

June 5, 2020

The Board of AQ Austria
AQ Austria
Franz-Klein-Gasse 5
1190 Vienna

Dear Madam President, dear Members of the Board,

I hereby confirm that we have received and fully accept the Expert Panel Review Report regarding the following program: PhD in Network Science. We are pleased to learn that the Report confirms the academic excellence of the program and that it fulfills all the criteria for accreditation.

We fully accept all the recommendations made in the Report. The administration of CEU PU will work closely with the Department of Network and Data Science to address every recommendation made in the Report. For specific responses to the recommendations of the AQ Austria Expert Panel, please refer to the Department's detailed reply in the Appendix of this letter.

We would like to thank the Expert Panel members for their expertise and insights, as well as for the productive and collegial discussions during the online meetings. We are grateful to the Expert Panel members for their hard work, dedication, and enthusiasm with which they approached the task.

We await the decision of the Board with anticipation and look forward to the opportunity of starting our program in Vienna in the coming academic year.

Sincerely,



Michael Ignatieff
President and Rector
Central European University Private University

Annex

CEU PU Department of Network and Data Science Response to AQ Austria Expert Panel Report

See below the response of the CEU PU Department of Network and Data Science to the recommendations made by the AQ Austria Expert Panel.

(1) The expert panel recommends establishing more formal processes to gather and document feedback from academia, industry and society. The panel recommends establishing a process to keep track of the placement and the working situation of former students. The expert panel supports the plan to establish an advisory board as a way to obtain feedback from industry. (page 6)

We thank the Expert Panel (EP) for this recommendation. In fact, this has been planned, but not yet established as our first cohort is about finishing. Following this recommendation, we will set up an alumnus contact system.

This issue has also been mentioned in other programs undergoing a review, and there will be a university-wide effort to improve our data collection and quality on career paths of our graduates.

(2) The expert panel recommends adding specific Intended Learning Outcomes on good scientific practice to appropriate course syllabi, and to explicate the corresponding methods of assessment. To evaluate the effects of this change, the expert panel recommends looking at the impact on course evaluations in the following years. (page 7)

We agree. Besides launching a specific course on ethical issues of data related research, we will take two measures. First, we will include in the syllabi points related to good scientific practice and second, we will require from our students to obtain the TCPS2: CORE certificate (<https://tcps2core.ca/>), which is the standard training form recommended by CEU (<https://acro.ceu.edu/research-ethics-training>).

(3) While the strong coherence in their disciplinary background serves the faculty well, the experts strongly recommend that in the future, the recruitment of faculty members should focus on increasing disciplinary diversity. In particular, relevant areas of the social sciences should receive special attention, possibly by dual appointments with other departments. (page 9)

The EP pointed out an important problem, and we have already started solving it. We have always paid attention to the diversity of the recruited students and will do so in the future. Balazs Vedres, our associate professor and sociologist by training will return from his leave next year. Starting February 2021, Dr. Fariba Karimi (now at GESIS) will join DNDS as a part-time assistant professor. There are plans for jointly hiring a professor with other departments.

(4) The expert panel recommends establishing a small number of formal institutional partnerships that guarantee a number of places for doctoral students seeking international research stays. Although the core faculty is well connected internationally, a regular exchange with selected institutions could strengthen the visibility of these opportunities for exchange and ease planning. (page 10)

Just after the review process, CEU has become a full member of the Complexity Science Hub Vienna. We have a Humboldt Institutional Partnership with RWTH Aachen (Prof. Markus Strohmaier). Through the person of our ERC professor, Albert-László Barabási we are closely tied to the Network Science Institute of the Northeastern University. Through membership connections we are linked to the ISI Foundation, Turin. Having said this, we agree that further steps in this direction are necessary. We are planning to establish a formal relationship with our long-time industrial partner Maven7 (Budapest) and to establish an Advisory Board, where representatives of universities and industry will be invited to.

(5) The expert panel recommends that the department seeks to expand its office capacity. While space is sufficient at the current level, additional student workspaces are deemed beneficial, and the planned hiring of two new faculty will make additional rooms a requirement. (page 11)

We could not agree more. The Department will work with CEU PU administration to ensure that the infrastructural needs of the faculty, staff, and students of the Department will continue to be met.

(6) Related to the recommendations concerning criteria §18 (1) 1 and §18 (2) 4, the expert panel recommends to maintain a permanent record of activities such as conference attendances, visits to other universities or research institutes, and industrial contacts of former students. Making such a database available to students would highlight possible exchange opportunities during and career paths after the PhD programme and facilitate access to relevant information. The panel cautions that the gathering and provision of such data needs to take data protection regulations into account. (page 12)

We thank the EP for this suggestion and will consider the possibility of establishing such a database within the regulations of GDPR.

