Training Professionals for the Global Marketplace

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CROSS-EVALUATION REPORT OF THE DEGREE PROGRAMME
IN INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS

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Abstract

An important element of the quality assurance system of Jyväskylä University of Applied Sciences (JUA) is the cross-evaluation of degree programmes, in which the expertise of the various fields of study is utilized to develop education. For each cross-evaluation, a multidisciplinary evaluation team is established. The evaluation team also produces a report on the evaluation in question, to be published later. Thus, the cross-evaluation is also an internal, collective learning method, in which good practices and development ideas are shared and disseminated. The cross-evaluation procedure, which started in 2004, had been implemented in more than 20 degree programmes of JUA by the beginning of the year 2008.

The present publication reports on the cross-evaluation of the Degree Programme in International Business (IB), carried out between October 2007 and January 2008. The degree programme is conducted in English and it is JUA's most international programme. About 30–50% of its yearly 40 new degree students come from outside Finland. Together with the large number of exchange students coming to IB every year they form a multicultural learning community and environment, which is both a resource and a pedagogical challenge for the degree programme.

The Degree Programme in International Business has a distinctive mission. Its focus has been adapted in the past years to meet the needs of internationalization in the region's businesses and industry. IB has defined its own niche markets in serving small and medium-sized companies. It focuses especially on technology business companies operating in international markets. Direct interaction between students and staff creates a positive, informal atmosphere, promoting students' learning in

a multicultural community. In the course of time, IB has established a wide international partner network, and now it aims at deepening this collaboration. The programme also has close contacts with working life, and its students take part in several joint projects with regional companies. The staff members of IB are aware of their strengths and committed to developing the programme and their own work.

Evaluating the interrelation between students' professional growth and practical problem-solving in companies is necessary in IB. There could be more joint discussion on pedagogical principles, learning and the professional growth process. At the same time, it is good to analyse students' needs for guidance in relation to the development of their self-directedness and the implementation of project studies. The degree programme has set wide-ranging and ambitious goals, but its challenge is how to develop the operational process further and increase cooperation within the unit as well as with other actors at Jyväskylä University of Applied Sciences. The regional and international partner networks could also be more systematically exploited.

The cross-evaluation highlights a challenge for JUA as a whole: the availability of services and information for students and staff also in English. The relation between the support services offered in the units and JUA's common support services must be clearly defined.

Cross-Evaluation as a Degree Programme Quality Development Tool

Towards a European Higher Education Area

The objective of the so-called Bologna Process is to establish a European Higher Education Area by the year 2010, in order to increase the competitive ability of European higher education in relation to the other continents. At the Berlin Conference of 2003, which is part of the Bologna Process, it was stated that "the quality of higher education has proven to be at the heart of the setting up of a European Higher Education Area". At the same conference, it was also stressed that "the primary responsibility for quality assurance in higher education lies with each institution itself".

The Education and Research Development Plan for 2007–2012 by the Ministry of Education ensures the implementation of the objectives of the Bologna Process in the Finnish higher education system. According to the development plan, higher education institutions themselves have the main responsibility for the quality and quality development of the education they provide. Higher education institutions are responsible for the evaluation of their own activities, for quality assurance, and for the development of quality assurance systems.

Quality assurance has been purposefully developed at Jyväskylä University of Applied Sciences (JUA) since the Ministry of Education decided on granting JUA a permanent status in 1997. Right from the start, the quality assurance system has been developed for JUA's own needs and in close cooperation with JUA's management system. Today, Jyväskylä University of Applied Sciences has a nationally audited quality assurance system at its disposal. According to the audit conducted by the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council, JUA's quality system meets the requirements set for quality assurance. The audit will be valid until spring 2012.

Cross–Evaluation of Degree Programmes at Jyväskylä University of Applied Sciences

The cross-evaluation of degree programmes is a procedure developed at JUA in order to enhance the quality of degree programmes. Cross-evaluation is part of the nationally audited quality assurance system of JUA. The first cross-evaluations were implemented in 2004, and by the end of the year 2007, a total of 24 degree programmes have been evaluated. All the degree-awarding programmes of JUA (bachelor's and master's level programmes), as well as teacher education, special needs teacher education and student counsellor education programmes, are subject to the cross-evaluation procedure.

The cross-evaluation procedure is based on the basic assessment model of higher education established in Europe. The essential elements of the model include a coordinating evaluation unit, self-evaluation by the higher education institution, an external evaluation/peer review, a public evaluation report, and follow-up of the evaluation. While developing the cross-evaluation model, for example, the principles of quality assurance published by the ENQA (European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education), the experiences gained from the evaluations of the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council, and the quality competitions and audit procedures used in the business world were utilized.

The cross-evaluation of degree programmes developed at Jyväskylä University of Applied Sciences is based on the ideas of development oriented evaluation, collegial support and the sharing of good practices. The purpose of cross-evaluation is to support the degree programmes in developing their own activities. Cross-evaluation refers neither to the inspection of activities based on exercising power, nor to the assessment of conformity with standards based on specific criteria. Instead, cross-evaluation is a process which serves the learning of all those involved in the activities. In this process the experiences gathered and the constructive feedback provided by the Evaluation Team open alternative perspectives and stimulate the development of the degree programme. The degree programme under evaluation can always independently decide on the actions taken based on the cross-evaluation.

At Jyväskylä University of Applied Sciences, cross-evaluation refers to evaluation processes in which
- the representatives of various educational and non-educational units evaluate the activities of the other units

- the positive interaction between different units guarantees that the units participating in the process, as well as their representatives, have the opportunity to learn from the experiences and views of the others
- the good practices of the degree programmes are disseminated in the other fields of study by the staff and students participating in the cross-evaluation.

Objectives and Ethical Principles of Cross-Evaluation

The evaluation is implemented in accordance with the principle of constructive evaluation, which aims at
- ensuring the best possible quality of education in the entire institution
- developing the planning and implementation processes of degree programmes when preparing for a European Higher Education Area
- increasing the readiness for the definition and assessment of quality criteria for education
- improving the readiness of degree programmes to define and assess the objectives and results of degrees
- strengthening the evaluation culture of JUA.

Ethical rules for the cross-evaluation of degree programmes:
- The primary purpose of degree programme evaluation is to promote the development of a degree programme, in accordance with the idea of a learning organization.
- The assessment and feedback given during the process should aim at development and change. The aim is neither to supervise, nor to check or classify.
- All evaluation situations are confidential. The openness and honesty required by developmental activities cannot be achieved without confidentiality.
- The feedback provided during the evaluations is constructive and offers new perspectives and alternatives.
- The cross-evaluation is transparent. The conclusions and recommendations must be based on the self-evaluation report, related statistical data, and the facts highlighted in the evaluation discussions. The final evaluation report is public.

Implementation of Cross-Evaluations

The rector assigns the Evaluation Teams for the cross-evaluation of degree programmes. The teams consist of the representatives of various educational and non-educational units. The following criteria are emphasized when defining the composition of the Evaluation Team: a) the team should have sufficient knowledge of quality development work and of the field being evaluated, b) the team should have sufficient knowledge of strategic and development focuses, c) the team should include experts from all the main sectors of the university of applied sciences (education, R&D activities, support services), and d) the team should have a balanced representation of unit managerial staff, teachers, students, and support service staff. Students are involved as sovereign members in all the cross-evaluations.

