



organe d'accréditation et d'assurance qualité  
des hautes écoles suisses

**Evaluation procedure - Universities of Applied Sciences**

**EMBA du Leader-Manager Responsable**

OAQ Report

10 October 2012



organe d'accréditation et d'assurance qualité  
des hautes écoles suisses

## Table of contents

1	Introduction .....	3
2	The EMBA LRM .....	3
3	The evaluation procedure .....	4
3.1	Self-evaluation report .....	4
3.2	On-site visit .....	4
3.3	External evaluation report .....	5
4	Fulfilment of the quality standards .....	5
4.1	Global evaluation .....	5
4.2	Strengths and areas of improvement .....	5
4.3	Position statement of the study programme.....	6
5	Final evaluation of the OAQ.....	6
6	Annexes .....	6

## 1 Introduction

The present report relates to the evaluation of the “EMBA du Leader-Manager Responsable” (EMBA LMR) offered within the HES-SO<sup>1</sup> jointly by the HEIG-Vaud (Yverdon-les-Bains, School of Business and Engineering) and the HEG Arc (Neuchâtel, Arc School of Business). This report is based on the self-evaluation report and on the external experts report, including the outcomes of the on-site visit.

The OAQ evaluation procedure is conform to the ENQA<sup>2</sup> standards and guidelines. The evaluation is based on the accreditation standards of the Federal Department of Economic Affairs for study programmes in the frame of Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS). The procedure involves three stages: i. self-evaluation carried out by the programme, ii. external appraisal by an independent group of experts iii. decision (by the OAQ Scientific advisory board).

The evaluation of the EMBA LMR was mandated by the HES-SO governance on a voluntary basis.

## 2 The EMBA LRM

The EMBA LMR is a two-year Master programme of 60 ECTS addressed to young executives willing to develop their skills as leaders/managers in tune with the economic and social needs of the Western part of Switzerland. This EMBA is thought for professionals who study while working. Attendance to the 9 modules is obligatory (no e-learning foreseen). It is jointly offered since 2010 on the HES-SO campuses in Neuchâtel (HEG Arc) and Yverdon (HEIG-Vaud), i.e. on two sites that are located not far away from each other but in two different cantons, respectively Neuchâtel and Vaud.

This programme was preceded by two postgraduate management development programmes aimed mainly at engineers and offered separately by HEIG-Vaud and HEG Arc for respectively 25 and 16 years before they became a joint programme. A previous evaluation conducted by the OAQ in 2008 came to the conclusion that the then proposed joint programme was to a certain extent not conform to the OAQ standards. Following OAQ's negative decision, the schools involved decided to develop a fully revised, joint-degree programme: the EMBA LMR under evaluation.

The programme currently enrolls the first two cohorts of students: 46 are in their second year (cohort 2010-2012), 28 are in their first year (cohort 2011-2013), well distributed between the two sites. The first graduates will get their degree during the academic year 2012-2013, after completing their Master thesis. For the time being at least 27 new students are expected to start their EMBA studies in the fall of 2012 (cohort 2012-2014).

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<sup>1</sup> Haute Ecole Spécialisée de Suisse Occidentale

<sup>2</sup> European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education

### **3 The evaluation procedure**

#### **3.1 Self-evaluation report**

The self-evaluation phase began in January 2012. The self-evaluation report was sent to OAQ on 14 May 2012. OAQ then forwarded the report to the experts, according to the schedule, one month before the on-site visit.

The experts highlighted the good quality of the self-evaluation report that provided well structured basic information.

The unit under evaluation chose to treat the standards dealing respectively with internationalisation (1.2, 3.1 and 5.3) and with gender issues (1.4, 4.3 and 5.2) in specific dedicated sections. In particular, the theme of internationalisation was perceived as significant for the study programme under review. A dedicated chapter could better highlight the analysis, strengths, weaknesses and opportunities, essential for an analytical self-evaluation.

The report could easily be used by the experts as a helpful instrument to evaluate the programme. The experts have then collected complementary data during the on-site visit, which proved essential for the formulation of their final judgement.

#### **3.2 On-site visit**

The experts Panel was composed of three members:

- Guy Haug (peer leader), Valencia University of Technology (Spain) and expert on management and engineering studies in the European Higher Education Area;
- Eva Cools, Vlerick Leuven Gent Management School (Belgium);
- Alberto Gandolfi, SUPSI and AFG Consulting (Switzerland);

The on-site visit took place on 18 - 19 June 2012. During the visit the experts Panel met different representatives of the programme: HES-SO direction, EMBA governing bodies, programme directors, teaching staff, students, technical staff, professional partners.

The visit was perfectly organized by the two schools involved. The atmosphere was pleasant and the experts particularly appreciated the punctuality, the frankness and the collaboration with the interviewees and the representatives of the programme.

The group felt that the range of individuals with whom it was able to meet, the nature of the discussions and the variety of supplementary material produced in response to requests during the course of the visit enabled it to make a full and well-informed appraisal of the programme under evaluation.

### **3.3 External evaluation report**

Following the on-site visit, the experts wrote an evaluation report. Every evaluation area was analyzed and suggestions for quality improvement, as well as recommendations, were put forward.

In the experts report two areas of evaluation have been introduced dealing respectively with internationalisation and gender issues, matching the structure of the self-evaluation report.

Standard 3.06 was considered inapplicable to the present study programme and therefore was not taken into consideration in the external evaluation.

## **4 Fulfilment of the quality standards**

### **4.1 Global evaluation**

The experts report concludes that the EMBA LMR globally fulfils the quality standards examined. The programme under evaluation meets 17 of the 20 applicable standards and partially meets the remaining 3 (standards 1.04, 2.03, 2.01). None of the standards was found as being missed. Indications regarding the fulfilment of each standard are provided in detail in the summarizing table (Annexe 2), including a comprehensive summary of all suggestions and recommendations for the improvement and development of the study programme.

### **4.2 Strengths and areas of improvement**

In the view of the experts Panel the programme's main strengths are:

- the clear, firm, coherent and well differentiated profile of the programme, thanks to its determined orientation towards the development of soft leadership skills and responsibility, in tune with the needs of regional, but internationally-oriented industry;
- its committed team of persons, who share a common vision of the role and content of the programme;
- high quality, usefulness and effectiveness (if not full efficiency).

