

July 9, 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 programs: PhD Comparative History, MA in Comparative History (One-Year), MA in Comparative History (Two-Year), MA in Nationalism Studies (One-Year), MA in Nationalism Studies (Two-Year), PhD in Late Antique Medieval and Early Modern Studies, and MA in Late Antique, Medieval and Early Modern Studies. We are pleased to learn that the Report confirms the academic excellence of the programs and that they fulfill 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 three departments to address the recommendations made in the Report, particularly as a number of the recommendations relate to university-wide policies or are otherwise relevant to CEU PU's strategic priorities. For specific responses to the recommendations of the AQ Austria Expert Panel, please refer to the departments' 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 site visit. 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 looking forward to the opportunity of starting our programs in Vienna in the coming academic year.

Sincerely,



Michael Ignatieff  
President and Rector  
Central European University Private University

## CEU PU Departmental Responses to AQ Austria Expert Panel Report

July 8, 2020

### I. Department of History

#### PhD in Comparative History

p. 13

*There should be a path for students who do not feel they have been getting adequate support from their supervisor to seek assistance from the Director of the programme. There should also be a process, if the supervisor does not feel the supervisory relationship is a good fit, to withdraw from supervision without the dismissal from the programme of a student making adequate progress. The CEU PU Doctoral Regulations address a process for change of supervisor and the departmental regulations state that they do not duplicate items covered there, but in fact there is some duplication of important items and this is an important enough one to state there. The responses to queries state that students can and do change supervisors by agreement with the Director and committee, and that this has not caused problems. This is very good news but it would be still better if the procedure were set out. The students with whom the panel spoke felt that they knew whom to go to in this sort of situation but the situation of conflict had not arisen. There should be an ombudsperson to whom students can go in the case of conflict with the supervisor and other department staff. There does not seem to have been a problem to date, but the time to establish a procedure is before a problem exists.*

CEU PU Response: As pointed out in our accreditation application, and acknowledged in the recommendation for p. 15 below, the History Department does have an ombudsperson to whom students can turn, and problems of the nature described do belong to her/his province. As recommended, this opportunity and the mechanism for changing the supervisor shall be explicitly included in the departmental Doctoral Regulations.

p. 15

*Although the criterion is fulfilled, it is noted that all the programme-specific counselling is provided either by the doctoral supervisor or by two other officers of the PhD programme. It is entirely appreciated that the culture and the ethos of the CEU PU and the department revolve around close intellectual and personal interaction between students and staff, and this will be sufficient in most cases to provide programme-specific counselling. However, it might be worth considering nominating a member of the department not directly involved in the PhD programme to offer academic-related counselling, to provide a degree of distance that might be helpful to students worried about their position / progress within the programme. It is recognised that the Department of History does have an Ombudsperson system in the case of actual complaints, which is an excellent provision and might be extended to other types of informal academic counselling.*

CEU PU Response: Within the constraints – given the size of the department, there is hardly a member “not directly involved in the PhD programme” - we shall consider how we might further enhance our academic counselling support for PhD students.

p. 21

*In future, it would be desirable to have some more formal induction or training in the role of the doctoral supervisor for new staff in the department. The Department is not large enough to have its own faculty development programme around doctoral supervision, but the University should have one in which experienced supervisors can share best practices.*

CEU PU Response: The department has recently decided to appoint a small committee of senior faculty for the induction of recently appointed junior faculty members.

### **MA in Comparative History (One-Year)**

p. 26

*The private university should address the issue of comparative history as an independent subject in its future presentations of the programme, for example during students' recruitment.*

CEU PU Response: We acknowledge that the framing of the degree programs as degrees in "comparative history" may be a source of confusion for some applicants and students. It would make sense for the Department to begin discussions about how it might wish to revise the ways in which it advertises the program beyond the student handbook and its website so that maximum clarity is provided for potential applicants and incoming students.

p. 30

*CEU PU should make a dual control principle mandatory for all matters concerning the admission procedure.*

CEU PU Response: Response: The Department takes this recommendation into account and will implement the dual control principle in coming years to ensure a fair and transparent process. Admission currently consists of a multiple-stage assessment process supervised by the Admissions Committee. The Committee will consider how the dual control principle can be incorporated into the process.

p. 31

*The geographical focus of study programmes on Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe and on the wider context of Eurasia is undoubtedly a unique feature within Europe and can be expected to support its attractiveness for the candidates: the common regional definition of Eastern European and Eurasian studies is much less common in Europe than in North American academic culture. Given this articulated definition and the seat of the CEU PU, however, the question arises as to what extent Central Europe does function really as an*

*integral part of this area profile. In the future, it would be necessary to address the fact that Central Europe, apart from Hungarian and partly German history, is represented quite marginally (in a quantitative sense), both at the level of topical courses and at the level of academic staffing.*

CEU PU Response: This suggestion makes sense and we plan to have discussions about the role and meaning of “Central Europe” in our course offerings and overall research and teaching profile in order to reflect both the university’ legacy and the implications of its new location.