The themes of the evaluation are
- The planning of the degree programme and its education
- The implementation of education in the degree programme
- The results of the degree programme and the learning of its students
- The services and activities supporting the implementation of the degree programme.

The themes are specified through evaluation questions, based on which the degree programme compiles a self-evaluation report. The Evaluation Team produces a cross-evaluation report for the degree programme on the basis of the self-evaluation report, and the evaluation visit information. The cross-evaluation report describes the strengths identified in the degree programme and makes the necessary proposals for development. The cross-evaluation reports are published in the series Reports from Jyväskylä University of Applied Sciences. The stages of the evaluation process are described in Figure 1.

The Stages of Evaluation

Guidelines for the degree programme

The Evaluation Team provides guidelines for the self-evaluation of the degree programme.

Self-evaluation

The degree programme carries out the self-evaluation according to the guidelines given, and submits the report to the Evaluation Team by the deadline. The material consists of the actual self-evaluation report and a section for commenting on the indicators.

Analysis of the self-evaluation report and preparation for the evaluation visit

The members of the Evaluation Team independently familiarize themselves with the self-evaluation report, make preliminary identifications of the strengths and development challenges of the degree programme, and draw up specifying questions based on their observations. The Evaluation Team agrees on the division of responsibilities regarding the planning of the questions in advance and the compilation of the report. Moreover, other practical arrangements related to the implementation of the visit (e.g. division of tasks and documentation during the visit) are agreed on.

Figure 1. The Stages of Cross-Evaluation

Evaluation visit

The evaluators interview the respondent groups (management, teachers, and students) separately to ensure that their answers are independent. At the end of the day, there is a common meeting for the representatives of all the groups, in which the Evaluation Team presents firsthand observations on the evaluated degree programme, specifies the details of some of the questions, and asks the target group of the evaluation to assess the evaluation process itself.

Writing the evaluation report

The evaluation report is written in two stages after the visit. Firstly, the members of the group write down their own observations in pairs. The next step is a meeting of the Evaluation Team to process the observations, to choose the most essential ones, and to agree on the editorial policy of the report. Finally, the team completes the content of the report. The report is sent to be examined by the degree programme. The final touches to the evaluation report take place after the feedback session.

Feedback session

A feedback session is arranged between the degree programme and the Evaluation Team. Based on the discussions between the participants, a few changes can be made to the evaluation report. The session also includes a meta-analysis of the cross-evaluation.

Developing the activities

The degree programme under evaluation prioritizes the development targets and devises a development plan using procedure which best suits its activities. The development plan is delivered to the quality manager. About a year after the cross-evaluation, an evaluation and follow-up discussion is conducted under the leadership of the quality manager in order to assess the success of the development procedures recommended.

All the development targets that are relevant to the whole university of applied sciences, discovered in the evaluation of degree programmes, are handled once a year. The cross-evaluation procedure itself is also to be evaluated and developed.

Cross-Evaluation Report
of the Degree Programme in
International Business

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1 Cross-evaluation of The Degree Programme in International Business

1.1 Information on the degree programme

Quoting the Degree Programme in International Business self-evaluation report:

The Degree Programme in International Business (IB) was started in 1996. It is part of the School of Business Administration (LITA) in Jyväskylä University of Applied Sciences (JUA). Today it takes 3.5 years to complete the 210 credits of the programme. The annual intake is 40 students of which 30–50 % are international students with the rest being Finnish. Typically, the international students come from countries like Russia, China, Poland, and Germany. The staff includes Head of Programme, a Senior Lecturer, three Lecturers, International Coordinator, and visiting lecturers from the School of Business Administration.

At first, the title of the programme was Degree Programme in Global Business Management. From the very beginning until 31 July 2003, Ms. Marietta Gates was Head of Programme. Since 2003, the focus of the programme has gradually been shifting from that of a standard general business programme to a programme concentrating on growth businesses in the high technology field in particular. This transition process was supported by an ESF funded High Tech Management Project 2004 to 2006. As a result of this project and some other parallel activities, IB now offers a High Tech Management Specialisation Module of 25 credits as the only degree programme at the Universities of Applied Sciences in Finland. All these activities have made it possible to build a solid network of regional, national and international partners. The most important result is the wide network of regional technology companies cooperating with IB.

Today, the mission of the programme is defined as follows:

The Degree Programme in International Business in the School of Business Administration at Jyväskylä University of Applied Sciences is a progressive, international, and scholastic programme with a hands-on practical approach to training professionals for the global marketplace. We provide

a top quality learning environment in order to compete with and surpass the standards and philosophies of the rivalling institutions through the use of advanced teaching techniques, cutting-edge technology, global focus and a determination to succeed. Accordingly, we are able to contribute to the success of growth-oriented innovative companies in the international marketplace.

Structurally speaking, the programme is made up of required business studies, specialisation studies, projects and practical training, thesis and language studies. All students are to go abroad for at least one semester consisting of work or study. The students are given a set of required business studies for the first two years. In the third year, the students can specialise in the areas of their own interests. They can choose their lines of specialisation independently of the studies offered by IB, from other programmes of JUA or from our international partners during the exchange period. While studying, the students are also required to implement real life projects in cooperation with business companies. They also have to study one extra language in order to improve their skills in one language other than English. The students complete their Bachelor's Theses in cooperation with the industry.

1.2 Planning and implementing cross-evaluation

The cross-evaluation team of the Degree Programme in International Business was set up according to the rector's decision. The selection criteria for appointing the members of the team were versatile knowledge of higher education, experience in evaluation, and interest in the task. The chair of the group was Head of Research and Development Affairs Leena Kaikkonen, and the members were Senior Lecturer Timo Jokisalo, R&D Manager Petri Jussila, Information Specialist Arja Kunnela, Senior Lecturer Jaakko Leppä-aho and student Anu Rajala. The secretary of the group was Quality Manager Tero Janatuinen.

Instructions for the cross-evaluation process were delivered to IB on 2 October 2007. The process was carried out entirely in English.

The IB self-evaluation report was drawn up in cooperation with the director, seven staff members, the quality coordinator, and a team of six students of School of Business Administration. A Digium questionnaire sent to 31 degree and exchange students was also used. The report was written by the Head of Programme.

The IB self-evaluation report was completed on 6 November 2007. Together with the report, the indicators and the analysis of them were delivered to the evaluation group. Furthermore, the original answers of the staff and students, and the Digium questionnaire results were delivered to the cross-evaluation team.

The cross-evaluation team visited IB on 29 November 2007. The management, representatives of the staff and students of the programme were interviewed. The persons interviewed were Director Asta Wahlgrén, and Head of Programme Matti Hirsilä. Those representing the staff were Principal Lecturer Jussi Nukari, Senior Lecturer Heidi Neuvonen, Lecturer Kevin Manninen, Senior Lecturer Juha Saukkonen, and Senior Lecturer and International Coordinator Risto Korkia-aho. The students interviewed were third year students Anne Kovanen, Antti Lyytikäinen, Aleksi Rastela and Antti Vainio, and first year students Valeri Haapalainen, Malgorzata Praibisz, and Aljaz Urbanc.

Quick feedback on the cross-evaluation visit was given to the representatives of IB at the end of the visit. They had a possibility to comment on the report from 28 January to 1 February 2008. The feedback session with the cross-evaluation team and the representatives of IB was held on 29 January 2008. The programme will choose its own development aims based on the evaluation and also, make a development plan. The follow-up meeting for discussing the cross-evaluation results will be held in the beginning of 2009.