In parallel, the experts Panel identified the following areas of potential improvement:

- activities and tools for the development, coordination, implementation and quality assurance of the programme are present, but they tend to rest more on the goodwill and dedication of staff than to on explicit, formalised procedures and consultations;

- The EMBA would need a medium-term Strategic Plan anticipating the next stages of its development: admission of more students (particularly women) in order to reach the necessary critical mass (which is also needed in order to guarantee the EMBA's longer-term visibility), graduation of the first cohort of graduates (with the related new needs for a career service, a Diploma Supplement policy and an alumni association), formal policy for staff development (e.g. with respect to thesis supervision) and for the sharing of tasks with partners in internationalisation, planning for the AMBA<sup>3</sup> accreditation, etc.;
- the programme governance would need some improvements in order to make it less dependent on the Programme Director, to better organise the involvement of teachers, students and external partners and to better define the roles of the various Committees.

### **4.3 Position statement of the study programme**

The unit under evaluation asked to postpone the deadline for the submission of their position statement, as initially foreseen in the summer break during which some key staff members were absent. The deadline was therefore postponed to mid-September. In an email sent to the OAQ on 14.09.2012 the schools involved expressed their full agreement with the experts report, their analysis, recommendations for improvement and conclusions drawn.

### **5 Final evaluation of the OAQ**

On the basis of what has been reported in the previous chapters the OAQ considers that the EMBA LMR in its current development stage meets high qualitative standards. Therefore the OAQ endorses the positive judgement reached by the experts.

The OAQ invites the programme management to continue exploring ways of improvement, taking into account the recommendations and suggestions given in the experts report and reported in the attached table (Annexe 2).

The OAQ concludes that the study programme EMBA LMR is authorized to use the quality label "OAQ evaluated".

### **6 Annexes**

- Annexe 1: Experts Report
- Annexe 2: Comprehensive table on the fulfilment of the quality standards, including suggestions and recommendations for improvement

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<sup>3</sup> Association of MBAs (<http://www.mbaworld.com/>).

**Evaluation of the continuing education programmes  
within universities of applied sciences in Switzerland**

**Expert report**

**HEG Arc (Neuchâtel) and HEIG-VD (Yverdon)**

**HES-SO**

**EMBA Responsible Leader-Manager**

Date of preliminary version: 31 July 2012

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## Table of contents

1	Introduction .....	3
2	Presentation of the unit .....	3
3	Evaluation procedure .....	3
3.1	Group of experts.....	3
3.2	Self evaluation report .....	4
3.3	On-site-visit .....	4
3.4	Timing of the evaluation.....	4
4	Compliance with the Quality Standards .....	5
4.1	Area 1 Implementation and training objectives .....	5
4.2	Area 2 Internal structure and quality management .....	7
4.3	Area 3 Studies.....	10
4.4	Area 4 Teaching staff .....	12
4.5	Area 5 Student body.....	14
4.6	Area 6 Material and spatial resources.....	15
4.7	Area 7 Internationalisation .....	15
4.8	Area 8 Gender issues .....	18
5	Overall impression, strengths and weaknesses.....	20
6	Conclusion .....	20



## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The EMBA “Responsible Leader-Manager” offered by the HES-SO aims to be a major instrument available to young executives willing to develop their skills as leaders/managers in tune with the economic/social needs of the Western part of Switzerland. It is offered on the UAS’ campuses in Neuchâtel and Yverdon, i.e. on two sites that are located not far away from each other but in two different cantons.

As a result of this situation, a good deal of the evaluation process needed not only to look into the quality of the programme and the teaching-learning process, but also to assess the “jointness” between the two sites, in particular with respect to management and the similarity of standards at both locations.

## **2. PRESENTATION OF THE UNIT**

Among its continuing education programmes, the HES-SO offers since 2010 an Executive MBA (EMBA) Responsible Leader-Manager simultaneously at the School of Business and Engineering (HEIG) at Yverdon (Vaud) and the ARC School of Business (HEG Arc) at Neuchâtel. The joint programme was preceded by two postgraduate management development programmes aimed mainly at engineers and offered separately by HEIG and HEG Arc for respectively 25 and 16 years before they became a joint programme in 2010.

A previous evaluation conducted by OAQ in 2008 came to the conclusion that the then proposed “joint” programme was neither new enough in comparison to the former programme offered at each site, nor really “joined” between the two sites. Following OAQ’s negative decision, the HES-SO decided to address these deficiencies and to develop a revised, joint-degree programme: the EMBA RLM under evaluation.

The programme is a two-year master programme aimed at mature students, i.e. professionals who take it on site at Yverdon or Neuchâtel alongside their professional activities in the surrounding regions. It is not based on a distance-education model and deliberately stresses the development of graduates’ “soft” skills and sense of responsibility.

The programme currently enrolls the first two cohorts of students: 46 are in their second year (Class of 2010-2012), 28 are in their first year (Class of 2011-2013), nearly evenly distributed between the two sites. This means that the first graduates will get their degree during the academic year 2012-2013, after finishing their Master dissertation. For the time being, an additional 27 new students are expected to start their EMBA studies in the fall of 2012 (Class of 2012-2014).

## **3. EVALUATION PROCEDURE**

### **Group of experts**

The group of experts (“panel”) comprised three persons with significantly different backgrounds:

- Dr. Eva Cools, Vlerick Leuven Gent Management School (Belgium)
- Dr. Alberto Gandolfi, SUPSI and AFG Consulting (Switzerland)
- Dr. Guy Haug (Peer Leader), Valencia University of Technology (Spain) and expert on management and engineering studies in the European Higher Education Area.

The Expert Panel did not comprise either student representative (because the EMBA is for professionals who study while working) or an alumnus (there are not any yet).

## **Self-evaluation report**

The self-evaluation report consisted of a paper document (95 pages) and a series of annexes. It was also submitted in electronic format.

The report was submitted in English; yet, the main language used at both locations and in the teaching-learning process of the EMBA RLM is French; this may explain that the self-evaluation report is on occasions unclear or difficult to understand in English.

The group of experts was very grateful to OAQ for providing, together with the institution's self-evaluation report, some very helpful background and contextual information about Switzerland's Universities of Applied Sciences and the applicable standards of quality.

## **On-site visit**

The site visit took place on 18-19 June 2012. The agenda was well prepared both by OAQ and by HES-SO, both at Yverdon and Neuchâtel, and the planned series of meetings and interviews took place perfectly according to schedule. While most of the interviews were conducted in English, the panel saw no problem in accepting answers (and occasionally a dialogue) in French from persons who were not really at ease in English. The panel believes that this has greatly improved the level of communication by creating a better climate of confidence.

