MASTER OF SCIENCE / MASTER OF ARTS IN DIGITAL COMMUNICATION LEADERSHIP

VRIJE UNIVERSITEIT BRUSSEL, AALBORG UNIVERSITET, PARIS-LODRON UNIVERSITÄT SALZBURG, WAGENINGEN UNIVERSITY & RESEARCH

ACCREDITATION ● PANEL REPORT
FRAMEWORK FOR THE EUROPEAN APPROACH FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE OF JOINT PROGRAMMES
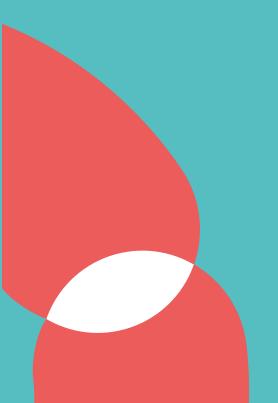
14 SEPTEMBER 2022

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1 Executive summary

The panel concludes that the joint Master in Digital Communication Leadership (hereafter DCLead), offered by a Consortium consisting of Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Aalborg Universitet København, Paris-Lodron University of Salzburg, and Wageningen University & Research, satisfies all standards of the framework for the European Approach for quality assurance of joint programmes. The panel therefore advises the NVAO to make a positive accreditation decision.

The panel comes to this positive conclusion based on its inquiry into the quality of DCLead. It found that DC Lead is truly a joint programme, in which solid joint formal structures and processes go hand in hand with a strong sense of community. The programme sets itself apart through its interdisciplinary and international ambitions; its social, ethical, and critical orientation; and its attention for practical application. DCLead's flexible setup and dynamic mix of teaching and evaluation formats give students many opportunities to reach the preset programme goals. The teaching approach of problem-based learning is attractive to students and allows for active, student-centered learning. The selection process is rigorous, streamlined, and transparent, leading to a diverse cohort of strong, highly motivated students. DCLead's teaching staff are highly qualified, have a shared vision, and are available for students. Also, the resources to support the programme are up-to-standard, and the student support services are rich and varied. Finally, a solid structure for joint quality assurance has been built.

In addition to strong points, the panel also identified points for improvement. Against this background, the panel formulates a number of recommendations, which do not detract from the panel's positive conclusion:

- Define on a more granular level the intended learning outcomes (ILOs) oriented towards the development of digital communication leadership and international/intercultural competencies.
- Be more explicit in the course descriptions on the format of assessment.
- Monitor whether the efforts towards attracting a diverse cohort of students are extended to students' socio-economic status.
- Ensure more systematically that wherever students go in the tracks, they receive the same level of support and service.
- Further clarify quality assurance related roles and responsibilities and identify unnecessary overlaps between structures and procedures of the Consortium and those of the respective partner institutions.
- Keep investing in closing the feedback loop so that students (and other stakeholders) are up to date of changes made based on their input.
- Fully tap into the potential to learn from each other's best practices within the Consortium.

The Hague, 14 September 2022

On behalf of the expert panel convened to assess the Master of Arts/Master of Science in Digital Communication Leadership,

Dr. Rolf Heusser   Dr. Jetje De Groof
(panel chair)   (secretary)

2 Assessment – Standards for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes

2.1 Eligibility

The panel assesses the Eligibility standard as compliant.

2.1.1 Status

> *The institutions that offer a joint programme should be recognised as higher education institutions by the relevant authorities of their countries. Their respective national legal frameworks should enable them to participate in the joint programme and, if applicable, to award a joint degree. The institutions awarding the degree(s) should ensure that the degree(s) belong to the higher education degree systems of the countries in which they are based.*

The Master of Science/Master of Arts in Digital Communication Leadership consists of four Consortium Partners: Paris-Lodron Universität Salzburg [PLUS], Austria; Vrije Universiteit Brussel [VUB], Belgium; Aalborg Universitet København [AAU], Denmark; and Wageningen University & Research [WUR], the Netherlands. All four partners are established and officially recognized universities in their respective countries. The four Consortium Partners are supplemented by a set of Associated Partners, including both academic and internship partners.

The self-assessment report substantiates the adherence to the legislation in each of the partner countries when it comes to awarding of degrees. The respective legislative systems moreover provide the necessary basis to enable joint programmes and degrees. Also, each consortium partner is firmly embedded in its national accreditation frameworks and has been granted an institutional accreditation by its national accreditation body.

DCLead offers three specialization tracks: Digital Communication, Policy, and Innovation in Europe (POLINN), which is catered for by PLUS and VUB; Digital Technology and Management (TECMAN), which is organized by PLUS and AU; and Information and Communication Technology for Development (ICT4D), which is offered by PLUS and WUR. The Consortium Agreement stipulates that the type of degree awarded depends on the track. Graduates completing POLINN are awarded a 'Master of Arts', whereas students graduating from the TECMAN and ICT4D tracks receive a 'Master of Science'. Moreover, whereas students completing POLINN and TECMAN are awarded joint degrees (by PLUS and VUB, and PLUS and AAU respectively), while students completing ICT4D receive a double degree from both PLUS and WU.

The panel explored during the digital site visit the rationale behind this seemingly complex approach. It learned that the Consortium would prefer to issue joint degrees for all tracks, yet WUR currently only allows joint degrees for national collaborations. The panel supports the Consortium's ambition to evolve towards joint diplomas for all tracks. The panel concludes that the various degrees awarded are transparently explained, both on the programme's website and in the Consortium Agreement, giving (prospective) students the necessary information to navigate this complex situation. The digital site visit confirmed that the approach is clear to students.

In conclusion, the panel is of the opinion that DCLead's legal status is aligned with the requirements that apply in the Consortium Partner's respective countries.

2.1.2 Joint design & delivery

The joint programme should be offered jointly, involving all cooperating institutions in the design and delivery of the programme.