2 Planning of The Degree Programme And Its Instruction

2.1 Strategies and policies

Jyväskylä University of Applied Sciences (JUA) has set itself the vision of being an internationally recognised institution of higher education, and a major regional developer. In line with the university vision, the School of Business Administration (LITA) has set itself the mission of creating business competences, and aims at being the leading local expert in delivering business competences.

Both in the self-evaluation report and in the interviews completed during the audit visit, the Degree Programme in International Business (IB), as one of the three degree programmes at LITA, declare that the policies of IB are consistent with the JUA strategies. Additionally, the degree programme is said to follow the LITA mission according to which IB has defined their own niche markets in serving small and medium-sized companies. They claim to focus especially on technology business companies operating in international markets, and accordingly, also claim to develop the degree programme to meet the requirements of the branch. During the audit visit this was clearly expressed by all the groups interviewed.

In the self evaluation report, the concept of *internationality* is strongly underlined, and the degree programme emphasises the intention to develop Russian Trade Specialisation in particular. During the audit visit, both managers and staff-members stressed the future importance of Russia as a trade partner. Consequently, the programme is determined to widen the co-operation with that country. USA is also considered an important target area in building further connections and in benchmarking. All in all, the internationality of the Degree Programme seems to be at a high level if related to the number of exchange students and international contacts within teaching. In the self evaluation report, the staff told that they are paying a lot of attention to integrating R&D activities to the students' learning processes related to *regional development*. During the audit visit, all the groups interviewed made clear that student projects in particular served this purpose.

The self-evaluation report also confirmed that IB has decided to concentrate on project based learning in close cooperation with the industry

to follow the idea of applying innovative learning methods as defined in the JUA *pedagogical strategy*. In the interview the management told that they understood project-based learning as a way to make it possible for students to learn in real working life related environments. It also enables students to deeply understand how business development processes take place. During the audit visit, all those interviewed told that students could study in continuous interaction with the local business community through student projects. In these networks IB wishes to act as business developer in assisting Finnish companies in their crucial challenge to grow in global business arenas. In the cross evaluation team's opinion, if this was the case, the strategies of regional development and internationalisation were well visible in everyday routines as mentioned by the staff in the self evaluation report. However, no practical examples of these student projects were given in the cross-evaluation process to more clearly verify the statement made in the self-evaluation report.

Somewhat surprisingly, the staff members told in the self-evaluation report that they formulate their policies and procedures to be consistent with international standards and not necessarily always according to the policies of Finnish Ministry of Education policies. Despite that, the staff told in the interview that IB is one of the programmes best following the JUA strategies. Furthermore, as mentioned in the self evaluation report, the JUA strategies had been taken into account in the daily decision making processes, and in the teaching as well as in R&D through the integration of local expertise and internationalisation. The cross-evaluation team sees the policies of IB be consistent with the JUA strategies. However, in the texts provided and discussions held, questions related to international strategy and regional development were occasionally referred to. Furthermore, the cross evaluation team was hoping for some more transparent examples to better concretise the claims of IB expertise following the JUA strategies.

The cross-evaluation team also thinks – though not so much emphasised by the IB personnel itself – that the formulation of the degree programme mission is also seemingly well in line with that of LITA. IB has set itself a goal, confirmed by clear argumentation, to serve small and medium-sized companies seeking to be more international, especially in the field of the technology business. To reach that, the programme's results and role in the unit are told to be continuously "mapped" with its relation to other programmes being evaluated by the unit management team. On second thought though, there could be a more active relation

to other programmes in LITA, and to all other international programmes in JUA.

During the audit visit, it became clear that practical routine activities take place without written policies. However, staff members acknowledged that the degree programme's policy papers should be better documented, and told that e.g. an internationalisation policy will be written in the near future.

2.2 Ensuring quality and competitive ability in the international education market

According to the self-evaluation report, IB is an up-to-date follower of the Bologna Process aiming at life-long learning and staff and student mobility assisted by an extensive network around the world. The report also shows that e.g. assuring international quality, international networking and benchmarking are important components in the continuing development process of the degree programme.

Multicultural environment is made up of several elements in the degree programme. As mentioned by the student team in the self-evaluation report, IB apparently has a very international atmosphere due, among other things, to the foreign exchange students and practical training exchange of the Finnish students. The student team also said that IB has quite good networks with schools and companies around the world. Networking is also being constantly developed. During the audit visit, the staff members highlighted that multiculturalism is not separately taught but learnt through living and studying in such an environment. This was also confirmed by the students by saying that they were daily studying in a multicultural setting where the students' different cultural backgrounds and knowledge bases enrich the practical learning situations. Furthermore, one student told that this kind of a studying environment in itself makes multiculturalism more concrete, transferring it from theory to practice.

The staff and managers interviewed see that the essence at the moment is not in increasing the number of international partners but instead, in finding the most useful ones. Staff members emphasised that planning and developing the programme could be done with the help of so-called powerful inner circle partners who could contribute to the improvement of the programme. During the audit visit the management told that the staff and head of programme benchmark international education institutions and companies. The head the programme also told that he annually discusses the programme at international events.

It became quite obvious that multiculturalism really exists in IB. The degree programme can offer good competences for their students e.g. by making them to study in mixed teams in a multicultural environment. However, the cross-evaluation team thinks that the implementation of these best practices, i.e. how these processes are truly done, and how the quality is assured, might have been worth displaying in a more transparent way.

2.3 Ensuring up-to-date objectives and meeting the needs of future working life

According to the self-evaluation report, the structure of the programme was created in cooperation with working life. The report includes a list of cooperative organisations such as public organisations, business development companies, start up and small and medium-sized companies operating in international and global markets. The staff members also mention in the self evaluation report that IB has ongoing communication with the surrounding business community (guest lectures, development projects), and it seeks feedback from companies, partner institutions and alumni: e.g. 2006 to 2007 IB collected information on companies' interests in Russian markets in Central Finland. As a result, IB has been involved in building cooperation between the City of Jyväskylä and the City of Obninsk. However, it id not become clear how this cooperation will promote the assurance of the current goals of the degree programme, or meet the requirements of the industry. In the self evaluation report, the student team only pointed out that it is good that teachers update, develop and maintain their knowledge and connections with the industry on a regular basis.

The cross-evaluation team got the impression that IB is able to combine international competitiveness and strong regional effectiveness usually thought to be far apart. It also seems that there are good connections to working life based on the student projects and also on the staff members' connections. Unfortunately, there is no more precise description of how working life is actually involved in the practice of planning and structuring the degree programme. It might be interesting to know how the project cooperation is actually made use of and reflected on, in order to promote the instruction given by the degree programme to better respond to the requirements of the future working life.

However, the cross-evaluation team wants to highlight that to be able to successfully achieve skills and competences transferable and usable in new contexts, it is necessary to consciously design learning situations encouraging students to develop skills like social networking and communication, learning to learn, and creativity and flexibility. Solving real working life problems as learning tasks should also produce a better, more general understanding of the working life phenomena in question and of the profession as such.

The cross-evaluation team also points out that a lot of feedback has been collected but there is no exact description of the feedback system. A more systematic and transparent feedback system might better promote the evaluation and development of the degree programme.