The experts were very grateful for the presence and contribution of Ms Laura Beccari as OAQ person in charge of the evaluation procedure.

They also wish to express their gratitude to HES-SO staff, in particular to Prof. Zarina Charlesworth, programme director, the directors of the schools of Yverdon and Neuchâtel and the dean of the Department of Continuing Education and Training, as well as to all other persons met (students, business representatives and stakeholders). The group of experts was very satisfied that the site visit took place in a friendly, open and collaborative way throughout the two days. Questions were in general answered openly, completely, from different perspectives, and any additional information required by the panel was provided nearly immediately. This allowed the group of expert to gain a thorough overview of the state of development of the programme, progress achieved since the previous evaluation 4 years ago, as well as on remaining issues and uncertainties.

## **Timing of the evaluation**

At the time of carrying out this evaluation, the EMBA RLM counted two cohorts of students – first and second year – at each of the two sites, i.e. 4 groups of students in total.

When asked to explain why they chose this particular moment in time (which may seem premature) to seek the non-compulsory evaluation of the programme, the leadership of HES-SO referred to three main reasons:

- in Switzerland, degree programmes subject to compulsory evaluation need go through this process before the first degrees are delivered, and HES-SO wants the same principle to apply to its continuing education programmes, even though their evaluation is on a voluntary basis; the institution values this as an opportunity to fine-tune and improve the programme while it is still flexible enough;
- the institution wants not to run too late with the adaptation of its programmes to the principles of the Bologna process, which should have been completed by the end of 2011;
- the OAQ seal is expected to help marketing the programme and hence make it stronger.

#### 4. COMPLIANCE WITH THE QUALITY STANDARDS

Under this section some standards have been grouped following a specific order matching with the thematic areas and the way they have been dealt with in the self- evaluation report submitted by the unit under evaluation.

For this purpose, two areas of evaluation have been introduced dealing respectively with the internationalisation (area 7) and the gender issues (area 8).

Standards 1.2, 3.1 and 5.3 are dealt with under area 7.

Standards 1.4, 4.3 and 5.2 are dealt with under area 8.

##### Area 1: Implementation and training objectives

###### Standard 1.1

The degree programme pursues training objectives that match the UAS mission statement and strategic planning objectives.
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###### *Description*

The programme is a full re-development of formerly existing programmes at the two campuses of HES-SO. These programmes were initially developed at the request of the professional associations and were aimed exclusively at engineers. The new EMBA programme responds to a change in the regional demand for continuous education (for a more generalist and broader-based education aimed at a more diverse target audience) and seeks to build on the combined strength of the two campuses in engineering and management education. It is based on a mix of practice with theory and offers a deliberate and consistent focus on soft skills (leadership development) and social responsibility. Thus, the EMBA has a profile which is specific in the UAS's portfolio of programmes and is also clearly different from what is available from competing higher education institutions. The self-evaluation links the objectives of the programme with the mission statement of each of the two schools (they still are different, although very close) and with the Strategic Plan 2013-1016 of the UAS.

###### *Analysis*

There is no doubt that the programme is in tune with the needs of local industry, with the mission and objectives of the HES-SO and the two schools involved and with the needs of mature students. The leadership of the institution, as well as the Directors of the two campuses, stressed the strong ties between the programme and its regional economic and social environment – which is the very “raison d’être” of the institution. They also emphasised that while the programme has been redefined as a single curriculum, the Institution will continue offering it at two different locations in order to respond to the local demand of young professionals who need to upgrade their skills while attending their professional duties: they have little time to loose in transportation and e-learning is not well suited for the development of soft skills. The panel is of opinion that the positioning of the programme in the portfolio of the institution is very well justified and corresponds with a clear strategic choice that is shared between the institutional leaders and the core programme staff and implemented in a consistent way. This is also true with respect to the positioning of the programme as “a different type of MBA” in comparison to its main competitors (which are English-taught programmes at the nearest universities), both with respect to its audience (mainly local/regional), its methods (small groups not exceeding 25 students, customised learning, on-going individual coaching and tutoring) and its orientation towards regional needs (which comes with a well-suited type of internationalisation).

*Standard compliance:* fulfilled

###### *Recommendations*

The experts encourage the institutional and programme leadership of the EMBA to stick to its current positioning and exploit it in every dimension (students, industrial partners, tailor-made internationalisation, strong emphasis on personal development), not least in order to strengthen the

programme's "unique selling point" and consolidate it by means of a reasoned growth of the student population and a determined coordination between the two campuses.

The leadership should also make certain that the programme community (teachers, administrators, student representatives) continues sharing its vision about sustainability values, individual and social responsibility, the avoidance of "short-termism", etc., possibly through training seminars dealing with these issues in common.

Finally, the Experts expect the leadership of the UAS to fully integrate the EMBA in the new Strategic Plan that is under development, in order to guarantee its lasting embedding into the institution's development.

### **Standard 1.3**

The degree programme enables students to assimilate course content within the time allotted.
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#### *Description*

For many students, their admission to the EMBA hinges on their successfully completing a pre-programme, the CAS. The experts were satisfied that this pre-programme, although it runs parallel to the EMBA, is completely separate and there is no overlap of any kind between pre-programme and programme. It was also interesting to see that there is a single, annual admission procedure based on a single set of standards for the admission of students to the two schools at Yverdon and Neuchâtel.

The completion of the programme (always on a part-time basis) takes two years, plus the time need for the master dissertation. The EMBA is structured in broad and diverse modules that allow mature students to build on their professional experience through a combination of practical and theoretical learning. The programme objectives are described in terms of Learning Outcomes and there is a table matching the acquisition of these competencies with the different modules over time. A remarkable feature of the EMBA is Module 1 (the "capstone module"), which aims at developing students' leadership capacities: this is a lasting and cumulative process (which explains why this core Module runs across the 4 semesters, in parallel to the other modules) based on a system of structured, individual coaching monitored through a "portfolio" of activities for each student.

Hitherto, only very few students have not reached the expected level at the expected time (only one student had to repeat the first year and another one failed the first semester and is now re-applying to the programme after passing the CAS).