The Consortium Agreement and the Curriculum document provide the basis for the joint design and delivery of the programme. The Consortium Agreement, so the panel was pleased to find, regulates in a detailed manner all relevant aspects of the collaboration between the Consortium Partners (see also 2.1.3.). Joint steering structures have been established, such as the Programme Board, the Consortium Board and the Selection Committee, and joint procedures have been set up, such as joint admission processes and joint master theses supervision. The panel learned that DCLead is moreover supported by a very proactive administrative unit that is continually looking for ways to further develop the Consortium, and to create an atmosphere of collaboration between the different partners.

The development and delivery of DCLead's curriculum, so the panel found, is also clearly a joint endeavour. The first semester, offered by PLUS, starts with a common trunk. Students subsequently start the specialized tracks (they opted and were selected for before the start of the programme) in the second and third semester at the other Consortium Partners, VUB, AAU and WUR. In the final semester, students focus on their master thesis project. The institution hosting each student in the fourth semester is selected based on the topic of the master thesis and the preferences of the students. Further specialization and mobility in the fourth semester also involve all Associated Partners. The panel appreciates that this set-up guarantees that students encounter the whole network that constitutes DCLead. The panel considers the involvement of academic and internship partners around the globe as a clear strength of the consortium.

The panel noted that, in addition to the joint curriculum and the joint organizational structures and processes mentioned above, other elements are in place that further strengthen collaboration between DCLead's partners. First, the master thesis is supervised by two supervisors coming from different Consortium Partners. Second, an Autumn School is organized in the first week of October, which is mandatory for all students in their first and third semester. With its objectives of cohort building, programme assessment, and fostering collaboration within DCLead's management team and its broader network, the importance of this event for ensuring and further developing collaboration, can hardly be overestimated. Third, the educational collaboration of the partners is also translated into joint research.

The dialogue with DCLead's representatives confirmed that the joint nature of the programme is not limited to paper. The panel observed during the interviews that strong personal links exist between the Consortium Partners, with strong informal ties strengthening the formal structures. The Autumn School was repeatedly mentioned as a key element in this respect, allowing Consortium and Associated Partners to spend a week together, stimulating personal exchange alongside thematic discussions. Support for the programme was moreover

not only evident in the discussions with DCLead's key representatives, but also from lecturers more loosely involved in the programme.

The panel concludes that DCLead has been successful in community building and is truly a joint programme. Strong formal and informal structures support the coordination of the development of the programme and its legal and practical organization.

2.1.3 Cooperation Agreement

The terms and conditions of the joint programme should be laid down in a cooperation agreement. The agreement should in particular cover the following issues:
- *Denomination of the degree(s) awarded in the programme;*
- *Coordination and responsibilities of the partners involved regarding management and financial organisation (including funding, sharing of costs and income etc.);*
- *Admission and selection procedures for students;*
- *Mobility of students and teachers;*
- *Examination regulations, student assessment methods, recognition of credits and degree awarding procedures in the consortium.*

The panel carefully studied the Consortium Agreement of DCLead. It concludes that it regulates, in a transparent and comprehensive way, all relevant and required components of the joint programme. It offers transparency on the different degrees that are awarded depending on the specialization track followed; explains the student admission and selection procedures; elaborates on the mobility of students and teachers; and provides the required transparency regarding examination regulations, student assessment methods, recognition of credits and degree awarding procedures in the consortium. It also provides all necessary details in terms of governance, organization, and management: it elaborates on the authority of the Consortium's governing bodies; provides clarity on each partner's responsibilities; outlines the transfer of funds from the Coordinating Institution to the Consortium Partners; and provides procedures should conflict arise. The panel values that ample attention is also given in the agreement to the quality assurance of the programme.

During the site visit, the panel explored with different groups of interviewees what leadership in digital communication entails according to the DCLead partners, as it failed to grasp, on the basis of the documents provided, where exactly the ambitions lie in this respect. The panel noted that there is a shared, yet implicit understanding of the *raison d'être* of a master's programme in digital leadership (see 2.2.2. for a more detailed account). The panel is of the opinion that this implicit understanding could be made more explicit. Adding a mission statement and/or vision in the Consortium Agreement would in this sense be welcomed. According to the panel, this would help scoping and further developing an explicit and joint understanding of what leadership means in the context of the DCLead programme. It would also provide the basis to further sharpen the ILOs in this regard (see also 2.2.).

The panel concludes that, regardless of the latter remark, the cooperation agreement is in line with all the requirements.

2.2   Learning Outcomes
The panel assesses the Learning Outcomes standard as compliant.

2.2.1   Level

> *The intended learning outcomes should align with the corresponding level in the Framework for Qualifications in the European Higher Education Area (FQ-EHEA), as well as the applicable national qualifications framework(s).*

The panel observed in the Curriculum document that the ILOs have been described in great detail, both at the programme and the individual course level. DCLead aims to achieve learning outcomes in four categories.

First, the ambition is to develop applied academic knowledge. In this category, critical contextualization and evaluation of current national and international developments and discussions is key, as is independently deepening insights and expanding the theoretical basis of students' respective fields of study. Attention also goes to application of the acquired knowledge and skills in a professional context.

Second, students gather advanced knowledge in their specialization field according to their chosen study track. In POLINN this means that students are able to understand and analyse the relationship between policy makers, market mechanisms and the users considering the cultural dimension of the field of digital communication. In TECMAN this entails that students can understand and analyse the relationships between technology developments and business potentials in the field of digital communication. In ICT4D the ambition is for students to understand and analyse the possibilities and risks connected with the use of digital communication for the enhancement of human, social and economic conditions particularly of people living in developing countries.

Third, students are expected to develop solution-oriented skills, such as entrepreneurial spirit, responsibility, communicative attitude, creativity and the ability to plan, coordinate, supervise and advise. This will allow them to become independent, responsible, inquiring and reflective professionals.

Finally, students develop their social competence, meaning, amongst other things, that they show an open and constructive attitude in a culturally diverse international context and are open to scientific doubt and societal pluralism.