### **MA in Comparative History (Two-Year)**

p. 39

*The private university should address the issue of comparative history as an independent subject in its future presentations of the programme, for example during students’ recruitment.*

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CEU PU Response: This suggestion makes sense and we plan to have discussions about the role and meaning of “Central Europe” in our course offerings and overall research and teaching profile in order to reflect both the university’ legacy and the implications of its new location.

## II. Department of Medieval Studies

### PhD in Late Antique, Medieval and Early Modern Studies

p. 51

The Department should ensure that feedback from student evaluations can be returned to faculty promptly so that changes can be made for the following course offering. Students have found that in the past this has not been the case, although they have found instructors responsive to feedback delivered personally and informally.

**Response: The Department receives student evaluations from central administration after the end of each semester. It is not in the power of the department to speed up this part of the process. However, not every student returns the evaluation. Perhaps each instructor should place special emphasis on the return of these evaluations which are important for improving instruction.**

p. 55

The draft regulations do not have explicit provisions for dealing with conflicts between student and supervisor. There should be a path for students who do not feel they have been getting adequate support from their supervisor to seek assistance from the Director of the programme. There should also be a process, if the supervisor does not feel the supervisory relationship is a good fit, to withdraw from supervision without the dismissal from the programme of a student making adequate progress. The CEU PU Doctoral Regulations address a process for change of supervisor and the departmental regulations state that they do not duplicate items covered there, but in fact there is some duplication of important items and this is an important enough one to state there. The responses to queries state that students can and do change supervisors by agreement with the Director and committee, and that this has not caused problems. This is very good news but it would be still better if the procedure were set out. The students with whom the panel spoke felt that they knew who to go to in this sort of situation but the situation of conflict had not arisen. There should be an ombudsperson to whom students can go in the case of conflict with the supervisor and other department staff. There does not seem to have been a problem to date, but the time to establish a procedure is before a problem exists.

**Response: In general, the PhD director acts as an ombudsperson between the doctoral student and the faculty member with whom there is conflict. To date such conflicts have been handled more informally but it would indeed be useful to set out a step by step procedure for students in the PhD regulations depending on the nature of the complaint. In a case where the student desires to change supervisors the procedure should be as follows:**

- 1. The student should first discuss their desire to change supervisor with the supervisor OR if they feel too uncomfortable doing so then they should approach the Director of the PhD program.**

- 2. The director of the PhD program should contact the supervisor and advise them of the problem. The PhD director should also consult with the proposed new supervisor and make sure they consent to the change.**
- 3. If the issue cannot be resolved, then the PhD director should go to the doctoral committee and formally present the problem. The PhD director, together with the doctoral committee should then formally agree to the doctoral student's change of supervisor or recommend the student take a second supervisor.**
- 4. In cases where the problem is non-academic (harassment issues) then the PhD director and doctoral committee IN AGREEMENT WITH THE STUDENT should raise the issue with appropriate bodies within the central administration.**

**The aim should always be to support the student and resolve issue to the benefit of both the student and supervisor where possible. In the very few instances in the last 25 years where intervention between student and supervisor has been necessary, constructive resolution has always been the goal of the department. We will now formalize the steps to be taken in the department's PhD regulations before the start of the next semester.**

p. 56

The department should make someone available for counselling for PhD students other than the supervisor. Supervisors may be expected to maintain a close professional relationship with the student, but not all are comfortable with providing advice on a personal level, nor do all students feel comfortable enough with the supervisor to seek it.

**Response: We would feel uncomfortable naming one individual to give personal advice to doctoral students. Female students are likely to feel more comfortable with women and, conversely, male students more comfortable with men on the faculty. The door of the PhD director should always be open in this regard but in the end whom the students turn to must be a personal decision.**

p. 58

The programme is stronger in medieval than in late antique and early modern, and in history, art history, and archaeology than in literature and musicology among other disciplines. All programmes must have some specialisations, no one can cover all fields especially with a staff this size, but as the programme plans for the future they will want to evaluate whether these are the areas in which they wish to maintain strength or whether they wish to build in other areas.