2.4 Implementation and development of the curriculum

According to the self evaluation report, the curriculum was constructed as a combination based on international influences, the Bologna Process requirements, and the regional needs of the industry, and student feedback. The feedback from students, staff and the market forces is used while annually defining the overall goals and policies of the curriculum. This takes place in a staff meeting in spring and later in August. The potential structural changes and course descriptions are completed by the end of the calendar year.

The whole faculty is said to be involved in this process. The person responsible is the head of programme openly co-operating with the staff members. The teaching staff takes part in planning through both formal and informal processes. There are lecturers responsible for their own special areas, but still, all the staff members contribute to the curriculum planning process. The students are more deeply involved in this process when major changes are made. For example during the academic year 2004 to 2005, IB organised a student committee to comment on the structural changes planned. The self-evaluation report also reveals that the low power distance organisational culture of IB makes it possible to get instant feedback from the student body.

According to the self-evaluation report, *yearly plans* are made in cooperation with the staff members. They create positive overlapping and also control negative overlapping in the curriculum discussed in staff meetings during the autumn semester. Existing *courses* are deleted from the curriculum based on too small a number of students having

participated in them in the last two academic years. According to the self-evaluation report, the main goal is to keep the courses offered the same, and to develop the contents of the courses instead. If needed, new courses are created based on the information from the market, student feedback, and cooperation of the experienced staff members. A critical analysis of the outcomes vs. targets of the ongoing year is done in the spring. It also seems that the student body feedback is taken into account.

According to the self evaluation report, the head of programme is responsible for the overall contents and modules in the programme with the lecturers in charge of the *individual modules and courses*. Each lecturer chooses *the appropriate learning methods* and draws up definitions of the course contents in cooperation with other teachers. The operational plans and their implementation reported to be ready by the end of the academic year, are a naturally, being constantly developed during the whole academic year.

During the audit visit, the head of programme told that scheduling is going be totally revised for the next curriculum. Some of the students told in the interview that the present system of two periods per year is good. Thus, the courses are extensive enough, and the teachers can more easily concentrate on the teaching. However, this seems to only poorly fit JUA's system of four periods, and affects students' active participation in the courses.

During the audit visit, the students said they were not completely satisfied with the modules and courses available. In the self evaluation report, they complained that too many different methods and structures were used. They felt like teachers having a free hand. Decision making and degree programme planning processes could, perhaps, be more open and systematic to students. The cross-evaluation team regards the student committee as a very good idea. The students' more systematic involvement in the process could promote the development of the curriculum.

In the cross-evaluation team's opinion, IB seems to have a wide enough base for composing a curriculum and modifying it if needed. The planning process seems to be systematic with attention paid to the needs of both business and industry. However, the cross-evaluation team would like to get a more precise picture of this e.g. in the form of descriptions of how up-to-date and especially future working-life competences are going to be built, and if they are supported by the structures of the curriculum, and by the learning methods chosen. The project based method

was told to be the current method of IB so it could have been highlighted in this context.

3 Implementation of instruction in the degree programme

3.1 The core policies governing instruction

Based on the discussions during the audit visit, the cross-evaluation team thinks that the degree programme has some good practices in implementing the instruction. On the other hand, some consciously defined wider starting points for the instruction were given in the self- evaluation report. These were not transparently described as *policies*. Consequently, this raised some expectations especially of further improvement on the pedagogical philosophy as a basis for the actions taken. A more precise picture of this was given during the audit visit when the IB staff and management members gave more detailed information on the pedagogical policy of the programme.

In the interview the management told that School of Business Administration (LITA) had already formulated their pedagogical strategy in 2003. Now that the JUA pedagogical strategy is being renewed, they are writing the pedagogical policy of the unit emphasising innovative learning and active cooperation. IB lacks a written pedagogical plan of action but the staff said they would need to formulate it in a clearer way combined with the on-going process of curriculum development.

During the audit visit, the management and staff members raised e.g. the following topics which can be seen as their guidelines for planning and implementing the IB instruction:

Practical approach

The management emphasised that IB favoured a *practical approach* to lecturing, thesis, and case studies included in teaching. They said that the main idea of IB was to teach the students to think, communicate and act like international businessmen and learn to apply knowledge. They aim to organise learning environments in companies in order to give opportunities for students to be put into life-like business situations, and to work in authentic projects. During the audit visit it became obvious that the goals and emphases of the programme were clear to everyone.

Use of project a based method in teaching

In order to start from the practical level, both the management and staff members said they used project based learning. This requires practical cases from the real business world with problems to be solved by the students. The project based system gives the students stepping stones for finding jobs; they can sell themselves and learn in real situations. However, project based studies are under development.

Individual approach

In the self evaluation report, both the management and staff emphasised the students' individuality. The teachers underlined that the students should benefit from whatever they do, from all the processes and networks.

In the self-evaluation report, the students' and staff members' answers were different from each other. Perhaps the student team had misunderstood the question; maybe they only had different views, or different priorities, or were simply not aware of *the core policies governing the implementation of instruction*. If this is the case, it might be good to somehow make sure that all the students know them, as they are the bases of their learning processes. The staff members also admitted during the audit visit that they should deliver a clearer message of certain policies to the students.

The cross-evaluation team points out that it might be fruitful for the further development of the degree programme if the staff more consciously defined their educational philosophy, i.e. their shared understanding of human beings as learners, and of the concepts of knowledge and learning itself. While educating professionals, these considerations must, of course, be combined with constant interpretation of global changes and current business development trends. Keeping these in mind, it might be easier to reconstruct the goals set for the IB professional education; i.e. what are the professional competences wanted and the *process of professional development* through which these competences can be achieved.

3.2 Support and guidance for students' learning

According to the self-evaluation report, each staff member is responsible for the *daily guidance of students*. There are also certain people

responsible for different aspects of student learning and guidance, e.g. practical training tutoring, e Study Plan and company projects. All the staff members also take care of networking to guarantee the availability of R&D projects for the students.

In the interview, the teachers told that they had wanted to build a so called 'open door' -policy to be followed inside the programme. This means that all the teachers are always available for their students through informal conversations throughout the weekdays, which they consider one of their best practices. The teachers also told that they would thoroughly discuss the guidance process in the beginning of studies. However, they felt that students did not necessarily see what guidance is about, and did not regard everyday discussions as such. The teachers assumed that students most possibly think that guidance is something formal, more like a task, whereas they see guidance built in the system.

The students told that there was still lack of guidance even though there were people whose duties included student support and guidance. They took it as a timing issue, the teachers not having enough time for guidance, which the staff members also referred to. During the audit visit, they mentioned the great number of exchange students at IB (e.g. 80 exchange students in the present academic year). However, the resources available only provide guidance to the 30 degree students with no additional guidance to the exchange students. Accordingly, the staff members told they felt that they had a lot on their shoulders. Nor are there any printed materials in English provided by JUA, so it is up to the IB staff to take care of those.

In deeper discussions on the support provided for the students' learning, the evaluation process dealt with the following aspects: *guidance of personal study plans, practical training tutoring and thesis guidance.*

According to the self-evaluation report, the students receive *guidance of personal study plans and career guidance* implemented in the form of the orientation week in the beginning of studies, formal information sessions held annually, and personal talks. Career guidance also occurs on an informal basis through course lectures and one-to-one guidance. In the staff members' opinion, the key point is that they know their students well, the guidance work is evenly distributed, and that the staff members use quite versatile ways to support their students. Since 2007, all the first year students make an e HOPS to be continuously followed and updated by the tutor teachers and head of programme. The students are encouraged to see their studies as tools for developing their personal competence

profiles and future plans. The head of programme also explained that they wanted to make the students accomplish their studies according to individual time tables. They had also encouraged the students to be effective by trying to graduate as early as possible.