Throughout the curriculum, six core competencies are to be developed that DCLead considers to be key for successful leaders in digital communication:

- Digital technologies and their developments
- Policy and innovation
- Business and management
- Digital communication and culture(s) in Europe
- Human, social and economic development
- Ethics and social responsibility

The panel carefully checked alignment of DCLead's ILOs with the core qualifications of master graduates as defined in the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), level 7, and with the requirements of the national frameworks. It concludes that the learning outcomes are defined at the appropriate master level and adhere to the national and European quality frameworks. The ILOs focus on highly specialized knowledge, aims to develop critical awareness on knowledge issues within the disciplines related to digital communication and

works towards developing specialized problem-solving skills. This is done in complex and unpredictable contexts that require new strategic approaches, with the ambition to function in an autonomous way.

Taking the above into consideration, the panel concludes that DCLead's ILOs are formulated at the appropriate master level. The panel wishes to remark that an overview visualizing the alignment of DCLead's ILOs with the applicable frameworks (e.g., in a matrix), would have been a welcome support for the panel.

2.2.2   Disciplinary field

The intended learning outcomes should comprise knowledge, skills, and competencies in the respective disciplinary field(s).

The self-assessment report explains that DCLead approaches the field of digital communication from an interdisciplinary and international point of view, with the ambition to form reflective future professionals that are critical and constructive experts in the field. In studying the programme's goals and ILOs, the panel concludes that they include the knowledge, skills and competencies that are relevant to this field. DCLead has moreover been forward looking in setting its objectives. Through its interdisciplinary and international ambitions, through its social, ethical, and critical orientation, and through its attention for practical application, the programme sets itself apart from similar courses that sometimes lack in consideration of relevant social issues, are either professionally or academically oriented, or limited to one field of study. The panel welcomes the approach chosen by DCLead. It finds the developed competencies relevant for academic careers, but also for a range of government, business and third-sector analyst and policy roles.

DCLead being a programme aiming at digital communication *leadership*, the panel was surprised to find that no specific ILOs were formulated regarding leadership. It explored in the self-assessment report and during the site visit how exactly the notion of digital communication leadership is operationalized in the programme in general and in the ILOs in specific. The dialogue with programme management and lecturers established that there is indeed a shared understanding of what leadership in digital communication entails. DCLead considers the ability to combine economic and social, technological, and cultural dimensions, while taking into account both individual and societal needs, as an indispensable precondition for future leaders in the field. The development of this competency starts with basic knowledge, yet it is crucial to add a critical, multiperspective, and multidisciplinary approach. The interview with the students confirmed that this shared understanding also leads to a shared approach in class in the sense that students are constantly challenged to develop critical approaches. The panel recommends that this shared, yet implicit, understanding of digital communication leadership is made more explicit and is translated into tangible ILOs.

In the same vein, the panel explored the degree to which the programme's international and intercultural ambitions have been adequately included in the ILOs. The panel observed in the course descriptions and during the interviews that the programme does contain many activities that are geared towards the development of these competencies. It welcomes in this sense the efforts that are being made to decolonize the curriculum. Still, the panel is of

the opinion that there is clear room for improvement in making more tangible in the ILOs what exactly the programme's intentions are in this regard.

The panel concludes that DCLead's ILOs comprise knowledge, skills, and competences that are adequate and relevant to the disciplinary field of digital communication leadership. However, it advises DCLead to define on a more granular level the ILOs oriented towards international, intercultural and leadership competences.

2.2.3 Achievement

The programme should be able to demonstrate that the intended learning outcomes are achieved.

The Curriculum document lists the modules, courses, and activities that students have to carry out in order to obtain 120 ECTS credits and be awarded the degree. The panel carefully studied this document, which also contains in-depth module descriptions.

The DCLead programme comprises five modules with compulsory subjects (78 ECTS) and an addition minimum of 12 ECTS from elective subjects. The panel concludes that the ILOs formulated at the programme level are covered by the course specific learning goals in the modules. It would like to remark, though, that this check would have benefitted from a matrix showing the contribution of individual courses to DCLead's ILOs.

The module descriptions confirmed that courses comprise a variety of teaching formats (see also 2.5.1.) that are in line with the learning goals of the course, and that allow students to convey, discuss and evaluate academic and specialized knowledge, to practice and test solution-oriented skills, and to develop the intended ILOs and core competences. This was confirmed by students and lecturers alike during the digital site visit.

As regards evaluation, the panel learned from the self-evaluation report that evaluations are varied and dependent on the type of course and learning outcomes to be achieved, including written or oral examinations; written academic papers or essays; the development of research proposals; presentations; and individual or group-based project work and reporting (see also 2.5.2.). This was confirmed by students and lecturers alike during the digital site visit. Nevertheless, the panel also noted that the types of examinations are only superficially described in the course descriptions.

The panel checked how DCLead ensures that each individual student reaches the ILOs, although they might be following different tracks. It learned that students spend their first semester together at PLUS, before starting their specialization track. In this first semester, students follow a common trunk, in which courses are offered that cover all of the six core competencies of the programme on an introductory level, as well as basic and more advanced theoretical and methodological skills. In the second and third semesters, the other consortium partners deliver courses further exploring at least three of the six main competencies identified in their competency track module and specialization modules. The programme management conveyed during the digital site visit that whichever track a student follows, they will encounter a mix of course types, teaching formats and evaluation methods,

which ultimately makes them fulfil the learning outcomes. The Programme Board monitors whether this is indeed the case.

The panel also found proof of achievement of the ILOs in that employability of DCLead graduates is high. Tracking of alumni, including via LinkedIn, shows that students enter into careers DCLead trains them for. Some proceed to a PhD or are active in research, others develop careers in digital communication project management and consultancy. The alumni the panel spoke to seemed to confirm this image.

In sum, the information provided confirms the constructive alignment between DCLead's ILOs, its programme design (curriculum and teaching methods used), and assessment. The presence of this constructive alignment, and the fact that graduates proceed into careers linked to digital communication, makes it plausible for the panel that the given curriculum helps to achieve the ILOs. Still, the panel recommends being more explicit in the course descriptions on the format of assessment to be able to better guarantee and proof the full chain of constructive alignment.