#### *Analysis*

The Expert group was satisfied that the modules are articulated in such a way that each cohort of students progresses according to the planned calendar. Although it may be too early to be fully assertive about the efficiency of the programme, the panel is confident that few students will lag behind. This may also be expected thanks to the demanding pre-programme that prepares students for a successful completion of the EMBA within the planned time frame and to the programme's pedagogic features (small groups of mature students, strong coaching and tutoring, emphasis on skills development, etc.).

The panel wonders whether the EMBA should not consider offering admissions each semester, instead of each year, in order to improve its service to potential learners and possibly take better advantage of its dual campus (in particular if admission were organised between them on a rotating basis each semester).

While it is understandable that the EMBA emphasises the need for physical participation in courses as a condition for the gradual development of soft skills over time, there may nonetheless be areas where the material could equally well be assimilated by mature students through e-learning. A higher percentage of e-learning would make some aspects of the programme more flexible and more easily accessible (which would match a demand from students) and could possibly also ease the participation of more women in the programme.

*Standard compliance:* fulfilled

## *Recommendations*

The expert group encourages the programme's leadership to set in place a formal, structured, on-going process of assessment and improvement in order to allow for its flexible adaptation to external and internal demands.

Although there seems to be an admission procedure in place at the moment, this can be further professionalised and better distributed.

The panel invites the EMBA to consider offering admissions on a rotating, semester basis rather than in parallel, on an annual basis, like currently. It also suggests that some parts of the programme could be offered as e-learning, as this may ease the registration of more students, including in particular more women.

## **Area 2: Internal structure and quality management**

### **Standard 2.1**

Decision-making processes, competencies and responsibilities are clear and properly implemented.
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#### *Description*

A major new feature of the EMBA is that it is now placed under a single Programme Director, even though it is offered on two campuses and hence also involves the two Campus Directors. Yet, in the current phase, the programme and campus directors have to deal with at least three different committees who are involved in shaping and managing the EMBA, namely:

- The Steering Committee (who has been a key instrument in the inception phase, but is now expected to pass on its responsibilities to the programme's permanent bodies)
- The Programme Committee (which includes the persons who are responsible for a module)
- The Advisory Board (which still needs to be completely defined and activated).

#### *Analysis*

Most management tasks are currently concentrated in one single person: the Programme Director, who is directly responsible not only for the overall management of the EMBA, but also for all kinds of specific tasks reaching from PR activities to selection interviews, etc. The expert panel is concerned that the EMBA may be currently too strongly and too exclusively dependent on a single person, which makes it vulnerable in case this person is no longer available.

At the operational level (academic secretariat, teachers, courses, students' affairs) the responsibility of the EMBA remains partly split between the two schools (HEIG-VD and HEG Arc), not least because of differences between the cantonal regulations concerning some procedures for the registration of students or the payment of lecturers. Other aspects are fully integrated, e.g. there is a single database for the management of students and studies, a single Internet site and a single e-learning platform (these common services are called "sharepoints").

The panel is aware that this partial integration may not be an ideal situation for the governance of the programme and that this issue needs continued attention, in order to enable a truly unified and cohesive leadership of the EMBA. Yet, there is obviously a high level of coordination and good cooperation between the two operational units, and the duplication of courses between the two sites (sometimes by the same teacher, usually by two different teachers) also offers some advantages. For instance, from the viewpoint of students who may take a course at the other campus in case they have to miss it at their usual school. Or when one of the campuses develops a specific international partnership from which students from both campuses can take advantage

Overall, the experts are of opinion that the programme is currently sufficiently coordinated at the institutional level and well run, in a pragmatic and effective way, at the operational level. This does not mean that no further progress is needed: there are still significant risks with respect to the coordination, communication and management of the programme and the organisation that supports it: the current management model owes more to the high dedication of key individuals and the good collaboration and communication between all people involved than to effective, lasting and formalised

procedures. This also applies to the management of quality, which is yielding good results but lacks formalisation.

*Standard compliance:* this standard is at the moment only partially met.

#### *Recommendations*

The governance system should be stabilized and the roles of the different players should be better defined, in particular with respect to the various Committees. The Management Information System and the quality assurance procedures should also be more formalised.

The Advisory Committee should be appointed in the coming months and should have a clear job description. An increase of international members in the Committee would enrich its value in providing strategic inputs to the Direction of the EMBA.

We suggest creating a robust and systematic, formalised governance system for the EMBA, which involve all relevant stakeholders in a professional and sustainable way.

Part of this system should include a way to distribute management tasks among more people. In this way, the Director could focus more attention and energy to strategic activities.

The Panel further suggests mapping the critical processes and procedures of the EMBA. Mapping should include: work flow, control points, responsibilities, supporting tools and documents.

## **Standard 2.2**

Both teachers and students are involved in the decision-making process whenever decisions affect them.

#### *Description*

A very high flexibility and availability of the programme Director is stressed by many stakeholders: students, faculty, administrative staff, external partners.

Students have the feeling of being listened to, stating that their concerns and inputs are seriously taken into considerations and acted upon. When judged appropriate, improvement initiatives have been implemented by the Direction of the EMBA.

The feedback that came from the faculty is very positive as well. A part of the faculty (module leaders) is already involved in the Programme Committee.

#### *Analysis*

The communication between Direction, administrative staff and faculty is judged by all sides as very open, honest and effective.

The annual “staff day” is appreciated and enables to build personal relationships and to exchange experiences and good practices, which are important for the coordination and improvement of teaching activities and programme management (administrative staff also participate in the “staff days” and have the feeling that they are being listened to).

Unfortunately one day a year is a very limited time for an effective interaction. Moreover, the involvement of student and faculty is mainly based on informal relationships and communication: it works well in the current situation (with the current dimension and people of the EMBA), but the risk is that in the future, with a growing number of people involved, such approach could not guarantee the right level of communication.

*Standard compliance:* fulfilled

#### *Recommendations*

The Group of experts suggests better formalising the involvement of students and faculty in the various Committees.

Students should be represented in the Programme Committee as of the autumn of 2012; this move is already planned and should be formalised as soon as possible.

The staff day appears to be a very effective approach to foster involvement; the panel suggests building on this basis and creating a wider and more robust system, possibly on a semester rather than annual basis.

### **Standard 2.3**

The practical relevance and quality of the degree programme are regularly evaluated. The results are used to further develop course content.