According to the self evaluation report, the lecturer of management also acts as a tutor to students doing their practical training. The staff members told that e.g. *practical training* tutoring is given simultaneously with the students participating in projects emphasising reflective learning through follow up reports and meetings. As mentioned in the self-evaluation report, it seems that the students' experiences of this vary a lot. When asked about guidance for practical training, the student team answered that it was "non-existent", which is noteworthy, and indicates that all is not as well as it could be. However, the student team also said that the guidance given had been improving, so evidently some progress is being made. During the audit visit, the teachers told that they were well aware of the situation: guidance for practical training at IB was not yet systematic enough, but it was under construction. One of the teachers was focusing on this challenge as part of his pedagogical studies (the so-called developmental task in teacher education) also involving the other staff members. According to the self evaluation report, IB is also developing the guidance process by trying to find the best practices inside JUA (e.g. LITA, Degree Programme in Logistics).

As shown by the self evaluation report, the lecturer of research methods is responsible for the process of thesis guidance. In addition, staff members say that they personally contribute to the construction of thesis guidance, and that IB also has a systematic process of thesis guidance. There are also multiple channels through which the students can get guidance, e.g. the course on academic research, detailed instructions on the Internet, and personal guidance. Students are contacted whenever their rights to study are about to expire, or if they have not completed their theses as instructed. As the teachers told in the interview, working life is also involved in thesis guidance.

Again, the students seem to have very different kinds of opinions of the usefulness of thesis guidance received. According to the Digium questionnaire tilled in by students, the guidance is apparently sufficient but the students of the self evaluation team say that the guidance, at least so far, has been useless. On the other hand, these students have not yet really started working on their theses. But it seems that the students expect more thesis guidance already in advance in order to be able to

start the process, and most importantly, to make the most of the process. The students also told that choosing a topic is the most difficult part of the process. Nevertheless, they thought that it was easier to get help if you were prepared for the guidance meeting. You get guidance by simply making an appointment with the tutor in question. The students also said that graduation would not be delayed due to lack of guidance. One of the teachers told that she had focused on this issue in her pedagogical studies the previous year, and that the further development process was going on. To make it clearer and more useful to the students, the degree programme might still need to focus on this matter.

The teachers told in the self evaluation report that they used different forms of guidance in a variety of ways to support their students. Nevertheless, based on the student team's answers, it seemed that they were not satisfied with the amount and quality of guidance and support they had been given. This was the case especially in thesis guidance, and practical training guidance. The student team's answer also implicates that teachers possibly do not use the guidance methods mentioned above as best they could.

IB has put an effort to move to less school based, more authentic teaching practices. The purpose is to link learning (and teaching) to everyday problems of working life to be solved by the students as part of their studies. In a learning process like this students might quite easily shift from the role of a learner to that of an employee. Though many issues are, disputably, more reasonable, practical and motivating for students to study in real situations, it should not be forgotten that the students are still students and should, accordingly, be given time and support also for learning. The cross evaluation team thinks that the students' many kinds of experiences of guidance should be taken in consideration. A survey might be needed to find out which students really need support or guidance, and how they prefer to receive it.

3.3 Study methods

As the self-evaluation report tells us, the degree programme uses *different pedagogical methods* and attempts to fit the situation at hand. The running of some courses also includes individual and group work integrated with virtual modes of learning.

According to the staff members, the study process has been divided into three phases in which multiple learning methods are used: During the

first year of studies the programme is traditional, and the students learn to develop their confidence and awareness. The second year focuses on learning skills, especially through participation in projects. In the third year the students get a deeper understanding of the field of international business.

Through participation in projects in real companies the skills learnt change into competences. The students also told about projects, team work, and case studies. They said that project and problem based learning was used to learn networking and related skills, which is a good way to apply theory in practise while getting prepared for working life.

During the audit visit, the management told that there was no policy on, or strict rules for choosing the appropriate teaching and learning methods, because it is the subject that matters. Instead, they wanted to support the teachers to find the best ways to help the students to learn. The staff members were aware of the special challenges they had to face, and they said that the group work method used was also appreciated by the students. They said they emphasised the importance of competences accessible through the learning processes. The learning processes are reflected by the students e.g. by way of learning diaries.

The feedback from the students was positive showing that the plans made by the staff had been materialised. During the audit visit, the students were asked about their learning and how they could affect it. The students told that 'learning' as such is actually not discussed with them in the course of their studies but that the concept still it exists in a way. The students referred to teachers frequently showing them the very same slide saying "if we lecture you learn only 5 % of the matter, but if …" in order to make them understand the methods used. Some students said that different learning styles were discussed in the beginning of studies while others thought that these styles had not been discussed. The teachers were said to be flexible, though.

The students told the teachers had different teaching methods, which worked for some of the students but not necessarily for some others. They claimed that there were lectures which did not promote learning, because lecturers did not give enough information, and everything had to be read in a book. The students also added that the lectures should also have other ways of distributing knowledge than just by showing slides. They exemplified this with the argument that however good the slides are one cannot just concentrate for more than fifteen minutes or so. Therefore, lecturing cannot generate enough information to them.

On the other hand, the students told that the courses were far from challenging enough due to the composition of lectures in particular. They also said that the grades, on average, were very high, which was not motivating. The students also thought that exams were sometimes easy compared to the numerous assignments and the great amount of team work. Thus they learn many things in practice. They continued by saying that exams might seem easy because they work quite a lot during the weekdays. In their opinion, some courses were heavy and extensive while some others were far too easy.

The students mentioned that a review session after the courses and projects completed could be useful. Apparently, those sessions had been organised, but there had been no participants. The students said it was important to review what you had done to learn from that. The reviews could also be more personal. Now they are meant for the whole group at the same time. Some students thought that there was enough feedback while others felt the contrary, even though they admitted that the amount of feedback received was dependent on the student's own activity. "As a student you get feedback if you only ask for it." They added that the teachers were easily accessible. Both exchange and degree students also reported some of them (both exchange and degree students) having problems with the language.

Accordingly, the cross-evaluation team thinks that attention should be paid to teaching learners with diverse cultural backgrounds, varied learning styles and other individual learning needs, as pointed out by the staff members in the self-evaluation report. These differences were said to cause extra challenges to the staff members. It is easy to agree with them that it is important to bear in mind these challenges while planning the education. Another thing is the virtual discussions which received some negative criticism from the students. Something could be done to increase the students' interest in them.

3.4 Creating a multicultural and working-life related learning environment

The self evaluation report states that IB focuses on a system of shared values and on developing a culture that promotes a positive learning environment. The staff members say they have experience of business and academic education both in Finland and abroad, which they believe to help them see things from different points of view which makes it possible for them to transfer their theoretical learning to the students and to promoting their practical skills.

The degree programme emphasises its will to integrate research and development work with learning processes, e.g. company cooperation with student projects. Company contacts result in projects for student participation later used as cases in teaching. R&D integration with the learning process is felt to function well. However, in the interviews the students gave slight criticism of projects sometimes including too much work especially during the second year.

