

Accreditation Report

Accreditation of

Magdeburg Stendal University of Applied Sciences

“European Master in Sign Language Interpreting” (M.A.)

I Procedure

Date of Contract: June 21st, 2013

Receipt of self-evaluation report: January 8th, 2013

Date of the on-site visit: March 24th -25th, 2014

Standing Expert Committee: “Humanities, Languages and Cultural Sciences”

Support in the ACQUIN Office: Clemens Bockmann

Date of Accreditation: 24th June 2014

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The **accreditation report** of the peer group is based on the self-evaluation report of the university and extensive discussions with the vice-rector, the directors of the study programme, staff representatives (lectures) and students.

The underlying **evaluation criteria** are based on the “criteria of the Accreditation Council for the accreditation of study programmes” in the current official version.

Date of the accreditation report: 19th may 2014

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II Introduction

1 Short profile of the Higher Education Institution (HEI)

1.1 Magdeburg-Stendal University of Applied Sciences

The Magdeburg-Stendal University of Applied Sciences have been founded after the German unification in 1992. It has seven faculties at two locations with a teaching staff of about 160 professors and lecturers that offer study programmes to about 6500 students. In October 2005, all study programmes with the academic degree “Diplom” have been replaced by Bachelor and Master programmes. The university includes a central library, a centre for information and communication technology and a centre for the use of modern media that offers support in the application of distance learning methods, video conferencing, etc.

1.2 Humak University of Applied Sciences, Helsinki & Kuopio

Humak University of Applied Sciences has been founded in 1998. It operates nationwide and its structure is a network of three study programmes in 12 educational units. There are some 1300 students at Humak and the number of personnel is about 120. Humak University of Applied Sciences has its’ focus on in the fields of Civic and Youth work, Production and Administration of Cultural Activities and Sign Language Interpretation. Moreover Humak includes a virtual campus, which makes use of modern education and information technology.

1.3 Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh

Heriot-Watt University is made up of six academic schools and two postgraduate institutes, offering over 400 programmes in a wide range of disciplines to around 8000 students with over 1500 members of staff, including ca. 480 academic and 180 research staff, on five campuses in Scotland, Dubai and Malaysia. Heriot-Watt has been named Scottish University of the Year in two consecutive years in 2011/12 and 2012/13 in the Sunday Times University Guide; it has been ranked 18th university in the UK in the Guardian University Guide 2014, and it has been placed first in Scotland and fourth in the UK in the 2012 National Student Survey.

1.4 Fact sheet of the Study Programme

The “European Master in Sign Language Interpreting” (M.A.) – EUMASLI in the following – is a part-time study programme of 90 ECTS credits. The standard period of study comprises five semesters. EUMASLI is a joint programme of Magdeburg-Stendal University of Applied Sciences (Germany), Humak University of Applied Sciences (Finland) and Heriot-Watt University (Scotland). Students have to pay tuition fees of approximately 5000 Euro at Magdeburg and 7940 British Pound at Heriot-Watt for Scottish and European students (9375 BPS for Students from the

other realms of the United Kingdom and 16875 BSP for “oversea students”). At Humak students do not pay any fees.

III Evaluation

1 **Targets of the university and faculty**

At Magdeburg-Stendal University of Applied Sciences undergraduate training of sign language interpreters has been offered in the Faculty of Social Studies and Public Health since 1997. It is located in the main university campus at Magdeburg-Herrenkrug. The sign language interpreting unit has a staff of two professors, one part-time sign language interpreting trainer and three deaf sign language lecturers, two of them part-time. The unit cooperates closely with the Department of Technical Translation, which is situated in the same building. Since October 2007, a purpose-built digital "sign language lab" has been available for teaching and practice purposes.

The sign language interpreting unit has received money from an EU-Leonardo project between 2000 and 2003, as well as from two EU-Lifelong Learning (EU-LLP) projects between 2009 and 2013. Currently it is the coordinating institution for a third EU-LLP project, which began in January 2013. The unit maintains close links with regional and national deaf research organisations as well as professional associations of sign language interpreters. It has a sizeable record of student and staff mobility within and beyond Europe. The current Bachelor programme in sign language interpreting has been introduced in October 2005. 16-18 students per year are admitted to the three-and-a-half-year programme (210 ECTS credits). The programme has been accredited by a recognized German accreditation agency. From autumn 2013 onwards, the revised Bachelor programme has been offered as a four-year programme (240 ECTS credits).

The Bachelor programme "Sign Language Interpretation" of Humak University of Applied Sciences today comprises 160 credits (equivalent to 240 ECTS credits). In the beginning, the interpreter programme was provided by the Finnish Association for the Deaf in 1978. Since 1983, the interpreter training programme has been provided by the college which developed to become a University of Applied Sciences: First, the training was a one-year education, in 1986 it became a two-year and from 1988 a three-year programme. Since 1998 it has been offered as a Bachelor programme. The duration is four years for the full-time programme. All the study programmes offered by Humak are made up of the universitys' basic studies, programme specific basic studies, major studies, projects, work placement and final theses. Humak also offers continuing education and extension studies in the form of adult education, retraining and upgrading of qualifications (e.g. Further Qualification for Community Interpreters in FinSL); specialisation studies (e.g. speech-to-text interpreters), Open University instruction and other extension studies. Humak has been working as a project leader in several EU-projects and brings substantive international experience to the joint study programme.

At Heriot-Watt University the Department of Languages and Intercultural Studies has a history of over 35 years and offers a range of language programmes at undergraduate and postgraduate levels with particular expertise in translation and interpreting. The department employs around thirty academic and teaching staff, including six professors, and is the home of two research centres, the Centre for Translation and Interpreting Studies in Scotland and the Intercultural Research Centre. The department has six digital state-of-the-art language and interpreting labs for spoken and signed language, which were refurbished in 2012.

