD Programme. It is suggested that a formalised, programme-wide quality assurance strategy should be introduced at the earliest opportunity. This strategy should provide explicit details of the assessment criteria, the monitoring and review processes to be adopted, and timed action plans for both modules/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 location.

The Review Team expressed concern that there was a lack of explicit learning outcomes in all course documentation. Thus, at both degree programme and module/course level, written descriptors should clearly state what students are expected to be able to know, demonstrate and communicate at the end of the specified course of study. Furthermore, both the teaching and learning and the assessment strategies need to indicate how they are addressing the learning outcomes. This learning outcome-driven approach will be essential for the success of any future external accreditation of the IMRD Programme.

Andrew Cobb (Chair) of the Peer Review Panel)

Vincent Dolle

Guy Garrod

Michal Przborski

Simon Heath (Secretary)

18 August 2008

Table 1: Summary of the Review Outcomes

Categories	Benchmarks	Evidence of Verification	Good Practice	Recommendations
1. Needs, Aims and Learning Outcomes	1.1 Mission Statement 1.2 Aims and Learning Outcomes 1.3 Needs of stakeholders	✓ X X		Introduce and embed learning outcomes in all course documentation. Seek formal input from stakeholders.
2. Educational Process	2.1 Curriculum planning 2.2 Teaching and learning 2.3 Assessment of learning outcomes Guidance in the learning Process	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓		Link teaching, learning and assessment methods to learning outcomes. Issue clear guidance to students on the conversion process. Develop a handbook of good practice.
3. Educational Resources and Partnership	Staffing Facilities Resource allocation Interactions with external organisations	✓ ✓ ✓ X	A well resourced and administered programme, taught by experts in the field, including visiting scholars.	Seek more scholarships for EU students. Improve links with stakeholders.
4. Student Progression	From application to graduation Completion rates	✓ ✓	Clear and effective processes for application and selection.	Reconsider languages of course delivery. Enhance recruitment of EU students.

Categories	Benchmarks	Evidence of Verification	Good Practice	Recommendations
	Employability	X		Offer careers advice and actively monitor alumni to gather data on employability.
5. Student Support	5.1 Pre-induction and selection Administrative support Induction arrangements Welfare support services Cultural and social needs Financial information and support	✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓ ✓	Effective selection process. Good local and central student support.	Students would benefit from starting at the same university. A comprehensive course handbook should formally document the support available.
6. Quality Management and Enhancement	Institutional Environment Decision-making Process Quality assurance and enhancement systems Inclusion of the “student voice” Appeals Ethics and equal	X ✓ X ✓ ✓ ✓	Students are included in all stages of the decision-making process.	Introduce formal Terms of Reference for the Programme Management Committee. Provide formal written guidelines to monitor and review quality and standards on an annual basis. Consider an introduction to research ethics. Establish rules for plagiarism. Introduce an IMRD staff

Categories	Benchmarks	Evidence of Verification	Good Practice	Recommendations
	opportunities 6.7 Staff development	X		development programme to underpin pedagogic developments and exchange good practice .

D Accreditation of the International Master in Rural Development (IMRD)

The EAALS Board at its meeting on 27 November 2009 considered the papers submitted by the IMRD Degree Management Team to address the points for enhancement identified in the Quality Assurance Peer Review Report dated May 2008. These point were:

- Whilst the Review Team recognised that the staff teaching on the IMRD Programme had well established personal and research networks, they considered that there is a need to formally consult both national and international stakeholders on the evaluation and future development of the programme. This would also ensure that future developments meet the career aspirations and employment opportunities of students.

Comment: The IMRD Management Team have formalized an Associated Partners Organisation (APO) with letters of Association received from a number of major international organisations as set out in the Addendum to the Final Report August 2008. It is noted that a biannual meeting will be held with representatives of these organisations to evaluate the IMRD programme in light of their expectations. The first meeting will take place in May 2010.

In addition it is noted that the IMRD Management Team have instigated the Strategic Advisory Board (SAB) which will involve a selection of representatives from the APO and two external academic representatives. The SAB will provide advice on issues relevant to the development of the course. The SAB will participate in the General Assembly of the IMRD degree programme. It is anticipated that the SAB will have an important role in the review and enhancement of the IMRD programme.