IB also pays attention to the required competences important in the international education and business community. Obviously, all the staff members successfully participate in the network creating process. All faculty members are involved in the company projects. The tutors of the degree programme think the connections with local and international working life keep them up to date and bring in the necessary awareness of the professional competences and logic prevalent in business. According to the self- evaluation report, the degree programme uses Launch Pad and High Tech Management concepts as learning environments. The Launch Pad and High Tech Management environments seem to be working well. Unfortunately these were not described visibly enough.

In their self evaluation report the IB management and staff members stated that exchange students were an important factor in *creating a multicultural and international learning environment*. Finnish students and exchange students were apparently often working together in multi-cultural teams selected by teachers. Multicultural group activities also seem to be quite successful and beneficial. During the audit visit, the staff members also noted that IB had most international students at JUA. It is quite demanding to the staff but has worked. They regard flexibility as one of their strengths.

The student team told in the self evaluation report that they felt being internationally competent and able to work in multi-cultural environments i.e. wherever in the world. This can be seen as a sign of success in this area. During the audit visit, the IB students also said that they have enough contacts with working life and that they were satisfied with that as well as with the good networks. The students told that some teachers had and some had not succeeded in creating learning environments to promote learning. But, they also listed more advantages of multicultural learning environment, and accentuated the networking itself. Students coming from different countries bring in different points of views as they have diverse backgrounds with both culture and knowledge related differences. Group work activities also support personal growth due to the

many kinds of people involved. The students appreciated that they were divided in various groups by the staff, not by themselves because here there was a direct link to working life: you could only seldom choose the persons to work with. The exchange students explained that this practise helped them to be prepared for potential jobs in Finland.

When interviewed, the students told that their courses represented different market areas in the international context. They added that IB has a strong cooperation area in Russia with another one in Northern Michigan. The students also appreciated that there were so many exchange students enabling them to create personal networks while in exchange. From the point of view of an exchange student it was positive that teachers had a lot of networks and could give students projects also related to their national contexts. Exchange students build new networks in Finland and participate in projects also promoting connections between foreign and Finnish students.

The cross-evaluation team like to point out that IB has succeeded in building a positive, multicultural learning environment individually taking the learners into account, providing them with real working life related projects and learning tasks, and encouraging them to work in multicultural teams. All the interviewees also confirmed that there was an easy going and open atmosphere and interaction inside IB, which is an important mental starting point to good learning.

However, it became clear in the self-evaluation report that students were not necessarily aware of the connection between R&D work and working life contacts. This calls for attention in the future. The students possibly do not know what R&D work means, or at least they do not know what it means in practice. Another thing that the cross-evaluation team noticed was that there were only occasional company visits, because large group sizes were thought to be problematic during the actual visits. If company visits are useful for students, then they should be carried out either in smaller groups or using some other solution. In the cross-evaluation team's opinion, IB could pay attention to how the numerous business contacts are managed and evaluated, and most importantly, how the advantages of the wide network can be exploited in education.

The implementation of teaching and learning was told to be strongly characterised by working life demands. However, the cross-evaluation team thinks that, equally importantly, the implementation of teaching and learning needs to be defined by various contexts of the individual learners. Diversity is most obviously a reality in the multicultural com-

munity of learners at IB. Accordingly, it may be necessary to make the activities typical of guidance more coherent and reorganise some of the guidance patterns used. Hopefully, this will not replace the present open door policy with inflexible, strict practices. One size in learning and guidance does not fit all the learners. Instead, to ensure the desired learning outcomes, a variety of strategies should be used including the recognition of the diverse needs of the students.

Above, the staff already described how learning processes had been divided into phases according the study year in question. Yet, a still deeper awareness of the professional development process (i.e. learning process) might promote learning at IB. This could also partially solve some of the problems revealed by the criticism of guidance from the students.

3.5 Cooperation within the unit and between the units

According to the self-evaluation report, the IB teachers have versatile, *internal cooperation*. They have official, annual meetings, they work close to each other, they have a system of shared values, and they are cross-trained in each other's fields. The self- evaluation report also states that there is a positive cooperative atmosphere. The IB teachers also told that they discussed with each other to make sure that their teaching was consistent with the way the others teach. They had understanding of each others' subjects, and they could replace each other if needed. Furthermore, they shared the same basic approaches and valued each other.

As shown by the report, lecturers are responsible for the implementation of *individual modules and courses*. The Head of Programme is responsible for the overall contents and modules in the programme. The lecturers make the pedagogical choices and define the contents in cooperation with other staff members. Operational plans are completed by the end of the academic year. Scheduling of the programme implementation was told to be based on the structure of the programme. IB has a semester based scheduling, and the duration of the courses is 4 to 5 months. The schedule is planned and produced in co-operation with the student affairs office and coordinated with other programmes instructed in English, and with the School of Business Administration. The teachers' needs are also taken into account if possible. Changes and corrections can be made in the course of the academic year.

The student team was not fully satisfied with the modules and courses. They felt that too many different methods and structures were used in

the teaching process. Sometimes the methods may not have been suitable to the courses. The student team said that the teachers sometimes had too open hands. As for scheduling, some of the students seemed to think that the system of two periods per year was great. However, some others thought that the academic year consisting of five periods would mean more possibilities to choose from and that in the system of only two periods individual courses would take too long to complete. The courses themselves were thought to be extensive enough making it easier for the teachers to concentrate on the teaching. However, the system of two periods per year now applicable at IB does not fit the JUA four-period system. This might prevent students from participating in certain courses.

The students said in the self-evaluation report that the rough study plan provided in the beginning never stayed the same. Sometimes it had been hard to plan one's personal schedules (e.g. working etc). It seems that the students might need more support to planning their personal schedules despite the creation of their overall personal study plans.

According to the self-evaluation report, *cooperation* between educational units and other degree programmes was exemplified by joint courses, guest lectures, regular staff meetings, and the students' chances of taking courses from other units/degree programmes. However, there the efficiency of these regular, internal meetings could be enhanced. Thesis cooperation between IB, LITA and MARATA could also be strengthened.

It seems that planning at IB is systematic and takes the needs of business and industry into account. The cross-evaluation team thinks it is good that the staff members and Head of Programme work together. In the course of planning, many people and partner programmes are also consulted. Also, it is notable that the development of competences is scheduled on a yearly basis. IB has lengthy courses (4–5 months) useful, and suitable to the students. The teachers also ask for students' opinions.

4 Results of the Degree Programme And Students' Learning

4.1 Assessing the implementation of the degree programme objectives and curriculum

According to the self-evaluation report, the degree programme follows the standard feedback procedure of Jyväskylä University of Applied Sciences (JUA), e.g. the OPALA feedback data is periodically reviewed. Furthermore, the degree programme occasionally organises customer satisfaction surveys. The feedback collected from customers and partners alike is mostly dealt with in an informal way as told by the staff in the interview.

In the self-evaluation report the students mentioned that it was easy for them to follow the given plan and, accordingly, complete at least 60 credits per year. On the other hand, students also said it would sometimes be nice to be able to choose some elective studies in order to "customize" themselves.

The managers told in the interview that the students study in a practical learning environment. The networks available offer them opportunities to try out real business situations. The staff emphasised that the students graduating from the programme should know how the real business works. That is why the programme recruits teachers with a sufficient business background.

The management pointed out that the final learning outcomes were relevant. The best evidence of this is the graduated students getting jobs and the satisfied customers. On the other hand, the management and staff were not fully aware of the success of the students in working life.