The department has been offering training of sign language interpreters since 1996, and also ran two programmes training trainers of BSL teachers. The first Scottish full time undergraduate programme in British Sign Language translation and interpreting, leading to full registration status with NRCPD, the UK registration body of sign language interpreters, and the Scottish Association of Sign Language Interpreters, was implemented in 2012/13. As part of this, every year the department admits 12 to 20 students to study British Sign Language either as their only main language or alongside French, German or Spanish. The BSL team is made up of five members of staff, including two professors, as well as at least five PhD students in the area of sign language interpreting from 2013/14, and is currently involved in a number of national and international research projects.

2 Targets of the study programme

2.1 Origins of the study programme

The partnership between Magdeburg-Stendal University of Applied Sciences (Germany), Humak University of Applied Sciences (Finland) and Heriot-Watt University (Scotland) was formalised in 2006 through a project entitled “EUMASLI: European Master in Sign Language Interpreting”, funded within the EU Socrates Programme, Erasmus Selection 2006: Curriculum Development Projects (Project No. 29972-IC-I-2005-1-DE-ERASMUS-PROGUC-3). The development project was coordinated by Prof. Dr. Jens Hessmann of Magdeburg-Stendal University of Applied Sciences. The EUMASLI project intended to contribute to the development of the professional field of interpreting between deaf and hearing people in Europe. The project resulted in the offering of the postgraduate programme to be accredited, which started in January 2009. Information on the project is available at www.eumasli.eu.

The EUMASLI development project ran from October 2006 to September 2009. Results of an initial ‘development’ phase of the project were summarized and inspected by outside experts and stakeholders in the field of deafness, sign language, and sign language interpreting in a first round of evaluations in August 2007, and again in year three in 2009. The “production” phase, i.e. the second year of the curriculum development project, aimed at preparing the implementation of the study programme by (a) providing the necessary legal and institutional framework

and (b) working out the study modules of the programme in detail, in particular by producing relevant study materials. The 'implementation' phase, i.e. the third year of the curriculum project aimed at finalising and starting the master study programme.

After an application and selection phase in autumn 2008, the delivery of the programme successfully started in January 2009 with an international group of 16 sign language interpreting professionals from 8 countries (Germany, the UK, Finland, the Netherlands, Belgium, Austria, Greece, and the USA). All students successfully completed the programme with graduation in 2011 in Finland and Germany, and June 2012 at Heriot-Watt University. A coordinator (Dr Svenja Wurm, now a lecturer at Heriot Watt University) had been employed between January 2009 and December 2010 by Humak University of Applied Sciences.

The students presented their Master Thesis projects as preconference to the annual conference of efsli (European Forum of Sign Language Interpreters) in Vietri sul Mare, Italy, in September 2011. Here, as elsewhere, the programmes' success got evident in the positive comments the study directors received by representatives of the scientific field, including internationally recognised academics, practitioners, representatives of the profession as well as community members. Student evaluations further confirmed their positive learning experience and enthusiasm for the programme, particularly stressing the quality of the academic and practice-oriented content, commitment and support of teaching staff, and perhaps most importantly the immense benefits of working together with an international student group of professional sign language interpreters.

After the success of EUMASLI, plans to continue the delivery of the programme were substantiated. Initial discussions happened with representatives of all partner universities in Vietri sul Mare, Italy, in September 2011. Drawing on student feedback, and acknowledging the apparent international interest in the programme, the programme was revised in order to accommodate not only European students but to target a more international market. Representatives of all three partner institutions met in Berlin in May 2012, where the decision was made to go ahead with the planning of a second round. Since then, the partners have met regularly in online meetings. Another face-to-face meeting, involving all three Directors of the programme as well as teaching staff took place in May 2013 at Heriot-Watt University and focussed on the application of curriculum revision and content development.

2.2 Main objective of the study programme

The rationale of the EUMASLI project, jointly developed by Magdeburg-Stendal University of Applied Sciences (Germany), Humak University of Applied Sciences (Finland) and Heriot-Watt University (Scotland), was that professional development of sign language interpreting in the participating countries has reached a stage where qualified input into the areas of research, development and management is needed in order to develop the field beyond its present level of providing services to deaf and hearing citizens. While important steps have been reached in the participating countries towards the recognition of sign language interpreting, project partners agreed that it is necessary to go beyond first-level training programmes in order to provide skills and competencies that will enable the field of sign language interpreting to grow into a coherent self-organised professional body that can serve both deaf and hearing people alike more efficiently than it does today.

The current study programme EUMASLI draws upon the strength of a long-standing European partnership, bringing together different traditions in the development of professional sign language interpreting. The study programme is designed to attract highly motivated students, already acknowledged as expert practitioners, who seek continuing professional development opportunities to become leaders in their field at national and international level. EUMASLI aims at leading its participants to reflect upon their professional status in an international context. Moreover the students should acquire substantial expertise in further developing the professional field in their home countries.