#### *Description*

The quality of teaching is assessed on a regular basis; student feedback is collected at the end of each teaching unit and analysed through an external organisation, which guarantees neutrality and a professional treatment of the data. The feedback reports are well structured and provide a lot of useful information about – among others – the lesson itself, the didactical approach and documentation, the practical relevance and the teacher.

#### *Analysis*

It seems that student feedback is seriously analysed by the Direction of the EMBA and that improvement measures are derived from it when judged appropriate.

Unfortunately, the EMBA is so young that a lot of interesting data are not yet available. For example it will be very important to assess the effectiveness of the EMBA for the professional future of the alumni. Of course, this data will be available only in the coming years, once the first cohorts have completed the programme.

A real and fully articulated quality management system is still missing. Course evaluation is useful and has led to improvement in teaching/learning, but Quality assurance also implies paying more attention to the view of external stakeholders and to the longer term impact of the programme.

The practical orientation of the programme appears to be guaranteed by a range of factors, e.g.:

- Most of the faculty are active part-time, with a significant connection with the practice
- Some of the teaching methods are practice-oriented: case studies, presence of invited external referents, business game, visits.

*Standard compliance:* this standard is at the moment only partially met.

#### *Recommendations*

The panel suggests collecting and analysing a wider range of performance indicators from different perspectives.

The practical orientation is and should remain a core dimension of the EMBA. Yet, the panel sees here some room for improvements in the interaction and exchange with external partners from the regional socio-economic environment (public and private companies, associations, etc.).

A quality management system should be set in place in order to ensure that the current high level of perceived quality can be sustained also in the future, when the internal and external condition could change (increase in the number of students and staff, increased interaction with regional reality, new services, etc.).

The system should enable to collect and analyse a wide range of quality indicators, as a basis for on-going improvement of the EMBA. On-going improvement of all aspects of the programme and of the organization should become more formalized and not depend of the current commitment of a limited number of people

### **Area 3: Studies**

#### **Standard 3.2**

The study plan is based on training objectives and generally leads to issuance of a professional qualification that matches a clear content profile.
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##### *Description*

The EMBA has very clear and consistent training objectives that are described in terms of Learning Outcomes and there is a table matching the acquisition of these competencies with the different modules over time. A remarkable feature of the EMBA is Module 1 (the “capstone module”), which aims at developing students’ leadership capacities: this is a lasting and cumulative process (which explains why this core Module runs across the 4 semesters, in parallel to the other modules) based on a system of structured, individual coaching monitored through a “portfolio” of activities for each student.

##### *Analysis*

Although the first cohort of students will graduate from the EMBA only in 2013, there are clear signals that the business community is highly appreciative of the programme’s impact on the development of young executives, in particular with respect to the acquisition of leadership skills and other soft skills. They see the CAS as guaranteeing the minimal technical level and the EMBA as an effective programme for the management development. The mix of theory, management techniques and individual coaching, as well as the mix of professional teachers and practitioners from enterprises dealing with small groups of students are seen as the key ingredients of the programme’s appeal and acceptance. The Panel was positively surprised by the strong approval in the business community for the “soft skills approach” chosen for the EMBA.

*Standard compliance:* fulfilled

##### *Recommendations*

Since the first graduates will complete the programme in 2013, the Panel urges the EMBA to make certain to keep in touch with alumni and the companies in which they work, in order to find out about the programmes strengths/weaknesses and entice alumni to recommend the EMBA to potential future applicants.

The EMBA should consider awarding a diploma Supplement in French and in English to all graduates.

#### **Standard 3.3**

The degree programme is based on a modular structure that awards credits on the basis of performance and examinations held at established intervals. <sup>1</sup>
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##### *Description*

The self-assessment report presents an overview of the programme, with the 9 different modules and the underlying units, their credit load, the balance between teaching and self-study, and the assessment methods. At the end of each semester, an examination period is held. The programme ends with a Master’s thesis.

During the site visit, binders were available with all course materials, including the overview of each module with its course objectives and competencies to be acquired.

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<sup>1</sup> Full-time studies at Bachelor’s degree level last at least three years and correspond to 180 ECTS. At Master’s degree level, 90 ECTS are awarded (in order to ensure international recognition, some Master’s degree programmes award 120 ECTS, see agreement between the Confederation and the Cantons regarding the implementation of UAS Master’s degree programmes, Bern, 24 August 2007).



### *Analysis*

The programme nicely fits together, fulfils the ECTS requirements, and makes use of diverse assessment methods. The programme has been benchmarked with that of other EMBA programmes to make sure the necessary topics are dealt with.

*Standard compliance:* fulfilled

### *Recommendations*

The current programme has been developed based on comparisons with other internal and external programmes and using diverse internal task forces. It will be important to continue developing the programme in the future, installing a more formal approach to do so (cf. Standard 2.1. above - programme governance). An internal (i.e., what differentiates our programme from other programmes in the institute?) as well as an external (i.e., what makes our programme unique?) perspective is important in this regard.

## **Standard 3.4**

The conditions to be met in order to obtain credits and qualifications are regulated and disclosed to the public.

### *Description*

For each module, an overview is provided about the course objectives, examination method, competencies to be acquired, etc. This way, students clearly know what to expect.

In addition, there are course regulations for the EMBA LMR programme which are distributed during the first course and need to be signed for approval.

Finally, an extensive policy regarding the master's thesis has been developed, including guidelines regarding the consequences of plagiarism.

### *Analysis*

Expectations of the modules and master's thesis are clear.

*Standard compliance:* fulfilled

### *Recommendations*

Make sure to evaluate these rules and regulations after the first full cycle of the programme.

## **Standard 3.5**

A clear distinction is drawn between the competencies to be obtained in a Bachelor's degree programme and those to be obtained in a Master's degree programme (competency profile<sup>2</sup>).

### *Description*

An overview is provided in the self-assessment report regarding the link between the different modules and the required competencies (as described by the NQF-CH-HS). A major difference between a typical bachelor degree and the EMBA is to be found in the profile of students: EMBA students are mature persons (mostly in their thirties) who are working in parallel to their studies and are thus significantly different from bachelor students.

### *Analysis*

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<sup>2</sup> See agreement between the Confederation and the Cantons regarding the implementation of UAS Master's degree programme, Bern 24 August 2007.

The EMBA LMR programme is a post-graduate education, which clearly fits the requirements of a Master. As a requirement for students that do not have the right level to follow the EMBA (yet), a Certificate of Advanced Studies in Business Management (CAS-SGE) needs to be obtained through a 6-month pre-education. The fact that students need first to complete successfully this programme is additional proof that the EMBA clearly differentiates itself from the bachelor level. The CAS-SGE programme also mainly focuses on knowledge transfer to students, while the EMBA programme stresses the understanding and application of this knowledge.