The management mentioned that the programme gave students the opportunity to graduate in less than 3.5 years. In the third year, the students may make they own choices of studies. In the staffs' opinion the project learning process does not guarantee that all the students acquire the knowledge and skills needed. However, the exchange students seemed to be satisfied with what they had learnt in the programme.

It is evident that the programme should pay attention to developing a method to ensure that the learning outcomes defined in the curriculum will be achieved. The cross-evaluation team wonders if the programme can create a method for classifying the future student projects by the degree of difficulty.

4.2 Participation of working life partners in the assessment of the degree programme's implementation and results

According to the self-evaluation report, the programme organises networking meetings four times a year in cooperation with Jyväskylä Innovation, University of Jyväskylä, and Nokia. The degree programme regards this as a vital source of feedback and ideas for future development.

In the report, the staff emphasises the regular feedback had from projects and theses. In addition, the staff seeks feedback through the informal networks with businesses and contacts with alumni. The assessments of the skills and attitudes of IB trainees also give information of the programme implementation and results. In the interviews, both the management and staff pointed out that the feedback system in the programme is informal based on discussions with colleagues and partners. A concrete example of this is the annual EAIE conference where the Head of Programme had asked his colleagues for feedback on the IB curriculum. The Director confirmed that the feedback given will result in changes in the practices prevalent in the degree programme.

The students that participated in the self-evaluation accentuated that it would be better to stay away from projects until they have the sufficient skills needed. In the interview, the staff explained that the first year students have quite a traditional school-like programme while second year students do more projects, whereas the third year projects are implemented in existing companies.

4.3 The assessment of course implementation

The self-evaluation report shows that there is a standard feedback form in the virtual learning environment for each course. Lecturers also collect feedback for their individual development purposes. The AMKOTA feedback data is also analysed at least once a year. Every second autumn a general customer satisfaction survey is organised as a student project at the degree programme level.

The staff members told in the self-evaluation report that every course should have course feedback. However, the students thought that it was only occasionally possible to comment on the implementation of a course, and that the assessment of course implementation was not homogeneous either. During the courses, informal discussions between both students

and the IB staff members take place. Feedback from visiting lecturers of other programmes or institutions is also collected.

In the students' opinion, some courses are not challenging enough with the average grades being very high which is not motivating. On one hand exams are sometimes easy, but on the other, there are a lot of assignments and team work. The students claimed that there was variation in the extent of the courses. Furthermore, some exchange and degree students also had problems with the language.

The cross-evaluation team got the impression that course assessment should be more systematic to generate sufficient information to support the further development of the degree programme.

4.4 Assessment of the learning outcomes of the students

As mentioned in the self-evaluation report, learning is assessed in various ways. Typically the lecturers use combinations of midterm and final examinations, open book examinations, individual or group assignments, presentations, group work, automated virtual quizzes or examinations, individual or group feedback, project reports, and self- assessment reports. The students are informed of the assessment practices in the beginning of the course. The interviewed students also confirmed this.

The staff members said in the self-evaluation report that companies and organisations willingly used the students in projects, and also hired them after graduation. This is one way to assess the learning outcomes of the programme. The staff underlined that the key competences were included in the course objectives. Theoretical knowledge integrated with successful participation in projects implies that course objectives have been achieved.

The students said that the numerical grading as such was not sufficient for assessing the learning outcomes. In addition, group work assignments were sometimes given too much weight.

The students admitted that the assessment and evaluation criteria were generally explained more or less in detail in the beginning of a course. In some courses it is easier to students to understand what the grade consists of. As told by the students, the criteria are now explained better than before.

Furthermore, the students claimed that there were no written descriptions of the grades. Occasionally, grade 5 had been explained in a written

form. The students would also like to get more individual feedback on their exams and assignments. They had different opinions of how clearly the goals of exams or assignments had been explained.

4.5 Utilisation of the evaluation and feedback data

According to the self-evaluation report, IB uses feedback from various sources to develop the programme. The feedback is openly discussed in staff meetings twice a year. Annually, a specific theme is defined as the core development area. In the academic year 2006–2007 the theme was the improvement of the thesis process, and practical training tutoring in 2007–2008.

In the staff members' opinion, the High Tech Management has turned out to be the focus of the programme through evaluation and feedback. Generally, the feedback is gathered through informal discussions, which seem to function well. The staff shares the same views of how to develop the programme.

In the self-evaluation report, the students claimed that teachers, but not the management listened to their opinions. They seemed to get no exact information on how their feedback was used to promote the programme. In the interview, the students told that changes in the implementation of the courses take time at least partially due to bureaucracy and lack of resources. In the self evaluation report the student team argued that the management should better listen to e.g. the students and the teachers when doing decisions which affect the practical running of the programme.

According to the self-evaluation report, 72.4 per cent of the students have completed more than 45 credits a year. This is way above the JAMK average (59.95 per cent). The programme is popular among applicants: in 2006 there were 17.2 applicants per study place. In the interview, the management emphasised that they always encourage the students to graduate as soon as possible.

The cross-evaluation team thinks that concentrating the resources on the development of one annual theme could lead to better results. This practice might also be of interest in the other degree programmes. On the other hand, there seems to be no systematic approach to fully process the feedback gathered. In the future, a more systematic approach could yield more valuable information on how to promote the programme. Furthermore, the students could be made more aware of the feedback data being used for promotional purposes.

4.6 The next essential stages in developing the degree programme

The academic year 2007–2008 is the first year that the degree programme is fully staffed. Now it's time to systemise and document the core processes. The following challenges were brought out in the self-evaluation report and in the cross-evaluation interviews: tutoring (e.g. thesis and practical training) and counselling services, regional, national and international networking, making the curriculum competence based, implementing new learning technologies, promoting student feedback, improving project based studies and project management.

The programme will increase the marketing and sales of its services to regional and foreign businesses. Both the management and staff underlined the challenge of finding the proper balance between the growth of the programme, quality assurance and the limited resources available. The students would like the study paths to be more personal (customised) than now even if the third study year is already quite individual.

To sum up, the degree programme has taken lots of challenges especially in international markets. However, the programme is quite compact which makes it flexible enough to face those challenges. As for regional development, and internationalisation in particular, the degree programme seems to well comply with the JUA mission.

5 Services And Support Functions Contributing to the Implementation of the Degree Programme

5.1 Support services promoting the core function of the degree programme

The support services of JUA include

- Quality and evaluation work
- Communications Unit
- Library and Information Services
- R&D Development Services
- Data Administration Services, e.g. IT support
- Student Affairs Offices
- International Affairs Office
- Educational Development Services including Career and Recruitment Services
- Finance & Accounts, Human Resource and Facility Services
- Student Health Services, Occupational Health Services.

As shown by the self-evaluation report, the support functions are generally seen useful in promoting the implementation of the core functions. The most useful of them are Library and Information services, Student Affairs Office, Finance & Accounts, Human Resource and Facility Services and Data administration and International Affairs Office.

Furthermore, the staff members see that Library and Information Services provide good service and introduction to using their resources, also in English. This is confirmed by both students and management.

Quoting the self-evaluation report, it is vital to promote quality issues especially in the international context. On the other hand, this process based quality approach is felt to limit creativity in the programme. In the self-evaluation report, staff members consider quality assurance bureaucratic rather than supportive.