**Response: It will be necessary sooner rather than later to find new specialists in material culture theory relevant to the late antique, medieval and early modern periods. Whether we can, hopefully, add another specialist in literature is not completely in the hands of the department. We should point out, nevertheless, that we have been flexible and efficient to add expert external co-supervisors to the PhD track of students where internal expertise was not sufficient.**

The multiplicity of requirements and ways of earning ECTS particularly after the first year means that the supervisor's role becomes very important in ensuring that students know what is required of them. Even if it is clearly set out in the written material, the supervisor must still be aware of it and revisit it with the students. It is very important that all doctoral supervisors be kept current with what is required, and that students are kept informed through other channels as well.

**Response: Information on such issues is regularly disseminated to the students at the weekly PhD colloquium, but the supervisors should, indeed receive regular updating to their changing duties by a circular letter from the departmental doctoral committee.**

There is a danger that the publication requirement will pull students' focus from the dissertation, or encourage them to publish too early in relatively obscure venues. The panel understands that publishing three papers was a requirement of Hungarian accreditation, but the department indicated its wish to keep the requirement. (It should be noted that the current students the experts spoke to did not find this to be a problem.) It is quite unusual for a medieval studies programme anywhere but Hungary. Other departments at CEU PU, even under Hungarian accreditation, allowed two of the papers to be book reviews, and/or are reducing the requirement now that the university has left Hungary. Medieval Studies should also consider this. It is possible to strongly encourage students to publish without prescribing a specific amount. Students feel under pressure to finish in four years even if they could take longer, for funding reasons, and this requirement may create additional obstacles.

**Response: The department would consider reducing the requirement to publish three papers since this is no longer necessary within the Austrian system. Some of the students moving from our Master's program into the PhD program write articles based on their Master's work for the Department Annual. Otherwise, we would continue to strongly encourage students to publish since production of academic articles is an important part of academic life but drop the requirement. Peer-reviewed articles written and published during the PhD years could be given one credit point.**

Students are guaranteed three years of funding (subject to satisfactory progress), and most also receive research travel funds and write-up funds in the fourth year. Both academic staff and students who spoke to the panel told us that because of these other funds the university ends up funding most students for at least 3.75 years and more. The system is overly complicated and puts the onus on the student to apply for each separate pot of funding. Department leadership indicated to us that they would prefer to see students be given four years of funding upon entrance rather than have to apply separately to different internal funds. The panel heartily endorses this recommendation.

**Response: The department would also be extremely happy to be able to offer four years of funding to PhD students from the beginning. This issue is not in the hands of the department but we would certainly support such an initiative.**

p. 63

As CEU-PU develops undergraduate programmes, the size of the academic staff may have to be reconsidered. The same number of staff cannot offer new undergraduate courses without cutting the number of graduate classes or increasing staff workload. Effective use of teaching assistants may help mitigate this issue as well as provide useful training for PhD students, for whom teaching undergraduates provides better experience than teaching MA students in more specialised courses.

**Response: There is a new, university-wide policy on how to recruit and reimburse TA work of PhD students, elaborated in response to the new needs of Covid-19 crisis. These regulations offer ample possibilities for PhD students.**

p. 63

In future, it would be desirable to have some more formal induction or training in the role of the doctoral supervisor for new staff in the department. The Department is not large enough to have its own faculty development programme around doctoral supervision, but the University should have one in which experienced supervisors can share best practices.

**Response: We have normally handled such introduction informally with new faculty learning on the job and asking questions. The department has always been friendly toward newcomers. Perhaps the Central Administration could provide more formal training for the one of the program directors for advising new faculty about teaching and the formal and informal rules connected to teaching and supervision within the Medieval Studies department. We will consult with new faculty about what they would have liked to have had by way of formal introduction to the department.**

### **MA in Late Antique, Medieval and Early Modern Studies (One-Year)**

p. 68

Being the focal point of education in the programme, the M.A. thesis might be valued at more than 10 ECTS points. Generally, a reattribution of ECTS points to the elements of the curriculum in general might be considered. At the moment, the teaching elements weigh somewhat heavily, whereas the thesis, being the focal point of all teaching and preparation for independent research, is underrated.

**Response: Besides the credits given directly for the thesis, further credits are accorded to thesis-related courses such as**

- **MA thesis seminar, Fall term, 2 credits**
- **MA thesis seminar, Winter term, 2 credits**
- **Independent study (optional, Fall or winter term, 4 credits)**

**Term papers submitted for other courses can also be incorporated into the text of the thesis, strengthening the coherence between the taught and research-based elements of the program.**

p. 71

CEU PU should make a dual control principle mandatory for all matters concerning the admission procedure.

**Response: See the answer to the same question above under the 2YMA program.**

p. 72

When B.A. programmes are introduced, CEU PU will have to hire more staff.