2.2.4 Regulated Professions

If relevant for the specific joint programme, the minimum agreed training conditions specified in the European Union Directive 2005/36/EC, or relevant common trainings frameworks established under the Directive, should be taken into account.

Not applicable

2.3 Study Programme
The panel assesses the Study programme standard as compliant.

2.3.1 Curriculum

The structure and content of the curriculum should be fit to enable the students to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

DCLead's curriculum consists of five modules:
- Module 1: DCLead Core Competencies
- Module 2: Theoretical and Methodological Skills
- Module 3:
    - A - Digital Communication, Policy and Innovation in Europe I (POLINN)
    - B - Digital Technology & Management I (TECMAN)
    - C - Information and Communication Technologies for Development I (ICT4D)
- Module 4
    - A - Digital Communication, Policy and Innovation in Europe I (POLINN)
    - B - Digital Technology & Management I (TECMAN)
    - C - Information and Communication Technologies for Development I (ICT4D)
- Module 5: Elective subjects

Semester 1 is spent at PLUS and comprises modules 1, 2 and 5, as well as the Autumn School. Students spend the second and third semester (modules 3 and 4) at the location of the track they are selected for (VUB for POLINN, TECMAN for AAU, WU for ICT4D). Individual mobility characterizes the final semester, during which mobility periods can be spent at any of the four

consortium partners (PLUS, VUB, AAU or WU). In the final semester, students work on their master thesis (30 ECTS for POLINN and TECMAN, 31 ECTS in the ICT4D track). For the completion of the master thesis, students can collaborate with one of the Consortium's associated higher education institutions (for a research stay), or one of the Consortium's internship partners (for an internship). The panel was pleased to learn that admission for research stays or internships must be approved by the Programme Board. This is a crucial step in view of quality assurance of the curriculum.

Based on the documents provided, the panel concludes that the curriculum has a clear and robust structure. The panel appreciates the curriculum's flexibility and its set-up, with a common trunk at the start ensuring a joint basis for all students, and subsequent specializations. The activities offered, both educational and social, and the good mix of mandatory and elective courses, further add to the attractiveness of the programme. The curriculum structure and the dynamic mix of teaching and evaluation formats (see also 2.5.) give students many opportunities to reach the preset programme goals (see also 2.2.3.) and to develop the six core competences. During the site visit, the panel heard many examples from students, alumni and lecturers of how the programme's ambition to develop interdisciplinary, intercultural, reflective and leadership skills are realized in the curriculum.

As highlighted in the SWOT-analyses, student evaluations reveal that at least part of the student population would prefer the programme to be more practice-oriented, which is why the panel explored this topic at length with different groups of interviewees. Lecturers and programme management clarified that the programme's main orientation is indeed academic and theoretical. Students agreed that the balance shifts somewhat more to the academic, yet added that many opportunities are provided individually for practical application, e.g. by writing academic papers on an applied topic or within a company. The students explained they were in favor of maintaining the current balance between the academic and the practical component of DCLead, as different students come to the programme with different skillsets and expectations. They added they had found the website informative in this regard, as it transparently explains that the programme's main orientation is academic and theoretical.

Continuing on this topic, the panel explored whether internships should be a required part of the curriculum. Students and lecturers agreed that most students appreciate the current set-up of the final semester, offering a choice between either a research stay or an internship. In this way, options are offered for students with different backgrounds. Some students have for example already run a company and are more interested in a research stay, whereas this is different for other students. The self-assessment report is candid about the fact that the quality and availability of internships has been an issue in the past, yet the panel observed during the digital site visit that this issue is firmly on the radar. The panel endorses the current strategy, which focuses on building stronger ties with external partners to strengthen their engagement, involving DCLead's growing alumni community. The panel welcomes that the Consortium is currently renewing its network of partnerships in order to improve the access to and quality of the internships. The panel asks to keep this issue on the radar, so that students wishing to do an internship, have access to a robust offer.

Finally, the panel explored the quality of the supervision of the master thesis. The alumni the panel spoke to were very pleased with the set up and supervision of the thesis. They valued the extensive list of potential supervisors, the fact that supervision from two institutions is offered, and were happy with the quality of the supervision. The panel studied the Thesis Handbook and found the different steps and requirements to be clearly described for the different tracks. Every student must present a master thesis proposal to a panel of experts at the Autumn School. The feedback is then taken into account in a revised proposal. The panel considers this a good practice, as it greatly improves the chance for a high-quality output. The panel found that master thesis subjects are scoped in line with the programme's ILOs. They must correspond with the chosen study track of the student. Also, adding an interdisciplinary and critical point of view is a requirement.

In conclusion, the structure and content of the curriculum allow students to reach the programme's ILOs.

2.3.2   Credits

> *The European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) should be applied properly and the distribution of credits should be clear.*

DCLead aims at educating master students through a 120 ECTS course that spans two academic years (four semesters). The structure of the curriculum was already explained above (2.2.3. and 2.3.1.). In the curriculum overview provided to the panel, the expected workload of each of the different components of the programme is made clear, expressed in ECTS. The panel concludes on the basis of the self-evaluation report and the digital site visit that the ECTS philosophy and its requirements are shared by all partners.

2.3.3   Workload

> *A joint bachelor programme will typically amount to a total student workload of 180-240 ECTS-credits; a joint master programme will typically amount to 90-120 ECTS-credits and should not be less than 60 ECTS-credits at second cycle level (credit ranges according to the FQ-EHEA); for joint doctorates there is no credit range specified. The workload and the average time to complete the programme should be monitored.*

DCLead comprises 120 ECTS. The panel learned from the self-evaluation report that students evaluate each course. The efforts required to pass is one of the elements monitored. On average, the results are in between 'about right' and 'demanding'. Oral feedback seems to confirm the results of the written surveys. The programme management explained during the site visit that weekly online meetings with student representatives allow for workload related issues to spring up before the students' evaluation at the end of a course. This makes it possible to already intervene when the course is still running. In any case, if issues arise with certain courses, this is looked at in more detail during a Programme Board meeting. Members of the Programme Board explained that adjustments have been made in the past.