2.3 Qualification targets and competences to be achieved

The EUMASLI programme concentrates on three interconnected themes: 1) Sign language and interpreting skills, 2) Policy development and management of the profession, and 3) Research. Graduates of the programme should become sign language interpreters who, on the basis of a first-level academic degree as well as relevant professional experience, have acquired substantial skills and competencies in the areas of research, development, and management. The Study and Examination Regulations for EUMASLI at the Magdeburg-Stendal University of Applied Sciences – SER in the following – states: “The objective of the programme is for students to acquire key professional knowledge and the ability to work independently in accordance with scientific methods, to familiarize themselves independently with fields of employment relating to practice, research and teaching and to deal with the frequently changing array of tasks in the working world. Professional expertise is taught in the field of sign language interpreting. Students will acquire competence in the areas of research, management and development of sign language interpreting.” (§ 2 SER)

Generally, the EUMASLI programme is developed to deal with the following current deficits:

- Research: While there has been a steady increase in the number of interpreters entering the field, working conditions and effectiveness of sign language interpreting have rarely been monitored. The research body to be drawn upon in reflecting the progress of the field is as yet small and highly selective.
- Continuing education: That sign language interpreters shall strive to further knowledge and skills through participation in relevant workshops, seminars, etc. is a provision in all the different versions of the Code of Ethics generally accepted in the field, and it is a demand regularly voiced by practitioners. However, so far, continuing education as a regular feature of the development of the professional field is rarely available, since relevant knowledge as well as personnel is not easy to find.
- Representation and negotiation of the interests of interpreters as well as deaf people: There is an on-going, at times ardent, debate about how not always congruent interests of deaf people and sign language interpreters can be combined and met. The implementation of policies and practices that advocate the interest of the professional field while being sensitive to and effectively supporting the needs and demands of deaf people is a challenge to be met by sign language interpreters and their organisations.
- Professional self-organisation and policy making: While there are professional organisations of sign language interpreters at a national level in many countries as well as international organisations such as WASLI (World Association of Sign Language Interpreters), efsli (the European Forum of Sign Language Interpreters) coordinating interests and activities of sign language interpreters at national and international levels it has been proved difficult to allocate, organise and remunerate interpreting tasks since relevant professional action is confronted with a great variety of regional and local conditions.

Competencies can be derived implicitly in the learning outcomes of the module descriptions, but unfortunately there isn't provided an overview of professional competencies to be acquired at the end of the programme. Descriptions of qualifications¹ and learning outcomes per modules are existent, but the overall programme qualifications are missing. Moreover the competences overseen are not linked to the Dublin Descriptors², which are divided in the following themes: Knowledge and understanding; Applying knowledge and understanding; Making judgements; Communication; and Learning skills.

The self-reflection report states that "the study program will lead its participants to reflect upon their professional status in an international context and acquire expertise that will enable them

¹ E.g. http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/SubmittedFiles/5_2013/113542.pdf

² See for instance http://www.tcd.ie/teaching-learning/academic-development/assets/pdf/dublin_descriptors.pdf

to contribute substantially to the development of the professional field in their respective countries.” The end qualifications are formulated as follows:

- acquired experience and skills in conducting research and thus be enabled to contribute to the growing body of literature on sign language interpreting;
- reflected their interpreting experience and gained new insights concerning specific aspects of the interpreting process;
- seriously considered social, ethical, and organisational aspects of advancing their field with a view to respecting and supporting the interests of deaf people and their communities;
- acquired knowledge and skills in the areas of management and policy making, and thus be prepared to take a leading role in the development of the professional field.

It is not clear in what way these competencies, or how working on these competencies, are represented as subjects or themes in the individual modules or how they are assessed, and how these are measured/evaluated in the final master thesis. The assessment method described³ might not be precise enough to guarantee a master level, since no marking matrix is provided.

If the competences were matched to the end qualifications or learning outcomes that are explicated in the modules description a coherent overview would emerge of what the students can show on a master’s level (see also section III.5). As an example, a matrix might be helpful to clarify the relation between the Dublin descriptors and the qualifications of the different modules:

Dublin Descriptors -> Modules	Knowledge and understanding	Applying knowledge and understanding	E.g. Making Judgements
2.1 Intr.IS	X	X	
4.1 Intr. IS and English		X	X

Although the description of the competences lack a certain specification according to formulations set by international standards, EUMASLI nevertheless is orientated towards competences.

The students acquire necessary research oriented skills on master level. Research-informed learning skills are fundamental to the programme since research it is one of the programmes core aims. Research skills are initiated in the first semester, where students are required to find research topics relating to the sign language and deaf community of one of the other participating countries. Hereby experience and expertise of fellow-students from that country is central. This approach encourages international engagement and supports peer-to-peer exchange. Furthermore it helps the new students to become acquainted with the study environment. Research

³ EUMASLI Handbook: “MA theses are assessed according to generally accepted scientific standards.”

and theory are thereafter embedded within all semesters, culminating in the master thesis in the last semester.

2.4 Students' personal development and capability for civic engagement

In EUMASLI there are three modules explicitly focusing on personal development, developing reflective practice, and developing the profession, where attention is paid to working in a multicultural group, study skills, professional reflection, and the overall process of sign language interpreting service production and management. Through diverse didactic work and study approaches, the students are encouraged to share experiences, to reflect upon their status and role as interpreters in an international context and what that means for the profession of SL interpreters. In the peer group exchange with the students it got obvious that the students are very enthusiastic about this aspect of the programme. Furthermore students make the experience that the academic environment and approach fundamentally form their personal points of view and general as well as specific attitudes. In general, the students' personal development is enhanced considerably by EUMASLI and the students acquire abilities for further civic engagement.

2.5 Employability

Personnel development planning (PDP) and tools ('skills') are introduced in the first semester and intensified during the following semesters. Students are expected to maintain an ongoing learning log. This encourages a critical self-reflection and learning-about-learning. The overall aim in promoting skills in working with International Sign is not only to prepare students to work in an international context, but also to encourage the further development of working with their respective national sign language.