- In keeping with existing good practice in the European higher education sector, the Programme Management Team is encouraged to produce an IMRD Handbook as a one-stop-source of key information about the programme. 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.

Comment: The Board agreed that IMRD had now produced the required comprehensive Student Handbook 2009 – 2011 and a Scholar Handbook giving advice for prospective incoming students.

- The Review Team noted that a range of formal and informal processes exist, but could find no evidence of a formalised, documented quality assurance process dedicated to the IMRD Programme. It is suggested that a formalised, programme-wide quality assurance strategy should be introduced at the earliest opportunity. This strategy should provide explicit details of the assessment criteria, the monitoring and review processes to be adopted, and timed action plans for both modules/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 location.

Comment: It is noted that the IMRD Management Team has set up the Strategic Advisory Board (SAB) as an independent commission consisting of two external academic representatives and disciplinary specialists from the APO to continuously monitor the quality of the programme. We note the SAB will review the academic and non- academic aspects of the programme in 2010 and thereafter every two years. It is noted that the IMRD Management Team are evaluating an external quality assessment tool to assist in the evaluation of the IMRD programme. The development of the full range of internal IMRD evaluation questionnaires (Annexes 3.1 to 3.6) for students is acknowledged.

The development of a degree programme wide internal quality assurance process is welcomed rather than depending upon the individual national agencies reviews. This addresses the weakness identified in the 2008 review. However, what is not clearly stated is how the outcomes of the

student evaluations and the SAB review will be addressed and implemented through an action plan, monitoring and review and who will be responsible for this process. In a future review evidence should be provided to show the rigor of this internal quality assurance process.

- The Review Team expressed concern that there was a lack of explicit learning outcomes in all course documentation. Thus, at both degree programme and module/course level, written descriptors should clearly state what students are expected to be able to know, demonstrate and communicate at the end of the specified course of study. Furthermore, both the teaching and learning and the assessment strategies need to indicate how they are addressing the learning outcomes. This learning outcome-driven approach will be essential for the success of any future external accreditation of the IMRD Programme.

Comment: It is noted that the overall learning outcomes for the IMRD programme have now been incorporated in the Student handbook and have also been developed for the whole programme and on a course basis. We expect in a future review to see clearly how the assessment strategies address the learning outcomes.

The Board acknowledges that significant steps have been taken by the IMRD Management Team to address the issues for enhancement listed in the Peer Review Report of 2008 and accepts that issues have now been addressed satisfactorily.

Dr Simon B Heath

Executive Secretary to the EAALS Board

46 Tour des Caves

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France

27 November 2009

Annex 1 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 2 Summary of students' responses

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

Application was influenced by the international reputation of the IMRD programme and the experience of the partner universities in this discipline. The course also provides a varied programme and an opportunity for student mobility in Europe. The opportunity to undergo a case-study in China was an attractive feature for EU students.

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

All information sent prior to arrival and on the internet was comprehensive and helpful to the students. Students expressed satisfaction with the range of different courses on offer.

3. Was the induction process helpful?

Yes. They were met by local coordinators who were helpful. At one university students had received individual induction and advice on course choice. One student, however, had arrived late, due to visa problems and was told to find her own accommodation. Others had to report to the local police to resolve visa and immigration issues.

4. Has the course lived up to your expectations?

Generally, yes. There was concern expressed by EU students of a lack of scholarships for EU citizens. Erasmus Mundus students commented that there should be more scholarships available to support students in the IMRD programme.

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

Although coming from different educational, cultural and national backgrounds, the students have had sufficient skills and knowledge to progress with the programme. The starting level for some EU students was considered to be low, for others there was repetition from their Bachelor studies. Some students noted some overlap in module title and content. First year students were enthusiastic about the transparency of the programme. Everything was clear and had been well presented to them.