The programme management explained that students sometimes perceive differences in workload between the different partner universities. Students agreed with this assessment, but also concluded that the workload is manageable. The semester in Salzburg is considered by students to be the most intensive, yet when the workload is high, it is easy to

communicate this back and forth immediately, as classes are not mixed and shared with other DCLead students only.

In conclusion, the panel is of the opinion that the workload of DCLead is manageable and is adequately monitored.

2.4   Admission and Recognition
The panel assesses the Admission and Recognition standard as compliant.

2.4.1   Admission

The admission requirements and selection procedures should be appropriate in light of the programme's level and discipline.

The panel observed that the admission and eligibility criteria are very clearly described in the Cooperation Agreement and on the website. Admission is dependent on the prior completion of a Bachelor's degree or equivalent programme at a recognised domestic or international tertiary educational institution (corresponding to at least 180 ECTS) and the admission by the DCLead Consortium. Specific and clearly described requirements apply for the different tracks. Relevant work experience in the field of digital communication or media is also taken into consideration, which the panel values. Candidates moreover have to demonstrate their English proficiency and have to provide a motivation when applying.

The panel noted that the selection process is rigorous. The Programme Board decides each year on the number of students to be admitted. The Programme Coordinator decides on the eligibility of the applications received, after which an extra check is done to make sure no one is dropped out without a reason. The Selection Committee then interviews each shortlisted candidate, which the panel values. The Selection Committee consists of three representatives of the Coordinating Institution and two representatives of each of the remaining three Consortium Partners. Final admission is dependent on a positive admission confirmation by the Programme Board.

The panel took note of the fact that DCLead invests strongly in providing information to applicants. The students the panel talked to explained that they had had many different channels at their disposal during the application process, and had experienced the process as being very streamlined. The richness of the information, so the panel concludes, leads to more informed applications.

The panel explored how the Consortium expects to continue the rigorous, yet time-consuming admission process with a rising number of applications. The programme management explained that a preselection is made such that only shortlisted applicants need to be interviewed. Moreover, the programme will provide more detailed information on the expectations to attract the better suited rather than more applicants.

In conclusion, the clear admission requirements, the careful consideration and selection of students leads to highly motivated and high-quality students. Although the process is time-intensive for the Consortium, the panel recommends to continue in the same direction as it leads to a strong selection of students.

DCLead students can apply for an Erasmus+ scholarship, which covers all their costs. The Selection Committee decides which students are eligible for a scholarship. Students explained during the site visit to be pleased with the scholarship opportunities offered. However, the panel also learned that it takes some time for the scholarship to be awarded, which makes it difficult for some students to prefinance their living expenses. In this sense, a seed fund to cover for this initial period would be welcomed.

The panel explored how DCLead's admission process and scholarships scheme assure that a diverse cohort of students is formed. It learned that DCLead invests in local communication campaigns, with current students and alumni acting as ambassadors. Many of them being local influencers, their enthusiastic participation in the programme leads to a large volume of applications (above 550 applications in 2021 for an intake of 20 students). The programme management explained that applications are from across the globe (70 nationalities represented last year), and often of high quality. There is an interesting mix of people who have already occupied important positions mixed with students freshly out of bachelor with an already impressive state of play. In the final selection, it is also made sure that a diverse cohort is admitted. The EU scholarship rules support this, as no more than two students from the same country can receive a scholarship. The panel concludes that there are many efforts for diversity and inclusiveness in the application and selection process, and that this clearly leads to a diverse set of students in terms of background and country of origin. Yet it also asks to monitor whether this diversity is also extended to students' socio-economic status.

The panel concludes that the admission and selection procedure is appropriate and aligned with the programme's ambitions.

2.4.2   Recognition

> *Recognition of qualifications and of periods of studies (including recognition of prior learning) should be applied in line with the Lisbon Recognition Convention and subsidiary documents.*

The panel is of the opinion that the admission procedure described above is aligned with the Lisbon Recognition convention. The procedure for the recognition of prior qualifications and periods of study is clearly described in the application process. In line with the convention, prior work experience is taken into account in the applications, next to formal learning trajectories. DCLead's Programme Board decides on recognition issues.

2.5   Learning, Teaching and Assessment
The panel assesses the Learning, Teaching and Assessment standard as compliant.

2.5.1 Learning and teaching

The programme should be designed to correspond with the intended learning outcomes, and the learning and teaching approaches applied should be adequate to achieve those. The diversity of students and their needs should be respected and attended to, especially in view of potential different cultural backgrounds of the students.

The course descriptions and the discussions with staff and students allowed the panel to gain a better insight in the learning and teaching approaches applied in the DCLead programme. The panel observed that a mix of teaching formats is used, which is well-aligned with the ILOs. It became clear to the panel that true student-centred learning is taking place at DCLead: students are required to participate actively in classes, and the panel considers the focus on problem-based learning to adequately support this goal. The discussions with staff and students clearly show that there is a focus on improved oracy through discussion and seminars, and students repeatedly mentioned that reflection is a salient element of classes. The panel learned that for DCLead, in-person teaching is crucial for peer-to-peer learning, which is why this format is preferred to digital formats. Nevertheless, online formats provide more opportunities to include guest lectures.

The panel noted that the culturally diverse audience at DCLead provides a high potential for intercultural and international learning. Students commented that this potential is certainly tapped into, and that students' different backgrounds are taken into account and used to enrich the discussions. The fact that students are mixed with students from other programmes in the specialization tracks, further adds to this potential.

The panel was impressed with the clear presence of a community in the programme and considers this as a feature that makes the programme unique. Again, the panel considers the Autumn School to be a critical asset of the programme as it is key in creating this community.

In conclusion, the learning and teaching approaches are clearly adequate to achieve the ILOs.

2.5.2 Assessment of students

The examination regulations and the assessment of the achieved learning outcomes should correspond with the intended learning outcomes. They should be applied consistently among partner institutions.