All the students of the first cohort received their master's degree in 2011. There is no information about the results of having obtained a master's degree for the working interpreters, nor is there information about their current employment. Anecdotal data yields that some of the current sign language interpreters who have a EUMASLI degree are in leader positions either in their home country or in international institutions or organisations. According to the 2011 presentation held by the European Union of the Deaf and the European Forum of Sign Language Interpreters⁴ at the conference of the World Association of Sign Language Interpreters (WASLI), there is a need for sign language interpreters all over Europe, but especially for sign language interpreters who have additional skills, such as international sign, and additional (sign) languages. The EUMASLI programme has three strands: interpreting in international settings, policy and research. This provides the students with a broad array of employment possibilities, which are not solely geared towards working as a sign language interpreter. The current stu-

⁴ WASLI 2011 conference proceedings (2014).

dents themselves indicate that they expect EUMASLI to give them a theoretical component which complements their daily practice. Moreover, students value the research component, the inter-cultural environment and the exchange of best practices, which will differentiate them from other sign language interpreters. From the view-point of the peer group the prospects for sufficient employment of EUMASLI graduates are excellent.

3 Concept of the study programme

3.1 Admission criteria & demand of the programme

The selection of applicants proceeds on the basis of the “Regulations on implementation of the assessment procedure to determine eligibility for the Europäischer Master in Gebärdensprachdolmetschen (European Master’s in Sign Language Interpreting) in the Department of Social and Health Sciences at Hochschule Magdeburg-Stendal University of Applied Sciences dated 28 November 2012” (Appendix C of the Study Handbook).

To apply for the master programme a Bachelor-Degree of any subject is needed. The applicants must also prove their English knowledge at B2 level of the Common European Framework of Languages and that they possess sign language skills with particular regard to sign language-based communication in international settings. To prove these abilities, a minimum of three years’ professional experience is required. Furthermore, they need to understand how to reflect appropriately on their professional experience as sign language interpreters (§2 Regulations on implementation of the assessment procedure to determine eligibility for the EUMASLI).

Applicants apply at one of the three partner universities by using the standard application form of that HEI. They are asked to state secondary choice(s) of universities. A joint selection procedure between the three partners ensures that students are spread across the three universities according to the student choices and university capacities. Written instructions, specifying the procedures and the criteria, are provided to the assessors prior to the procedure. The procedures are a step by step document of the selection process. The document explains in detail each type of assessment: the written test, the spoken language interview and the sign language interview. The provided assessment criteria encompass the English, expertise and sign language skills.

The selection procedure consists of a short-listing of all applications. Short listed candidates are invited to attend an online interview with the interview panel including at least one member of each partner university and a representative from professional practice. The applicants are tested in the following fields:

- to communicate with deaf people in an international context using signed communication (tested in the form of a signed interview with a Deaf member of the teaching team)
- to participate in a master’s programme in which the language of instruction is English

- to reflect upon and critically discuss theoretical ideas (tested through submission of a short written text and discussion in English)

Applicants are ranked according to the above skills as well as details provided in the application form. Offers are made to the most successful candidates.

The interview panel respect the applicants' choice of university; however, if places have been filled at a particular university, successful applicants may get the opportunity to receive an offer at one of the partner universities instead. As the tuition fees vary considerably amongst the three HEIs the executives of EUMASLI should consider taking financial capabilities of the students into account regarding the preferred choice of HEI. Highly skilled applicants with low income should not be forced to withdraw her or his application due to a refusal in the university of his/ her choice.

Overall, the peer group judge the assessment procedure as a good orientation for applicants.

For each intake all participating institutions must agree the minimum and maximum number of students, in order to be considered viable and therefore permitted to run the programme in that year. These numbers should normally be agreed no later than 1st March in the year immediately prior to the intake. Partner universities jointly approve commencement of the programme for each cycle on the basis of the proposed recruitment figures. Responding to available resources in each of the partner universities, it is envisaged that there will be a biennial intake of students, ensuring that teaching input is only required for one cohort at a time (although there will be overlap of a dissertation period of one cohort and teaching of the next cohort).

A first round of the programme was completed in 2011; all 16 students, forming an international cohort including 8 nationalities, completed the programme and have now graduated at one of the three partner universities. Because of frequent and continuing interest in EUMASLI uttered by sign language interpreters around the world, the executives of the programme now aim to open up the programme to specific target participants from within and outside Europe.

A total of 32 persons applied to the second round of EUMASLI. 24 students of those were accepted finally. Thus, the number of accepted students in EUMASLI has been increased by almost 50 percent compared to the first round. Currently there are 23 students. The students indicated in the discussion on-site that a group of 23 is relatively large and leaves little room for manoeuvring. The peer group is therefore concerned that the large student number has a negative effect of the quality of teaching and learning. The number of students enlisted should therefore be reduced to 18.

3.2 Concept

EUMASLI is composed of ten modules. The students study two modules per semester except in the first semester where three modules are required, and the last semester where the thesis is written:

- 1.1 Similarity and Diversity in European Sign Languages (5 ECTS credits)
- 1.2 Similarity and Diversity in European Deaf Communities (5 ECTS credits)
- 1.3 Personal Development and Academic Skills (5 ECTS credits)
- 2.1 Introducing International (5 ECTS credits)
- 2.2 Interpreting and Translation Studies (10 ECTS credits)
- 3.1 Translating International Sign/English (5 ECTS credits)
- 3.2 Developing the Profession (10 ECTS credits)
- 4.1 Conference Interpreting and Transnational Contexts (5 ECTS credits)
- 4.2 Research Methods: Sign Language Interpreting and Translation as Profession and Performance (10 ECTS credits)
- 5.1 Master Thesis (30 ECTS credits)

Although the programme as a whole has a clear tenet, the structure of the programme in terms of an inherent logic in linking groups of modules, is less rigid. According to the study and examination regulations of the EUMASLI Handbook the course programme includes mandatory modules, mandatory elective modules and elective modules. The mandatory elective modules can only be elected if offered by the participating universities. The designation “elective modules” applies to modules which the students may choose from among the modules offered at the participating universities in addition to the mandatory and mandatory elective modules that are required for their programme of study. Students are free to take examinations in the elective modules. The results of such examinations are not taken into consideration when determining the final grade. If desired, a certificate of attendance will be issued. Although noted in the examination regulations students in EUMASLI I and II have not yet taken any elective modules at participating universities.