**Response: Some of the existing faculty resources/teaching credits can be directed towards teaching the BA program, but indeed we expect the CEU's Senior Leadership to follow up this recommendation of the Expert Panel. This will be particularly important when all cohorts of the BA program will be already in place.**

p. 73

It seems reasonable to acquire more expertise in early modern studies.

**Response: Early Modern Studies is jointly covered by the History Department and Medieval Studies. There is a special cross-departmental platform to coordinate teaching and supervision, including also the Philosophy Department, and much of the teaching in Ottoman Studies also extends to this period. Depending on the research topics of the student cohorts, course offers can be dynamically adjusted. Nevertheless, we agree that we would need more expertise in this field, especially after the retirement of some senior resident faculty members.**

p. 75

It seems reasonable to the expert that CEU PU will be aware of upcoming retirements, especially in the case of senior staff in positions of responsibility.

**Response: Yes, we fully agree (see also the response above). Replacement of senior faculty will be of key importance in the coming years. Besides hiring new faculty members, the continuous involvement of the retiring faculty members in advisory roles, and eventually also teaching and supervision is desirable. This will contribute to maintaining the existing reputation of the programs and to provide smooth transition to the next generations.**

### **III. Nationalism Studies Program**

#### **MA in Nationalism Studies (One-Year)**

p. 79

*After the discussions with the students on 19 May 2020, the experts received the impression that the anonymous semester evaluations of courses should be communicated faster to the faculty members and a general feedback should be discussed with the students that they receive the feeling that evaluations matter - maybe in the departmental meetings.*

CEU PU Response: We will call a departmental meeting after every semester to discuss student feedback and other business with student representatives.

p. 80

*The experts recommend that CEU PU conducts an intensive external review of the one year master programme with intensive participation of students after 2 to 3 years in Vienna.*

CEU PU Response: The one-year program has been running in Budapest for 20 years, and the workload there has been even higher than in the Austrian accredited one-year program (80 ECTS, as opposed to the new Austrian one-year degree program's 60 ECTS). Despite the even more demanding program, we have had a negligible attrition rate, and the ratio of the dropouts has not been any higher than in the two-year program. But we have no objections to have another review of the one-year program if the Austrian accreditation authority deems it necessary.

p. 84

*CEU PU should make a dual control principle mandatory for all matters concerning the admission procedure.*

CEU PU Response: We have already been following the recommended dual control principle in our admission process. All applications have been reviewed separately by at least two faculty members.

p. 87

*Based on results of previous evaluations discussed with faculty members on 19 May 2020 the experts would suggest increasing the number of permanent faculty members in this programme due to additional teaching of future students who could become experts for NGOs in the field of migration and asylum studies as part of the new strategy of the CEU 2025.*

CEU PU Response: As part of our CEU 2025 proposal to launch the migration and asylum studies program, we have indicated the need for additional permanent faculty. Therefore, this recommendation is fully in-line with our plans.

p. 87

*The new academic environment in Vienna and the new partners like Institut für die Wissenschaften vom Menschen (IWM) provide the opportunity to undertake new initiatives to increase the role of faculty members as "public intellectuals" in fields "of high relevancy" and "controversial" topics like migration and asylum policies with direct CEU PU support, thereby commemorating the role of the founder of the Nationalism studies programme, Ernest Gellner.*

CEU PU Response: Once we launch the proposed migration and asylum studies program, we will announce an annual Ernest Gellner lecture series. We will seek cooperation with the IWM and other Viennese institutions to invite scholars with ground breaking research as well as major public intellectuals and experts in the topic of migration and asylum.

p. 87

*Development of a plan B if the European and global financial situation gets worse after the Coronavirus.*

CEU PU Response: Ensuring the financial sustainability of CEU is a priority for the University. The CEU2025 strategic plan aims to diversify CEU's income and create a budget structure more resistant to such external factors.

### **MA in Nationalism Studies (Two-Year)**

p. 92

*After the discussions with the students on 19 May 2020, the experts received the impression that the anonymous semester evaluations of courses should be communicated faster to the faculty members and a general feedback should be discussed with the students so that they receive the feeling that evaluations matter - maybe in the departmental meetings.*

CEU PU Response: We will call a departmental meeting after every semester to discuss student feedback and other business with student representatives.

p. 93

*With regard to the course the experts would suggest enlarging and deepening the Historical Contexts of Nationalism, which is right now concentrated on antisemitism and prejudices against Jews and Roma.*

CEU PU Response: We will crosslist more nationalism related courses offered by the History Department.

p. 99

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