The panel studied the course module descriptions in detail and observed that the evaluation requirements and methods are communicated transparently for each course. As already explained in 2.2.3., varied forms of evaluation are used, dependent on and aligned with the type of course and learning outcomes to be achieved. This correspondence is also constantly monitored by the quality assurance systems of the different home institutions and by DCLead's Programme Board. As mentioned above (see 2.2.3.) the panel sees room for improvement in providing more detail in the course descriptions on the format of assessment.

DCLead's Curriculum document clearly describes examination regulations. All courses are individually assessed, and the rules and regulations of the institution hosting the exam are applied. The panel learned from the students that the different grading systems and cultures

are a cause for concern and sometimes anguish for students, as it is perceived to be 'easier' in some systems to receive higher grades than in others. In this sense, the panel was pleased to learn that all institutions hosting exams apply an agreed programme's common grading scale, expressed in percentages, and the corresponding grade in their national general grading system for course examination. Students explained that although the system is not perfect, it has added to the fairness of evaluations. They were also satisfied about the degree to which a conversation between programme and students on this topic is ongoing. The panel concludes that some 'diversity' in grading approaches is bound to exist in joint programmes. The system used is transparently laid out in the Consortium Agreement and the panel saw no indications to contradict that students are fairly and consistently graded across the different tracks.

Another aspect where approaches across institutions differ concerns feedback. Students pointed out that in some partner institutions, receiving extensive feedback on the grades received is standard practice, while this is not the case in others. The panel is of the opinion that systematically giving students feedback on the grading received should be standard practice. It suggests providing consistent possibilities for feedback in the future and sees opportunities to learn from each other's best practices within the Consortium.

The panel also explored the evaluation procedure of the thesis. It learned that the DCLead programme is completed by a master's Examination, the prerequisite of which is the completion of all courses and the submission of the master thesis. During this Examination, the master thesis is defended in front of the two supervisors (TECMAN students choosing to have their primary supervisors from AAU are also assessed by an external examiner who is present at the examination). From the 30 ECTS awarded for the thesis, 27 ECTS are attributed to the thesis, and 3 ECTS is for the defense. During the digital site visit, students explained that the procedure is transparent and works well. The panel concludes that the evaluation of the thesis is up to standard.

In conclusion, the examination regulations and assessment used correspond with the ILOs.

2.6   Student Support
The panel assesses the Student Support standard as compliant.

> *The student support services should contribute to the achievement of the intended learning outcomes. They should take into account specific challenges of mobile students.*

The self-evaluation report describes the different support channels DCLead students have at their disposal. First of all, the services offered by the home institutions of the Consortium Partners, such as international relations offices and student support services, are available to DCLead students. Secondly, DCLead invests in providing dedicated student support for DCLead students, through its informative website, a Facebook account, and a Wikileads page. Weekly meetings with the student representatives provide a platform for any support questions from the student body. The small scale of the programme allows for informal and quick support where required. An important third level is peer-support, with DCLead earlier cohorts of students being very active in supporting new students.

Based on the documents studied and the dialogue with programme stakeholders, the panel concludes that DCLead offers rich and varied support services. Special attention is given to the challenges that mobile students encounter. Students and alumni emphasized the importance of peer-support. The panel highly values that activities are organized to establish group/community feeling within the DCLead programme, so that students can support each other. The students again mentioned the Autumn School as a pivotal event in this regard.

The panel appreciates that, when students are welcomed for their second semester by the partner institutions, a welcoming moment with faculty representatives is planned, to assist students in finding their way at either AAU/Copenhagen, VUB/Brussels, or WUR/Wageningen (e.g. with respect to course registration). The panel explored during the interviews whether any other forms of mentoring are available for students. It found that whereas some partner institutions do have mentoring systems in place, this is not the case everywhere. The panel sees room for improvement in ensuring more systematically that wherever students go in the tracks, they are assured the same level of support and integration in the group. This is especially important for this mobile group of students.

In the same vein, the panel learned from the interview with the students that the support for finding student accommodation differs, with some home institutes finding housing for the students, and others leaving it mostly up to the students' initiative. Again, the panel would welcome a more streamlined approach, ensuring a more comparable level of service across partner institutions for the DCLead students.

Regardless of these remarks and suggestions, the panel concludes that the evidence demonstrates that the programme is fully compliant with the different criteria in the Student Support standard.

2.7 Resources

The panel assesses the Resources standard as compliant.

2.7.1 Staff

> *The staff should be sufficient and adequate (qualifications, professional and international experience) to implement the study programme.*

The panel carefully studied the faculty page on DCLead's website and spoke to both staff closely involved in the programme (such as members of the Programme Board), and staff more loosely engaged (such as professors teaching a single course). DCLead's teaching staff are clearly highly qualified, recognized scholars in their discipline, and have experience with international programmes and students. They are all linked to the Consortium Partners' organizing departments and research centers. The Consortium Partners' universities being established and recognized institutions, this further adds to the panel's confidence in the quality of staff. The panel welcomes that alumni are actively involved in the programme (teaching, research, thesis supervision) as this ensures input from practitioners. Students and staff alike were moreover very appreciative of the quality of services offered by the support staff.

In addition to bringing their specific expertise to the programme, the panel was pleased to observe that DCLead's core teaching staff clearly has a shared vision on research and teaching in the field. The panel was moreover impressed with the level of enthusiasm and engagement for DCLead from more peripheral teaching staff. Taken together, this provides an excellent basis to implement the study programme. It also bodes well on the viability of the programme, as this staff can also be considered supporters of DCLead at the respective home institutions.

While the panel is of the opinion that quantity of staff currently is sufficient, an important challenge in years to come may be the increasing number of student applications. The dialogue with DCLead programme management indicated, however, that this issue is firmly on the radar.

In conclusion, DCLead staff is of high quality and has the necessary expertise and qualifications to be able to implement the study programme.

2.7.2 Facilities

The facilities provided should be sufficient and adequate in view of the intended learning outcomes.