The programme is developed around three interconnected themes: sign language and interpreting skills; policy development and management of the profession; and research, reflecting the strengths of the participating universities. Each university participates in the delivery of each theme. Students travel for intensive one- or two-week block seminars in each country (3x1-week in Semester 1, providing one orientation block seminar in each country; 1x2-week block seminar in Semester 2, 3 and 4, with each partner institution hosting one of these longer block seminars). Closely guided preparatory work precedes each block seminar, and a menu of task requirements must be fulfilled for assessment following each block seminar.

- Semester 1 serves as course enhancing the students' skills to a common level and provides a foundation to the programme, covering:
 - Linguistic aspects (an introduction to the three signed languages of the partner countries and a relevant theoretical underpinning of signed language studies and linguistic concepts);
 - Cultural aspects (an introduction to the Deaf communities of the three partner countries as well as providing the relevant conceptual and theoretical underpinning necessary to discuss issues relating to Deaf Studies);
 - Academic and personal study skills (substantiating students' analytical and communication skills needed for study at this level and promoting professional reflective skills).
- Semester 2-4 include one predominantly practically oriented module, focusing on signing in international contexts (2.1, 3.1, 4.1), as well as one module which is either geared towards the consolidation of research skills and/or a focus on developing the profession (2.2, 3.2, 4.2). The latter modules contain a reflective practice strand, in which students will be introduced to advanced mechanisms of professional reflections.
- During Semester 5, students work on their dissertation, supervised by two members of staff, which will be members of staff from two of the partner institutions. The dissertation includes a compulsory colloquium.

The two-week block seminars that are central in semester 2-4 are offered by the partner university that is in charge of the 'International skills' module (2.1, 3.1, 4.1 in the table above) in each semester (i.e., DE in semester 2, UK in semester 3, and FI in semester 4). The block seminars are organised roughly as follows: One half of the two weeks of teaching is devoted to the 'International skills' module; the second half is dedicated to the other module. Note that effort hours for the 'international skills' modules will involve further contact time, whereas other modules include an increased amount of self-study time. The delivery of these modules may involve the attendance of teachers from partner countries. This is for example the case in semester 2. The block teaching for all modules in this semester is conducted in Germany. However, within the HW module visiting staff from Scotland and Finland is required.

The Handbook explicitly lists "three interconnected themes" making up the content profile of this international programme, i.e. "sign language and interpreting skills; policy development and management of the profession; research"(p. 20). Modules 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3, during the first semester, have an introductory function to bring the heterogeneous group to one level. Modules 2.1, 3.1 and 4.1, ranging from semester 2 to 4, are linked by focusing on International Sign. In parallel, modules 2.2., 3.2 and 4.2 advance in the professional field and research of interpre-

tation and translation. The module descriptions add information, some with extensive reading lists. This is a list of recommended reading whereas an abbreviated mandatory reading list is not available until shortly before the block seminar. Due to working phases between the block seminars the mandatory reading for the next sessions should be announced as early as possible.

This Masters programme does not restrict, or confine, itself to a particular field of sign language interpreting (in court, health care, etc.). It aims at competences which are at the same time broader and more specific. Sign language interpreting being a rather recent profession, the discipline itself needs, and will profit from, international standards and connectedness, but also, in the first place, of exchange in order to get formal and informal information to encourage research activities. This is the ambitious background and scope of this international programme. Consequently, its overall content description is relating to advancing reflection and exchange in the international field of sign language interpreting/translation. The policy aspect is outstanding in that future leaders and multiplier can graduate and get the opportunity to intensify research practice by enrolling in a doctoral programme.

Despite this being a European Masters programme the link to European policy and practice is not prominent. With a view to the participants it has rather an international broadness than a European specificity. This has clear advantages for exchange and broadness of scope. It however can have disadvantages when there is less information provided about EU and global policies and institutions.

It has become clear during the on-site visit that there is a high degree of commitment and motivation of both the staff and the students. Opening a programme for Deaf interpreters and for participants from all over the world is a wonderful chance for research and professional development, but also a challenge to meet in order to preserve a clear content profile the students will profit from.

There also is a linguistic issue as the role of International Sign (IS) is not entirely clear defined. International Sign within the EU has a rather different definition than in the USA. With the arrival of students coming from the United States, the influence of ASL in IS will presumably increase, which is something to pay attention to. The programme description speaks of an instruction to communicate via IS, but there are also two subsequent modules focusing on interpreting or translating between IS and English. If this is the case in practice, it seems questionable that the required level of English competence (B2) for admission to the programme is adequate given what is required from the students. Instead, the admission level should be C1.

In fact, the language issue needs to be taken care of. The programme is run under truly multilingual conditions. There seems to be a much higher demand for linguistic skills in both IS and English than is evident at first sight. All participants are supposed to use English (and to a far lesser extent, IS as well) for all of their programme communication, be it in class or in independ-

ent study or in academic writing. Students whose mother tongue is not English might be disadvantaged. Clear information is requested on linguistic issues for all interested in joining the programme, at the website for instance.

The content of study is highly connected to this intercultural learning experience. And research issues are closely linked to issues of policy and professional enhancement not only of the individual participants, but of the professional situation in the participants' home countries. Competence in involvement in society and personality development, joined to a future multiplier function, is the most obvious aim. It is the exchange on-site in a multilingual group, all of them familiar with sign language interpreting, which is one eminent source for critical reflection.