*Standard compliance:* fulfilled

#### *Recommendations*

Continue this mapping between the content/approach of the different modules and their competencies, taking into account the internal and external situation.

### **Standard 3.6**

The UAS guarantees that the competencies obtained during the Bachelor's degree programme are coherent with the competencies required for admission to the corresponding Master's degree programme.

#### *Description*

This standard does not really apply here, as there is no specific bachelor that precedes this programme. It may be useful nonetheless to record here that the delimitation between the EMBA and the CAS is fully given.

#### *Analysis*

For this standard, see also 3.5

*Standard compliance:* not applicable

## **Area 4: Teaching staff**

### **Standard 4.1**

Lessons are taught by teachers who have adequate expertise in their field, have teaching credentials, hold a higher education qualification and have several years of professional experience.

#### *Description*

Teaching staff shows a good mastery of different didactical approaches and tools, including business games, simulation tools, case studies etc. All teachers met by the Panel have also significant experience in consultancy with local/regional business companies, and they believe that their experience with research/consultancy finds its way into teaching and coaching. Teachers find the focus of the EMBA on soft skills and managerial responsibility fully justified and appropriate.

The relationship with the students is very positive and appreciated by both sides, also due to the small size of the classes. Teachers are seen by students as accessible and responsive. There is a mix of professional teachers and business practitioners that students see as adequate to their needs and useful for their development.

The current percentage of international faculty is under 10%.

The entire didactical documentation is still printed on paper.

#### *Analysis*

The average academic level of the teaching staff, although not (yet) fully reaching the thresholds suggested by the international AMBA standards<sup>3</sup>, is judged appropriate to the mission and the profile of the EMBA.

There appears to be a good coordination inside each learning module; on the contrary, coordination and communication between different modules is sometimes weaker and should become more systematic.

The percentage of foreign staff remains weak and should be further increased in the next years, in order to bring a more differentiate, multi-cultural outlook in the EMBA and to open up new opportunities (both in training and research) for the students.

The full potential of new technologies (e.g. E-learning, blended learning, use of tablets instead of paper documents, etc.) is not fully explored and exploited by the faculty. This might contribute to making the programme even more attractive to potential students who are often travelling abroad or have a high workload. These students are likely to have difficulties attending a traditional EMBA and could appreciate more flexible and customized teaching methods. The same may be true also for young women or young parents.

*Standard compliance:* fulfilled

#### *Recommendations*

We suggest that a staff development plan should be established, in order to ensure that the didactical qualities of faculty will be maintained and improved in the future. This is important in particular with part-time faculty, which often can be weaker from a didactical perspective.

It is important that innovation in EMBA's didactical approaches and tools is fostered on an on-going basis and within a formalised framework. In particular, the Panel believes that it is worth exploring the benefits of an increased use of e-learning technologies and approaches.

The Panel suggests further that coordination and interaction between different learning modules should be improved and formalised.

A systematic quality management system (see criterion 2.3) should monitor the quality of teaching and should help to improve it on an on-going basis.

Finally, we suggest further stimulating the hiring of international, multi-cultural faculty.

#### **Standard 4.2**

Most teachers are involved in several aspects of the expanded performance mandate.
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#### *Description*

Most of the staff is currently involved in research projects. Some of them have also published books and papers, both at national and international level.

Most of the faculty is also involved in consulting activities; it seems that there is a consistent transfer in training of knowledge gained in consulting projects.

#### *Analysis*

The research level and focus correspond to those of others Universities of Applied Science

Research activities have a far-reaching impact on the quality of the EMBA, e.g.:

- They stimulate international networking of the faculty, generating personal contacts which can be used to enrich the programme, for example by inviting external speakers
- They make sure that faculty remains up-to-date and open-minded
- They enables faculty to bring in the classroom new topics, with first-hand experience.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.mbaworld.com/accreditationcriteria>

The panel is confident that a well-developed research activity can contribute in the medium and long term to increasing the visibility and reputation of the EMBA on regional, national and international level.

We can expect from staff the same positive impact as mentioned above in the area of consulting. Consulting projects give the faculty a fresh and direct insight in the “real world” outside the school and are therefore critical to guarantee the practical orientation of the programme.

*Standard compliance:* fulfilled

#### *Recommendations*

We suggest paying continuous attention to a systematic transfer of research results and insight into the training activities, and to sensitise the faculty about this important issue.

### **Area 5: Students**

#### **Standard 5.1**

The competencies required for admission and graduation are defined, publically disclosed and checked.
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#### *Description*

The admission process consists of the submission of all necessary paperwork (CV, motivation letter) on the one hand and an introductory interview with the programme director on the other hand. This conversation serves two purposes: checking the current level of the candidates (to advise him/her to first follow the CAS programme if needed) and to check the expectations in two directions.

#### *Analysis*

The admission process needs to be further formalized to make it less dependent on the time and opinion of one person and to also stimulate more selection. It will be important to attract more candidates in the future to enable a selection effect (instead of an admission range of about 100% at the moment).

*Standard compliance:* fulfilled

#### *Recommendations*

The panel strongly urges the UAS and programme director to further professionalise the admission process, for instance by conducting the proposed action plans of the self-assessment report as a first step. It will certainly be important to involve more people in the admission process.

In addition, it will be important to remain attentive of the composition of the student body. Heterogeneity in profiles stimulates the richness of the programme. Make sure to attract more (diverse) candidates that (want to) apply. An analysis of the current student body and people who showed an interest to follow the programme can help defining target groups that can subsequently be approached with a (pro)active and professional marketing campaign.

In this sense, further branding and marketing efforts will be important to put the programme on the map, using a broad range of communications channels, e.g., website, (social) media, etc. The main aim should be to work on the visibility of the programme.

#### **Standard 5.4**

Students have access to student advisory services.
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#### *Description*

Both institutes have student advisory services, which are complemented with the association with two professional associations (i.e., Swiss Engineering, APOGES) for the EMBA students. The service to

individual students is highly customised, both in their relationship with academic and with administrative staff.