According to the self-evaluation report, the programme had not been able to use the services of the Communication Unit. Furthermore, the staff thought that the unit had not understood the special needs of international programmes. The unit had also reacted negatively to certain service requests, e.g. T-shirts for promotional purposes could not be provided for the students. In the interview, the staff complained of non-existent translations of e.g. thesis instructions. The students also seemed to need English translations of all the information given.

The roles of R&D Development Services and Career and Recruitment Services remained unspecified in the degree programme. On the other hand, the staff members emphasised that Career and Recruitment Services supported the development of practical training. The students thought that Career and Recruitment Services supported contacts with working life and companies. They also said that they had been informed of vacant jobs.

The staff members wrote in the self-evaluation report, and also confirmed in the interview that the level of IT support varied a lot depending on the location of a unit. The students mostly complained of slow computers and problems with the network. They would like more IT support and better customer service.

Both staff and students were quite satisfied with the Student Affairs Offices. According to the staff, the International Affairs Office is management oriented instead of being student oriented. The Unit could assist in practical routines, and thus give more support to the degree programmes.

In the self-evaluation report there was not much comment on Finance & Accounts, Human Resources and Facility Services. In the interview, the staff members told that the whole JUA system could support the students' spare time activities to promote interaction between Finnish and international students.

Both staff members and students had got a good impression of student health services and occupational health services alike.

In the self-evaluation report, the programme accentuates that the support services should understand the unique characteristics of degree programmes and the services needed. The support services should promote the learning process in a better way.

6 Strengths And Suggestions for Development

6.1 Strengths of the Degree Programme

Goals of the programme are clear

The focus of the Degree Programme in International Business is clearly defined. Both the staff and students seem to be aware of the choices made. IB has found a practical application of the JUA and LITA missions taking into account the point of view of working life and promoting business life in Central Finland. Within the programme, there is a strong willingness to combine regional effectiveness with the international activities inherent in promoting the internationalisation of the enterprises in the region.

There is also a strong commitment to promote students' learning through discussions with the partners to enable them to acquire the competences needed in the industry. However, this process is not explicit enough.

Interactive learning atmosphere

The informal atmosphere and interaction seem to support both the learning of the students and the work of the staff. The interaction developed to its present state at a time when IB was still a small intimate community. Now that the education given has become more extensive, it sometimes strains the flexibility of the staff. However, the open communication helps to find the modifications needed for the best of the students.

Obviously, the staff is willing and committed to actively develop their work. They have prioritised the present and future development targets taking into account the size of the team. Examples of this are the staff's willingness to be at hand whenever the students need them, and also, their willingness to welcome and accommodate a large number of exchange students.

Multicultural learning environment

There seems to be some good practices to promote the multicultural learning environment. The students encounter multiculturalism in their daily routines, e.g. through the promotion of student exchange and the use of mixed groups in learning. The students also see this as an issue of their professional and personal development. Their international fellow students not only bring in their diverse cultural backgrounds but also their knowledge and experiences.

Active contacts with business life

IB has a wide network with business life, which links the working life context to learning. The students taking part in several joint projects with regional companies exemplify project based learning, an important learning method.

The international contacts with Russian and US partners are well-considered. In the near future, the mere quantity of partners is becoming less important than the quality of few strong partners.

6.2 Suggestions for developing the degree programme

Learning for the future

The degree programme is doing keen cooperation with enterprises through student projects and R&D activities. With this cooperation the degree programme likes to respond to the existing needs and problems of the surrounding business. Still, it remains unclear how well IB is taking into account a wider, proactive approach to regional development. At the moment, universities of applied sciences face the urgent need to integrate student learning processes with R&D activities. Accordingly, the goal of the programme is to deal with working-life related problems, and to create authentic learning environments within enterprises to promote students' learning. This goal is well defined. However, it might be worth considering the degree programme's role as a professional educator. Besides solving existing problems in companies, it is also important for the students to see the wider contexts beyond those problems.

IB obviously has a wide network of partners both in education and business. However, a more systematic approach to making use of these

networks is recommended to result in a holistic view of the developmental challenges to be faced in the future.

Making pedagogical principles more transparent

IB has described many procedures that can be considered as pedagogical principles taken into consideration while planning the implementation of tuition. However, they are not yet fully transparently described as pedagogical *policies or principles*.

Also, even though the idea of Life Long Learning was mentioned in the context of the Bologna Process, *learning* itself is little discussed. The staff emphasises their wish to have a practical approach in the implementation of the programme. However, all these statements also have – possibly still implicitly only – some modern ideas of learning.

Accordingly, it might be fruitful for the further development of the degree programme if the staff more consciously defined their educational philosophy, i.e. their shared understanding of human beings as learners, and of concepts of knowledge and learning. When educating professionals these considerations must, of course, be combined with the constant interpretation of global/societal changes, and current trends in business life.

Based on what was said above, it might be easier to reconstruct the goals set for the IB professional education: What are the professional competences aimed at and especially, what is the *process of professional development* leading to these competences?

Role of guidance

To prepare the students for facing the ever changing working life, IB thinks that up-to-date knowledge is very important. IB also strongly highlights the active role of a learner. The IB learning processes have been divided into phases according to the study years in question.

Yet, an even deeper awareness of the p*rofessional development process* (i.e. learning process) might contribute to improving the learning outcomes in IB. This might also help to solve some of the critical points in guidance highlighted by the students. This, in particular, raises the question of how the development of the skills of learning to learn could consciously be included in the planning and implementation of the learning and teaching processes themselves.

This might lead to the reorganisation of some of the practices now prevalent in guidance. Hopefully this will not lead to strict inflexible practices identical for every student. Maybe a little more defined scaffolding is needed instead of only taking to informal open door practices. To become an autonomous self-directed learner you first need a lot of guidance. In the beginning of the learning process, or when facing new challenges (like starting practical training or the thesis), a more systematic approach could be more productive.

In addition, it is worth noticing that the students expressed quite strong criticism against the numerous project tasks in the second year. On the other hand, they told that part of the teaching is not even challenging enough. Would it be possible to consider whether (some of) these second year tasks could form a basis for the thesis? And could the different forms of learning make up a more consistent whole?

Educational co-operation

The IB staff is well aware of their own strengths and also committed to developing their work. On the other hand, the staff members, keeping in mind their small number, should be careful not to exhaust themselves.

The goals of developing the programme are rather ambitious. Hence it might be worth taking into consideration how they can be achieved through improving the cooperation within the unit, within JUA, as well as in wider networks. At the moment, there seem to be some structural obstacles e.g. to developing the collaboration between the other international programmes within JUA. However, there might be a risk of isolation due to following one's own path too closely.

Also, as for the next developmental step to be taken, and if IB likes to increase the competitiveness of the programme in international educational markets e.g. through national and international evaluation, the ability to more transparently display their actions and procedures will be crucial.

6.3 Suggestions for developing support services and the whole university
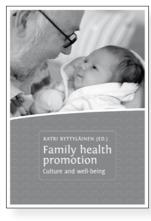
Full service in two languages

The JUA vision is to be an internationally recognised institute of higher education. The current environment obviously needs a lot of improvement to reach that goal. Based on the discussions during the cross-evaluation visit, all the information and all the services for both the students and staff should also be made available in English.

Promoting unit related services

The needs of the degree programmes vary a lot. Accordingly, detailed and flexible solutions should be based on mutual discussions. The services produced by the support services units on the one hand, and by the degree programmes themselves on the other, should be clearly defined.

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