The programme is ambitious in concept, it is an original and fascinating enterprise which has to be judged against its overall scope and professional aims and not just „inside academia“. Whether this programme reaches a Master-level of teaching and learning in practice depends to some degree on the linguistic issues mentioned earlier. The recent draft on the linguistic philosophy underlying the programme is a good step to clarify the situation; still, the students should receive active assistance and support. This implies a linguistic immersion week/phase at the very beginning facilitating the students' way into academic use of English and into IS. The scope of IS remains to be clarified. The immersion phase should also invite the students to exchange their immediate linguistic and communicative experiences which tend to be challenging. To assist the students linguistically means to maintain the competence level acquired during the block phases over the work-at-home phases. It is recommended to organise an introductory phase at the very beginning of the programme. It should tackle each of the challenging issues, the communication and workload issues in particular, and assist the students in organisational matters.

3.3 ECTS & modularisation

The programme of studies is divided into modules. At least one assignment must be presented for each module. In accordance with the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), a certain number of credits will be given at the end of each successfully completed module. The scope of mandatory modules during the entire programme encompasses 90 ECTS credits. A credit point is equivalent to 30 hours. The programme duration is five semesters in part-time study with presence phases at the three universities engaged and individual study at home. The workload following ECTS distribution is balanced. Semesters 1-4 have a workload of 15 ECTS credits each, semester 5 requires a workload of 30 ECTS for the MA thesis.

In practice, this means full-time study on-site plus an additional part-time study at home going on parallel to work. This is quite a challenge for the participants and needs to be made very clear from the beginning (by a detailed description of an exemplary semester available on the website). In addition and related to linguistic issues, workload can vary considerably depending on whether or not students are native English speakers. Taking into consideration the diversity of

academic, professional and linguistic backgrounds of the students a workload evaluation of the students' study should be carried out.

3.4 Teaching methods

Teaching methods take the form of international block seminars, online activities, international workshops and private study phases with academic support. International block seminars are run jointly at one of the participating universities for all participating students. Modules conform to the following pattern: An initial self-study period (phase A) is followed by contact time in the international block seminar (phase B), followed by subsequent individual or group work (phase C). This is normally followed by a concluding event, which often involves media-based interaction through video or online conferences, or instead travelling to an additional event which takes place either at one of the partner universities or elsewhere (phase D).

Block seminars permit a concise introduction, analysis and evaluation of theoretical and applied topics in the field of studies. For this purpose, a range of different types of instruction are used (lectures, seminars with presentations, oral presentations, workshops, discussions, work in small groups, etc.). Local workshops, if appropriate replaced by online meetings, take place in each country for the group of students enrolled at each of the participating universities. Their purpose is to introduce module topics or to present and discuss the results of project work and private study phases. Local workshops held at different participating universities can be broadcasted via electronic media (e.g. video conferencing, online conferencing) to enable interactive participation. Through licence held by the German and Finnish partners, staff and students are able to use the Adobe Connect online meeting platform (ACP) for specific online meetings. Private study phases permit students to focus on relevant specialist literature, work on specific assignments and carry out individual or group project work, etc. Private study phases are supported by study materials, media-based interaction and individual supervision. The blended learning approach will draw particularly upon the existence of a virtual learning environment (VLE), based on the learning management system Moodle, to convey transitional content to the student group, and will in particular be the common, neutral territory where the students will engage in directed peer-to-peer support activities.

Learning autonomy is an essential feature of the programme and one of its basic aims of exchange and reflection in particular. Consequently the amount of direct academic support seems crucial for this ambitious international programme. The bigger the study group, the more difficult this is. Therefore, the number of students enlisted should be reduced to 18.

Direct communication with staff members should be guaranteed not only during the block seminars on-site, but also during the phases of study at home. This should not be done predominantly in writing, but via skype or other media making possible direct exchange. This also applies to achieving fluency in (English and foremost) International Sign. Practising the languages

seems to be taking place at block seminars only. Access to study material as well as exchange should be made easier through one single, user-friendly electronic platform. This seems not to be the case at the moment as teachers use not only the moodle platform mentioned above but dropbox and other personal favourable electronic systems.

The organisers should provide more active support for re-entering academia (planning and structuring academic work, etc.) as the students have at least three years of professional career after graduating (cf. III.3.1) before entering the programme. Organisational issues are truly essential as implicit knowledge currently is lost as there are no mixed cohorts, i.e. a new cohort starts once the preceding one is finished. As a consequence, there is no trans-cohort exchange. The organisation of an alumni group might help the newcomer students in their orientation.

3.5 Examination system

There are comprehensive examination rules, which regulate all relevant aspects of the examinations. The board of examiners is the central organisational unit to organise and conduct audits and examinations (§ 13ff SER). All examinations are competence oriented. For the nine modules there are as many examinations varying in type (cf. § 19 SER):⁵

1. Academic paper (APa): five times
2. Academic project (APr): twice
3. Oral presentation (OP): twice
4. Portfolio (PF): once
5. Translation/Interpretation (T/I): once

An academic paper requires an experimental, empirical or theoretical approach to some specific subject matters from within the field of study. The task should be set in such a manner that it can be completed within four to eight weeks. Students are free to propose topics and task assignments for their papers. The oral examination is conducted either as an individual examination or a group examination (whereby up to three students may form a group). In general, the length of the examination for each student is 20 minutes. Oral examinations may be held in an appropriate sign language. The peer group appreciates the variance of examination types and the appropriateness of the examinations regarding the qualification targets of each module. There are three examinations in the first semester and two in the other semesters (except the thesis semester). Thus the examination load per semester is fair and feasible. Compensation for disadvantages/ statutory protection periods are clearly defined (§ 20 SER).