#### *Analysis*

Although the climate between programme administration and students seems to be very good (probably because of the highly personal attention enjoyed by individual students), the development of formalised student services is not fully completed yet; at this stage in the development of the programme, only initial steps have been taken thus far. They will need to be development as more students enrol in, and graduate from the EMBA.

*Standard compliance:* fulfilled

#### *Recommendations*

The student advisory services need to be further developed, certainly in light of the short period in which the first EMBA students will graduate. Which additional networks can they associate themselves with? How to organise the alumni network?

In addition, it is also important to think about the following: What about career services? Attention for workplace transfer?

The strengthening of student services and representativeness would also benefit from more opportunities for all students (i.e. the students of both sites) to do activities (including of course pedagogic activities) in common; some steps have been taken in this direction and the Panel suggests that it would be useful to create more opportunities of this type.

### **Area 6: Material and spatial resources**

#### **Standard 6.1**

The degree programme has the resources needed to reach the objectives. Resources are available over the long-term.
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#### *Description*

The spatial and material resources available to the EMBA are good to excellent, both at Neuchâtel and at Yverdon, and are available on a permanent basis.

#### *Analysis*

There is not the least concern about the level and adequacy of material and spatial resources available to the EMBA. Given the relative small size of the programme and its distribution on two sites, the Panel is not certain that the resources are always used in the most cost-efficient way, but they are available and contribute to the quality of the teaching-learning process and the acquisition of competencies by graduates.

*Standard compliance:* fulfilled

#### *Recommendations*

As the programme develops, cost-efficiency is likely to become a more prominent factor in the overall accountability process. The panel therefore suggest that the UAS together with the programme management starts looking into this issue as part of the new Strategic Plan, in order to prevent being forced into efficiency measures by the funding authorities at a later stage.

### **Area 7: Internationalisation, cooperation, intercultural orientation**

#### **Standard 1.2**

The degree programme is generally based on the criteria established for international recognition of foreign qualifications, especially recognition within Europe.
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### *Description*

With its modular structure over two years (+ six months for the Master thesis) and its clear professional profile, the programme is in-line with the European and international standards for continuing education masters. The EMBA builds on a bachelor-type first degree and requires the normal level of credit required for a master-level degree. There is therefore no particular reason to hesitate (as does the self-evaluation report) about the corresponding level in the European Qualifications Framework (EQF): the EMBA is by no means at level 5 (which corresponds to short, sub-degree higher education courses), but at level 7 of the EQF.

The EMBA is developing a series of targeted international agreements in partnership with other Swiss universities of applied science; this internationalisation strategy is not seen as a goal in itself, but rather as a means to serve the internationally-oriented needs of local industry.

### *Analysis*

The Panel finds the doubts of the EMBA and HES-SO leadership about the qualification level corresponding to the EMBA programme unjustified. Graduates from this programme should not expect any particular difficulty to have their degree recognised in the EHEA as a solid, professionally-oriented, continuing education master degree.

The panel commends the EMBA for developing a very realistic and well-suited approach to internationalisation, avoiding “me-too” solutions, dispersion and prestige-led agreements and privileging concrete partnerships based on the pooling of resources with other Swiss UAS (thanks to a formula where each Campus and UAS specialises in contacts with one specific foreign country/region on behalf of all UAS in the pool: e.g. HEG Arc with Russia, HEIG with India, etc.)

*Standard compliance:* fulfilled

### *Recommendations*

The experts recommend that the EMBA should seek the AMBA label in due time, i.e. not right away but rather after reviewing the programme in the wake of the present evaluation report and integrating it into the UAS’s Strategic Plan.

The leadership of the EMBA should clarify their interpretation of the EQF in the Swiss and European context and should convey this interpretation to the programme’s staff and students.

The panel also recommends that the EMBA further develops the pooling of international contacts with other Swiss UAS, in order to create opportunities for more students, but without allowing this strategy to take on a dimension not suited to the education/training objectives of the EMBA.

## **Standard 3.1**

The degree programme is based on a structured study plan that is coherent with coordinated implementation of the Bologna Declaration in Swiss UAS.

### *Description*

The study plan for the EMBA is structured over two years (+ Master dissertation). It carries 60 ECTS points for an estimated total of 1867 study hours.

The study plan has been established on the basis of an international comparison between the various competency categories to be acquired in MBA-like programmes, following the conclusions of research conducted by Rubin & Diersdorff in the USA in 2009.

A detailed comparison with MBAs and Executive MBAs at other Swiss UAS is provided.

### *Analysis*

The Panel shares the opinion that the programme is in line with the principles of the Bologna Declaration as they are applied internationally to continuing education masters aimed at active professionals. It also finds that the programme structure and content are in line with international standards for similar degrees and welcomes that the EMBA has chosen a profile that clearly fits into

the range of such programmes. With an average of 31 study hours per ECTS credit, the EMBA lies clearly above the average number of required hours per credit, which means that the programme may be worth a higher number of ECTS points. The Panel does not fully share the Programme Director's faith in the worldwide relevance of Rubin & Diersdorff model, but was able to check that the programme is sufficiently embedded in its local/regional business environment to match the needs of Swiss, rather than American business firms.

*Standard compliance:* fulfilled

#### *Recommendations*

The programme leadership may wish to consider revising the allocation of ECTS credits, as the EMBA may be "worth" a higher total of credit points.

### **Standard 5.3**

The degree programme enables student mobility. Other higher education institutions recognise studies undertaken at the UAS.

#### *Description*

The same as for most other executive MBAs, the EMBA RLM puts more emphasis on internationalisation than on traditional mobility: most students study part time and carry out a professional activity in parallel, which seriously limits their ability to spend an extended period of time abroad.

The EMBA programme contains internationalisation items for all students (Module 1 pays attention to the international dimension of leadership development and Module 3 is specifically dedicated to "International business") and some optional possibilities, in particular during the Annual MBA Key Lectures Series (bringing together all students of the EMBA and of several other institutions) and the international "business weeks". Students can participate in one or more such "weeks": they consist in immersion courses offered in English in 4 different countries (China, Russia, Brazil, USA) thanks to a pooling of international contacts with the Bern UAS.

The delivery of a Diploma Supplement to all graduates (in French, or in English upon request) is under preparation.

#### *Analysis*

The Panel commends the EMBA and HES-SO leadership for the development of an international strategy well suited to the needs of local industry and students; internationalisation is not and should not be the main feature of the EMBA and the programme is consistent in insisting mainly on the acquisition of international competencies by local graduates working in local, albeit internationally-oriented, companies.