The organizing institutions being well-established higher education institutions, the panel is confident that sufficient and adequate facilities are available for students to be able to complete their study programme. The panel learned that access to online learning platforms, journal subscriptions, software packages etc. is adequate.

As mentioned above (see 2.6.) DCLead invests heavily in providing information for (prospective) students regarding admission, scholarships and mobility, with an elaborate website and a clear presence in social media. In talking to the students, the panel learned that Whatsapp plays an important role, especially for peer-support initiatives. While appreciating that different information flows and channels are used, the panel suggests the DCLead community to critically reflect on the platforms that are used. It finds this especially important as students develop into leaders in digital communication worldwide. In the same vein, the panel suggests to continually reflect on the Carbon footprint of the programme. In this regard, it was pleased to learn that most students already opt for travel over land for transport within Europe.

Students receiving the scholarship explained to be pleased with the degree to which the scholarship covers cost and with the modalities and frequency of the payment (see also 2.4.1.). The panel suggests to continue efforts to ensure that scholarships are used as a lever to attract a truly diverse student cohort, also in terms of socio-economic background.

In conclusion, DCLead facilities are sufficient in view of the programme's ILOs.

2.8 Transparency and Documentation

The panel assesses the Transparency and Documentation standard as compliant.

> *Relevant information about the programme like admission requirements and procedures, course catalogue, examination and assessment procedures etc. should be well documented and published by taking into account specific needs of mobile students.*

All relevant information about DCLead is clearly documented and accessible for prospective students, ranging from information on curriculum objectives and content, to application procedures, scholarships, faculty and student life. The panel observed that the website and intranet of the programme are informative. The FAQ is especially helpful for prospective students. Students and alumni expressed their appreciation of the quality and availability of information and confirmed that the information channels available are widely used. DC Lead's website is, according to the panel, a vibrant platform. With active Twitter, Instagram and Facebook accounts of DC Lead, social media are also playing an important role.

The panel concludes that the evidence demonstrates that the programme is fully compliant with the different criteria in the Transparency and Documentation standard.

2.9 Quality Assurance

The panel assesses the Quality Assurance standard as compliant.

> *The cooperating institutions should apply joint internal quality assurance processes in accordance with part one of the ESG.*

The panel noted that the Consortium Agreement clearly sets out the procedures and relevant bodies for quality assurance. It observed that DCLead has set up joint internal quality assurance structures and processes that allow for a structural and dedicated monitoring of the programme. The main body to overview any quality assurance issues is the Programme Board. This Board analyzes course evaluations, monitors issues that spring up from the Student Panel, and takes action if required. The Consortium Board, which also includes Consortium Partners, provides advice and feedback on the quality and governance of the master programme in a yearly progress report. Also, an External Evaluation Council, composed of three external experts, meets every three years with the Programme Board to evaluate the quality of both academic and non-academic aspects of the DCLead Programme. Finally, an elected Student Panel composed of six students represent the student body in quality assurance matters.

In addition to these joint processes and procedures, DCLead is embedded in the quality assurance cycles and structures at the different partner institutions. All the involved Consortium Partners have solid internal quality assurance systems in place, that are aligned with the requirements of the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG). The panel learned that course evaluations take place at all partner institutions in a systematic way, using the systems and procedures that are in place at the local institution. The results of these student evaluations then serve as input for DCLead's Programme Board meetings. The panel learned during the site visit that the results of the student evaluations are also discussed locally in the partner institutions.

The panel concludes that a solid structure has been built, with many boards discussing the quality of DCLead, both at the level of the individual partner institutions and the Consortium. Yet the fact that many different bodies are involved also brings some challenges. For the panel it was not always clear who is ultimately responsible for what element of quality assurance of the programme, and how the information flows are managed to assure that the PDCA-cycle is closed. The panel therefore recommends to further clarify quality assurance related roles and responsibilities, and to identify where there may be unnecessary overlaps.

During the site visit, the panel further explored how students are involved in DCLead's quality assurance. The panel noted that the weekly Student Panel meetings with the Programme Coordinator are highly valued by the students. Student representatives explained that Student Panel members are elected. They gather current concerns of students before the meeting and provide feedback to the student community after the meeting. The panel learned that students are involved in the Consortium Board, but not at the level of the Programme Board. The panel suggests exploring the possibility of student representation at all levels of the Consortium.

The students the panel talked to were very appreciative to DCLead's responsiveness to student issues, and the availability of staff for any questions. They mentioned that communication lines are always open, also at the partner institutions. This informal quality assurance is clearly a strength of the programme. It still being a small programme, issues are often dealt with quickly and informally at the level of the individual tracks, as was also confirmed by the students. Still, the panel also sees some potential issues in maintaining the information flow and in keeping the overview whether issues are indeed dealt with in an adequate way.

The panel also observed that although the tools are available locally to act quickly, it often takes a longer time for solutions to be escalated to and implemented at the Consortium level. The panel feels that there is room for improvement to come to a real joint strategy at this level. This includes tapping more fully into the opportunities the Consortium offers to learn from each other's best practices.

During the site visit, the panel heard many examples of DCLead's orientation towards continuous improvement. Both student and staff gave examples of issues that had come up, either via formal quality assurance channels or through informal contacts, and that had led to actual changes in the programme. Examples include the availability and quality of internships, the differences in evaluation and grading practices across institutions, or the optimization of the application process. The panel did learn from the students that they are not always up to date of the most recent steps that are being taken and suggests to keep investing in closing the feedback loop, not only for students, but for all stakeholders involved.

Regardless of the suggestions made above, the panel confirms that the programme is fully compliant with the different criteria in the Quality standard.

3 Final judgement

The panel concludes that the joint Master in Digital Communication Leadership, offered by a Consortium consisting of Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Aalborg Universitet København, Paris-Lodron University of Salzburg, and Wageningen University & Research, satisfies all standards of the framework for the European Approach for quality assurance of joint programmes.

DCLead is truly a joint programme. Strong formal structures support the development of the programme and its legal and practical organization. As DCLead invests heavily and effectively in community building, strong informal ties further support the collaboration. The Autumn School is key in this regard.