⁵ In two modules APa or OP can be chosen alternatively, therefore there are nine examinations and not eleven as the listing suggests.

The possibilities to repeat examinations is given once (§ 24 SER). The programme directors justify this strict rule by necessities of the programme organisation and difficulties to provide the same base examination environment as it is not likely that academic projects are repeated more than once. As this is not always the case the peer group strongly recommends that students who have failed an assessment should have the opportunity to repeat this assessment more than once.

In the fifth semester EUMASLI concludes with the Master thesis (§ 27f SER) and colloquium (§ 29 SER).

EUMASLI has adopted the lead university's (Magdeburg-Stendal University of Applied Sciences) marking system as its basis for assessment. At each stage, marks will be translated into the partners' marking systems, following common European university practices. The Master's degree has been passed successfully when all module assignments and the Master's Thesis have been passed. The cumulative outcome of the Master's award is derived, where applicable, from the weighted average of the grades for the modules and the grade of the Master's Thesis. If the average of the cumulative grade is better than 1.3 according to the German marking system, then the overall result "passed with distinction" will be awarded. The programme is irrevocably failed when a mandatory module or the thesis has been failed and no further repetitions are permitted.

4 Implementation

4.1 Resources

The directors of EUMASLI have confirmed that the teaching capacity is sufficient. The qualification and competence of the teaching and research staff encompasses a wide range of competencies and is on a very high level, so that the study programme's objectives will be reached. However it remains unclear, how the additional requirements for the study programme will be covered. Personal and teaching capacities must be defined more clearly.

The programme is financed through tuition fees. The aim is to break even during the next round of the programme (2013-2016), which also covers additional programme development/ set-up costs. In the absence of additional development/ set-up costs in subsequent years, operational efficiency gains are expected.

Setting fees for the programme turned out to be a challenging issue: attempts at harmonising national conditions failed. The situation is as follows:

- In Finland, places in an academic study programme are government financed. A study programme can only be offered if it is approved by the relevant national ministry, which also provide the necessary funds to run the programme. The Finnish partner was success-

ful in obtaining government approval and funding for the programme from 2013 onwards. In effect, Finnish participants in the programme will not have to pay any fees.

- Germany has a tradition of government funded academic programmes as well, but the question of fees is currently under debate and there is a variety of approaches according to regulations concerning individual federal states, study areas, study levels, or academic institutions. However, programmes of the type developed here (i.e. second cycle programmes promoting continuing education) are not generally government funded but need to be “self-supporting”. The costs of the German contribution to the programme are set at approximately 25.000 € for one programme cycle, which can be covered if a minimum of five students pays 1.000 € per semester. Statutes regulating the payment of fees for German participants are being recalculated before each intake.
- (UK) Heriot-Watt’s School of Management and Languages proposes to set a full fee of £1,588 (for Home and EU students), £1,875 for the rest of UK students and £3,375 (for overseas students) per student per semester (excluding any applicable discounts).

As far as the peer group could observe the financial resources are sufficient to maintain the EUMASLI. As a harmonizing of the fees is not practical the directors of the programme should instead focus on reducing disadvantages for the students (cf. III.3.1).

The programme benefits from the VLE offered by the Finnish partner as a standard repository for course materials and a portal to online resources. However, this is not a delivery requirement, as all such activity can be delivered via alternative, standard channels (e-mail, etc.). Video-conference facilities in the partner universities are used in the course of the programme. The online meeting platform Adobe Connect (ACP), which enables individual online participation of up to 100 participants, enables participation in online activities on campus and remotely for staff and students alike. Thus, to save costs one of the scheduled project workshops and individual student contacts were partially replaced by video conferencing. Library and computing facilities are as required for a programme of this nature.

Overall the peer group estimates the personal, financial, and infrastructural resources as sufficient.

4.2 Organisation and co-operation

The study programme seems to be well organised. There are collaboration agreements between the three different universities. The organisational structure of the study programme’s implementation and management is divided into different levels and covers all relevant issues.

1. Every HEI has one study programme director, who is responsible for the programmes implementation. The programme directors form a Board of Studies, which meets regularly,

normally at least once per semester, either in person or online. The Board of Studies is responsible for reviewing and developing all academic aspects of the programme and for overseeing the administrative aspects of the programme. Programme directors are responsible to inform their departments and institutions about all relevant updates regarding academic and administrative contents.

2. A programme coordinator bridges the gap between the staff and the students and delivers and disseminates relevant information of the study programme. Payment of programme coordination is shared by all three universities.
3. A module coordinator is responsible for a specific module's implementation and quality management.
4. A Board of Examiners is responsible for organising and conducting audits and examinations. The members of the Board of Examiners are elected by the relevant body in each of the participating universities. In general, the board is to be comprised of at least five members, one member of the faculty of each of the participating universities, one external examination board member holding a suitable academic qualification (following Heriot-Watt University regulations) and one student representative (following the lead university's regulations) with observer status. The chairperson or vice-chairperson of the Board of Examiners must be a professor. For decisions regarding examinations, the student is a non-voting board member.
5. A person of trust is available for questions that do not necessarily have an academic character.

The enrolling institution ensures that information is provided or made available to students on the following matters:

- administration of the programme
- aims and objectives of the programme
- programme and examination regulations
- methods of assessment
- feedback and evaluation
- matriculation
- payment of tuition fees
- graduation arrangements
- codes of discipline
- complaints procedures
- academic appeals procedures
- other appropriate Ordinances, Regulations, Policies and Procedures.