Although there is not yet any evidence of this (due to the lack of graduates), the panel is confident that graduates of the EMBA will not find it difficult to get their qualification recognised in the European Higher Education Area. Bringing the ECTS points in line with what is actually required may further ease this process.

The Panel shares the opinion of the programme's leadership that the EMBA is in line with the majority of standards required to become a member of AMBA (Association of MBAs).

*Standard compliance:* fulfilled

#### *Recommendations*

The Panel encourages the EMBA to create some more international opportunities for students, in particular by contributing to the pooling of international weeks with other UAS through partnerships established by its own schools and by increasing the internationality of its own campuses by receiving more foreign faculty (as permanent or invited teachers) and students (e.g. by hosting "international weeks" in Switzerland and involving local industry in them).

The panel also invites the EMBA to set in place a mechanism guaranteeing that all graduates have sufficient command of English in a professional setting and sufficient exposure to internationality and interculturality (e.g. by expanding the offer of international weeks and providing incentives for all students to participate in them)

The EMBA should consider applying for AMBA membership once the programme is consolidated and a few cohorts have graduated from it.

## **Area 8: Gender equality**

### **Standard 1.4**

Gender equality is guaranteed.
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#### *Description*

Gender equality is not yet a full reality of the EMBA. This may be due to a significant extent to the history of the 2 institutes, which used to be dominated by engineering education, an area that has long been marked with a deficit in female students. However, the situation is changing. HEG Arc and HEIG-VED both have a person responsible for the contacts with the equal opportunity office of HES-SO and the responsible organ in the canton. There is currently an interim policy in place for 2012 in expectation of a new policy for the future. The two institutes are in a renewal phase of their “equal chances policy”, which will soon be fully in line with the guidelines of HES-SO. The EMBA RLM programme attempts to include the guidelines of the larger institutes within the specific programme.

#### *Analysis*

Both institutes put effort in equal chances for men and woman. A person is dedicated (for a proportion of his/her time) to work out initiatives in this matter. Although both the general canton guidelines and the institutes’ guidelines are up for renewal, there seems to be attention for this topic in the programme. The experts see also the appointment of a woman as programme director as an encouraging signal.

*Standard compliance:* currently only partly fulfilled

#### *Recommendations*

Given the consistently low number of women applying, the expert group acknowledges that solving this issue may take several more years. The Panel recommends that the EMBA keeps focusing its efforts on this issue in future policies and initiatives, both in the context of student selection, recruitment and admission, and in the area of teaching.

### **Standard 4.3**

There is a balanced gender ratio among the teaching staff.
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#### *Description*

Numbers provided in the self-assessment report: 72% male and 28% female involved in the EMBA LMR programme (on a teaching staff of 50 teachers)

The institutes stimulate parents (mothers and fathers) with young children to fix their teaching scheme in such a way that the combination work and family can be improved.

#### *Analysis*

Although this number seems fairly low, this is not much lower than the 33% average female lecturers according to the Association of Business School. Moreover, specific guidelines regarding work-family combinations are taken.

*Standard compliance:* fulfilled



### *Recommendations*

Although the numbers are encouraging at this stage, the Panel suggests that the EMBA should continue closely monitoring this aspect in the future.

### **Standard 5.2**

Gender equality as well as implementation of a general non-discrimination policy are ensured.
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#### *Description*

In the current four cohorts of EMBA LMR students, the balance men/women is respectively ranging from 10 to 24 male to 1 to 5 female students.

Attention is given for diversity in the context of the leadership courses, which form a significant part of the curriculum of the EMBA LMR programme.

#### *Analysis*

The number of women in comparison with men is low, but this is in line with other (E)MBA programmes elsewhere. The programme pays considerable attention to leadership and diversity aspects and thus creates a climate of openness regarding gender equality.

*Standard compliance:* fulfilled

#### *Recommendations*

A range of future actions are described in the self-assessment report to give further attention to this point:

- presentation of the programme at May 2012 conference of the Business Professional Women's Association;
- continued advertising on the Career Women's website 2012-2015;
- publication of an article on the EMBA LMR programme together with equal chances committee of HES-SO;
- introduction of a hybrid programme (incl. blended learning) to encourage people to attend particular sessions from a distance.

These actions, and more, are important to create a more equal gender balance in the EMBA LMR programme; therefore the experts strongly urge the programme's leadership to act upon them.

## **5. OVERALL IMPRESSION, STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES**

In the view of the Panel the EMBA has made significant progress since the initial, unsuccessful application for evaluation of 2008. Its main strengths can be found:

- on the one hand, in the clear, firm, coherent and well differentiated profile of the programme, thanks to its determined orientation towards the development of soft leadership skills and responsibility, in tune with the needs of regional, but internationally-oriented industry
- on the other hand, in its committed team of persons, who share a common vision of the role and content of the programme; in spite of some differences between individuals and between the two sites, this "team" includes not only the leadership of the UAS and that of the programme, but also the community of teachers, administrators and students involved in the programme. The same is true with respect to the business community.

This does not mean that there is no room for improvement. By and large, all activities and tools for the development, coordination, implementation and quality assurance of the programme are present, but they tend to rest more on the goodwill and dedication of staff than to on explicit, formalised procedures and consultations.

The EMBA would need a medium-term Strategic Plan anticipating the next stages of its development: admission of more students in order to reach the necessary critical mass (which is also needed in order to guarantee the EMBA's longer-term visibility), graduation of the first cohort of graduates (with the related new needs for a career service, a Diploma Supplement policy and an alumni association), formal policy for staff development (e.g. with respect to thesis supervision) and for the sharing of tasks with partners in internationalisation, planning for the AMBA accreditation, etc.

In the same way, the programme governance would need some improvements in order to make it less dependent on the Programme Director, to better organise the involvement of teachers, students and external partners and to take a fresh look into the use of resources. The coordination between the two campuses may still be an issue, but not a major one.

However, these areas for improvement do not represent an obstacle to the positive evaluation of a good, useful and effective (if not fully efficient) programme.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

The Expert Group came to the conclusion that the EMBA meets 17 of the 20 applicable standards and partially meets the remaining 3. None of the standards was found as being missed.

Therefore, the Expert Group unanimously recommends that OAQ should grant a positive evaluation of the EMBA RLM of the HES-SO, while at the same time drawing the attention of the leadership to the recommendations for improvement shown in this evaluation report.