(7) Currently, doctoral students have to apply multiple times to cover the full 48 months with cumulative stipends. The expert panel feels that this system generates uncertainty and requires additional effort from students who need to apply multiple times for funding repetition. Therefore, the panel suggests updating the system so that four years of stipend are guaranteed to those students passing the comprehensive exam. During the online session with CEU PU's representatives, the expert panel learned that an initiative to reduce the burden of multiple applications has already been drawn up, but that a decision is yet to be taken. (page 14)

As noted in the report, there are ongoing discussions at the institutional level regarding the structure of financial aid and easing administrative burdens. The recommendation is well-taken and will be considered during the ongoing discussions.

(8) The expert panel recommends specifying which courses guarantee that the ability of working in teams is acquired by modifying the syllabi. (page 14)

The recommendation of the EP is accepted. We will extend the syllabi accordingly.

(9) Regarding teaching assistantships, the panel recommends clarifying the learning outcomes and to consider adding some preparatory training. (page 15)

The learning outcome of the teaching assistantship will be added. The training of the TA-s is already discussed at university level.

(10) The expert panel recommends updating the syllabus of the Comprehensive Exam, so that the activities corresponding to its 6 ECTS credits are made more explicit. (page 15)

The recommendation is accepted. We are going to explain that the role of the comprehensive exam is to give account about the level of integration of the knowledge the students acquired during their course work. This integration process is acknowledged by the 6 ECTS credits.

(11) The experts recommend ensuring that the number of credits in the syllabi correspond to the number of credits outlined in the study plan. The programme proposal indicates 16 ECTS credits for Dissertation Writing III, the syllabus 20 ECTS credits. (page 15)

It is *Dissertation Research III*, rather than *Dissertation Writing III*, that is indicated as 16 ECTS in the curriculum submitted. The syllabus for *Dissertation Research III* indicates a 16 ECTS workload. However, the syllabi will be reviewed to ensure there are no inconsistencies with the curriculum plan.

(12) The expert panel recommends clarifying what the Comprehensive Exam is examining. From the documentation and from the interviews, it appears that part of the exam assesses content covered by some of the mandatory courses, but this content is formally already assessed when the credits of these courses are obtained. As the Comprehensive Exam includes 6 ECTS-credits, one would expect the assessment to be related to the activities performed during the four weeks corresponding to these credits. Please notice that this recommendation is not about changing the exam, which the panel considers an example of best practice, it only concerns the content of the syllabi. (page 16)

As noted above, the goal of the comprehensive exam is that the students achieve an integrated level of knowledge, realize the internal connections between the different courses they had taken and that this can be assessed. We will make this clear in the description of the Comprehensive Exam.

(13) The expert panel recommends adapting the grading scale to the Austrian scale instead of providing a conversion in the Diploma Supplement. The expert panel realises that this is a decision that would be made centrally by CEU PU rather than within a department. (page 16)

The use of the US grading scale is a result of CEU's position as a US-accredited private university. The University will consider in this context whether adapting the Austrian grading scale is possible.

(14) The crucial selection step takes place when the faculty ranks candidates for invitation. The transparency of the selection during this step relies on the awareness and discipline of the faculty members involved in the selection process. The experts recommend considering and prescribing additional measures that ensure the process is transparent to stakeholders other than the supervising faculty. This could include, for instance, an equal opportunity manager with special training, decision records, or a student observer. (page 17)

While we strongly believe that viewpoints of equal opportunity have been excessively considered in the recruiting process, we agree that introducing formal measures in this respect could be useful. In collaboration with the university's Senate Equal Opportunity Committee and the students' representatives we are going to work out the corresponding regulation.

(15) The expert panel recommends that future hiring ensures that the extreme gender imbalance is mitigated. Currently, the only female faculty is visiting from Budapest. (page 18)

We agree that the gender imbalance is disadvantageous in many ways. We will have a female part-time assistant professor starting February 2021. We are going to put this aspect high on the priority criteria for the planned new hires.

(16) The expert panel recommends that each candidate is formally assigned an associate supervisor (currently optional), although possibly from a different department or institution. (page 19).

The present regulations at CEU limit the number of students a professor can have as supervisor or associated supervisor. This is, why we have used the system of associate supervisors only in cases, where it was justified by the topic or by the special circumstances. However, this problem could be circumvented by introducing a system of "second readers" in agreement with the student, with less duties than for the associate supervisor but still with the opportunity to the student to have a second reference person. We will consider this option.