Each Institution awards the degree to the students enrolled at that institution according to the national regulations:

- Heriot-Watt: Master of Science in Sign Language Interpreting (EUMASLI)
- Magdeburg-Stendal: Master of Arts
- HUMAK: Master of Humanities

4.3 Documentation and transparency

The peer group had insights in all relevant programme documentations and materials such as the SER, Regulations on implementation of the assessment procedure to determine eligibility for the EUMASLI, EUMASLI Handbook (module description), diploma supplements, transcripts of records etc. The Cooperation Agreement of the three HEI was included as well.

The programme is publicised through national and international professional networks (the World Association of Sign Language Interpreters, the European Forum of Sign Language Interpreters, national professional associations of sign language interpreters, etc.), academic and social communities, subject discussion boards and other social media. A dedicated programme website (www.eumasli.eu) provides a standing resource for enquirers. Presentations at academic and professional conferences have reported on the EUMASLI project and generated student interest.

There are several opportunities for people interested in EUMASLI and for the students of the programme itself to use counselling services. It should be emphasised that every student has a teacher as a personal mentor.

The peer group judge the transparency and documentation of EUMASLI as good.

4.4 Gender equality and equal opportunities

The EUMASLI programme has no gender policy. The running group consists of 3 male and 20 female students. This gender ratio is typical for sign language trainings European wide and is therefore not surprising. Though the number of male and female applications cannot be influenced, however, the gender balance in the teaching team can. There should be more male teachers involved in the programme.

The Study- and Examination Regulations includes a compensation for disadvantages in § 20 SER. At the moment there are six deaf students in the EUMASLI programme. Deaf students have to bring their personal interpreter to have a guaranteed interpreting service. Currently Danish students have brought their own interpreters. For the rest of the group there is a HEI organised International Sign interpreting service available. However, this service depends on the available funding. The Expert Group can see a high commitment for barrier-free access. Nevertheless, interpreting services should be provided full time during the programme to make communication accessible to all students, whether deaf or hearing. As an inclusive higher education institution the University of Applied Sciences Magdeburg-Stendal should provide the necessary financial support for these services.

5 Quality management

The Quality Management consists of different levels. A broader framework is under the control of the rector's office or the presidential board. The managements of the different Universities are responsible for the collection and compilation of all relevant data (i.e. statistics, trend analysis, benchmarks, study data, drop out quotes, destination surveys...). These data are collected regularly (once per year) and are the basis for the further development of the universities and the study programmes. In a narrower sense there is a more specific Quality Management of the different study programmes. This also applies to EUMASLI.

In 2007 and 2009 the curriculum was evaluated by external experts in the areas of sign language and deafness. On a regular basis the study programme is monitored by the Board of Studies through semi-annual workshops of the teaching staff of the three universities. Furthermore there are common evaluation guidelines developed by the partner institutions. These guidelines consist of questionnaires for student evaluation of teaching methods and learning outcomes. The results are continuously incorporated into the improvement of the programme.

6 Summary and evaluation according to the „Criteria of the Accreditation Council for the accreditation of study programmes“ (08.12.2009, ed. 20.02.2013)

The part-time “European Master in Sign Language Interpreting” (M.A.) is an innovative study programme that embodies current trends in Sign Language Interpreting. It both deepens professional skills and academic research, respectively. The concept of a fully international study programme on a European scale is thoroughly developed and carefully carried out, setting targets at sign language and interpreting skills, policy development, and management of the profession as well as research. Despite minor challenges towards optimal organisation and information philosophy the programme works on a very sufficient level concerning the three HEI involved. The teaching and examination frameworks are adequately differentiated. From a qualitative as well as quantitative perspective the teaching staff situation is good. The personnel involved is excellently educated and highly interconnected to foster cooperation among the HEIs and beyond. Information on the study programme is easily available and transparent. Measures are taken by the quality management for further enhancement of EUMASLI.

The Criteria 1 “Qualification objectives of the study programme’s concept”, 2 “conceptual integration of the study programme in the system of studies”, 3 “Study programme concept”, 4 “Academic feasibility”, 5 “Examination system”, 6 “Programme-related co-operations”, 7 “Facilities”, 9 “Quality assurance and further development”, 10 “Study programmes with a special profile demand”, 11 “Gender equality and equal opportunities” are fulfilled.

The Criterion 8 “Transparency and Documentation” is not fully implemented as the total amount of teaching load is not presented.

IV Decision of the accreditation commission of ACQUIN

The accreditation commission discussed the study programme at the meeting on June 23-24, 2014 on the base of the evaluation report and the standing expert committee's statement. It came to the following decision:

The master programme „European Master in Sign Language Interpreting“ (M.A.) is accredited without conditions.

The accreditation is limited until September 30, 2019.

For the further development of the study programme the accreditation commission proposes the following recommendations:

- If deaf students are admitted to the programme then translation services should be provided to make communication accessible to all students. As an inclusive higher education institution the University of Applied Sciences Magdeburg-Stendal should provide the necessary financial support for these services.
- The number of participants for one group is relatively high (currently 24 students). Out of didactical reasons the appropriate number of students should be reduced to 18.
- The level of English required to enrol in the programme should be C1 according to the European Framework.
- There should be a students' study workload evaluation.
- The learning environment should be enhanced by
 - an introductory phase at the very beginning of the programme with all students personally present– not online –,
 - early addressing the mandatory reading,
 - providing full content for the modules at an early stage,
 - using only one – user-friendly – online-platform.

The accreditation commission comes to the following dissenting opinion concerning the evaluation of the study programme

Cancellation of Conditions:

- Personal and teaching capacities must be more clearly defined.

Reason:

The cancellation was proposed by the standing expert committee. The peers have not had the full overview of the staff involved by the HEIs. This information has been transmitted to the standing expert committee after the finalisation of the evaluation report. The standing expert committee did assess the number and quality of the professors and lectures as more than sufficient.