6 Is the course delivery and workload acceptable?

Students reported that they were busy in year one, as they had to learn how to study in a new environment. Year two workloads were acceptable. Students noted that the teaching methods were more lecture-based at Ghent, whilst there was more independent study whilst at Humboldt

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

Yes. Students noted differing teaching approaches at each university, which enriched their learning. Examples included the practical case-study in Pisa and a team-based approach in China. They reported a good balance between theory and practice-based teaching.

8. Do you know how you are assessed?

The process for assessments is clear at each location to the majority of students. The means by which local marks were converted to a central ECTS system, however, was unclear and a source of considerable confusion and concern. Thus, students who had been awarded a top mark in one partner university (eg 1 in Humboldt) was converted to an 18/20 in Ghent. It therefore appeared impossible to be awarded full marks and so students felt disadvantaged. Furthermore, the students stated that they were not informed nor understood the conversion process. It was possible to complain about individual grades but nobody had

done so. On the other hand, first year students at Ghent were familiar with the assessment process.

9. What teaching methods are used?

No response recorded

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

Staff were considered to be very friendly, supportive and helpful. The students considered that they could approach staff with their academic problems.

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

Both academic and administrative staff were effective and helpful. Tutors are accessible; student needs and opinions are listened to. They were satisfied with their representation on the Management Board and that their views were taken seriously. Non-academic problems were solved by local coordinators.

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

Best aspects

- Social, intercultural learning environment with an EU perspective.
- Course content.
- Generous Erasmus Mundus scholarships.
- Theoretical and practical coverage of IMRD.

Worst aspects

- Confusion with marks conversion.
- Lack of course presentation in English at Cordoba and Rennes. They felt disadvantaged that they were not able to access interesting courses because of a perceived language barrier. Insufficient time to learn new languages.
- Lack of careers advice.

13. Would you recommend this course to others?

Unanimously, yes.

14. How do you manage financially?

Fine, no specific financial problems were reported by non-EU students. Funding is adequate for those with Erasmus Mundus scholarships. Such generous funding should be offered to EU students.

Annex 3

The Review Panel

Chairman, Professor Dr. Andrew H. Cobb, Professor of Plant Science and Dean of Academic Affairs, Harper Adams University College, Newport, Shropshire, TF10 8NB, UK.

Quality Assurance Expert, Professor Dr. Vincent Dollé, Directeur du CIHEAM-IAMM, 3191 route de Mende, 34093 Montpellier, Cedex 5, France.

Subject Specialist, Mr Guy Garrod, Reader in Environmental Economics, School of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, University of Newcastle, Newcastle-upon Tyne , NE1 7RU, UK.

Student, Mr. Michal Przyborski , Vice-President of the International Association of Students in Agriculture and Related Sciences (IAAS), Kasteelpark Arenberg 20, B-3001 Heverlee (Leuven), Belgium. Michal is studying for a MSc in Food Commodity at Warsaw University of Life Sciences, Poland.

Secretary, Dr. Simon B. Heath , Association for European Life Science Universities (ICA) , c/o College Office , College of Life Sciences , University College Dublin , Belfield , Dublin 4 , Ireland.

Annex 4

Timetable of the Review

14 th May	1400	Private meeting of the Panel at Hotel Albrechtshof
		Informal meeting with the Management Team and other contributors to the programme at a local restaurant
15 th May	0845	Met by the IMRD local and programme coordinators at Humboldt University
	0900	Courtesy meeting with the Dean of the Faculty of Agriculture and Horticulture
	0915	Meeting with the Programme Management Team
	1045	Private meeting of the Panel
	1100	Meeting with persons responsible for the internal quality assurance of the programme
	1200	Meeting with twelve IMRD students in two groups, over lunch
	1330	Meeting with non-academic tutors and support staff
	1445	Meeting with academic staff contributing to the programme who were not part of the Programme Management Team
16 th May	1530	Private meeting of the Panel
	0900	Private meeting of the Panel to finalise the overall findings and outcomes of the Review
	1300	Meeting with Programme Management Team and Administrators to provide oral feedback and report on the findings of the Review
	1400	Meeting of the Review Panel with the Evaluation Panel Focus Group
	1500	Depart