DCLead has been forward looking in setting its objectives. The programme sets itself apart through its interdisciplinary and international ambitions; its social, ethical, and critical orientation; and its attention for practical application. DCLead's ILOs comprise knowledge, skills, and competences that are relevant to the disciplinary field of Digital Communication Leadership. Although there is a shared, implicit understanding of what leadership in digital communication entails, the panel concludes that there is clear room for improvement in making this shared concept more explicit. The panel recommends adding a mission statement/vision to the Consortium Agreement. This could then serve as a starting point to define on a more granular level the ILOs oriented towards the development of digital communication leadership. In the same vein, the panel recommends making the programme's international and intercultural ambitions more tangible in the ILOs.

The programme's flexible setup and dynamic mix of teaching and evaluation formats give students many opportunities to reach the preset programme goals and to develop the six core competences. The curriculum structure allows students to encounter the whole network that constitutes DCLead. The panel considers the involvement of academic and internship partners around the globe for research stays and internships as a clear strength. It welcomes that the Consortium is currently renewing its network of partnerships to improve the access to and quality of the internships. The panel asks to keep this issue on the radar, so that students wishing to do an internship, have access to a robust offer.

The teaching approach of problem-based learning is attractive to students and allows for active, student-centred learning. The panel found that DCLead actively uses the potential for intercultural and international learning the international student cohort provides. DCLead's grading system is transparently laid out in the Consortium Agreement, and the panel was pleased to learn that all institutions hosting exams apply an agreed programme's common grading scale. Although some diversity in grading is bound to exist in joint programmes, the panel saw no indications contradicting a fair and consistent grading across the different tracks.

The panel confirms the constructive alignment between DCLead's ILOs, its programme design and assessment. However, the panel asks DCLead to provide more details on assessment formats in the course descriptions in order to be able to better guarantee and proof the full chain of constructive alignment.

The panel noted that the selection process is rigorous and streamlined, leading to a diverse cohort of strong, highly motivated students. Although there are many efforts for diversity and inclusiveness in the application and selection process, the panel asks to monitor whether this diversity is also extended to students' socio-economic status. Also, it noted that a seed fund to cover the initial period before the scholarship arrives, would be welcomed.

The resources to support the programme are up-to-standard. DCLead's teaching staff are highly qualified, have a shared vision, and are available for students. Its support services are rich and varied. The panel highly values that activities are organized to establish group/community feeling, opening the door to strong peer-support systems. While the panel is of the opinion that quantity of staff currently is sufficient, an important challenge in years to come may be processing the increasing number of student applications.

The panel found that the level of support students receive differs to a certain degree across Consortium Partners. This is the case for the degree to which students receive feedback on their grades, for the availability of mentoring systems, and the support received in finding student accommodation. The panel recommends DCLead to ensure more systematically that wherever students go in the tracks, they are assured the same level of service. In this regard, the panel feels that the opportunity to learn from each other's best practices in the Consortium has yet to be fully seized.

The panel concludes that a solid and joint quality assurance structure has been built, yet it recommends to further clarify quality assurance related roles and responsibilities, and to identify where there may be unnecessary overlaps. It values DCLead's orientation towards continuous improvement and its responsiveness to student issues. Due to the close links between students and staff, informal quality assurance is strong. Whereas this allows for many issues to be dealt with swiftly and directly, the panel sees some potential issues in maintaining the information flow and in keeping the overview whether issues are dealt with adequately. It asks DCLead to closely monitor this. Also, it recommends to keep investing in closing the feedback loop so that students (and other stakeholders) are up-to-date of changes made on the basis of their input.

In sum, the panel confirms it is very positive and enthusiastic about the quality and expected added value that the DCLead programme brings to the field of digital communication leadership. Following the conclusions above, the panel advises NVAO to take a positive accreditation decision.

The panel formulates the following recommendations, which do not detract from the panel's positive conclusion:
- Define on a more granular level the ILOs oriented towards the development of digital communication leadership and international/intercultural competencies.
- Be more explicit in the course descriptions on the format of assessment.
- Monitor whether the efforts towards attracting a diverse cohort of students are extended to students' socio-economic status.
- Ensure more systematically that wherever students go in the tracks, they receive the same level of support and service.

- Further clarify quality assurance related roles and responsibilities and identify unnecessary overlaps between structures and procedures of the Consortium and those of the respective partner institutions.
- Keep investing in closing the feedback loop so that students (and other stakeholders) are up-to-date of changes made on the basis of their input.
- Fully tap into the potential to learn from each other's best practices within the Consortium.

4 Assessment procedure

The assessment was carried out in line with the 'Framework for the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes – November 2020'.

The panel prepared itself for the assessment on the basis of the Self-Assessment Report and annexes submitted by the institutions when applying for accreditation. Prior to the preparatory meeting of the panel, each panel member formulated initial impressions and questions to be discussed. During the preparatory online meeting on Friday 8 July 2022, the panel discussed all information received with the application and also prepared the virtual dialogue with the programme (institutions). Impressions and questions were collected and merged into a well-ordered and handy document before the dialogue with the institution.

The virtual dialogue took place on 12 July 2022. The digital platform used was Zoom. The dialogue included discussions with representatives of all cooperating institutions. During the dialogue the panel investigated the context of the joint programme and the institutions and collected all required information to make a judgement on the quality of the joint programme.

During a closed meeting of the panel on 12 July 2022 the panel discussed all information obtained and translated it into a judgement per standard and for the programme as a whole. The panel took this conclusion in full independence.

All information obtained led to a draft assessment report that has been sent to all panel members. The feedback from the panel members has been processed. The assessment report adopted by the chairperson was submitted to NVAO on 14 September 2022.

5   Overview of the assessments

The panel presents their assessments per standard, as outlined in chapter 2.

Standard	Assessment
1 Eligibility	Compliant
2 Learning Outcomes	Compliant
3 Study Programme	Compliant
4 Admission & Recognition	Compliant
5 Learning, Teaching & Assessment	Compliant
6 Student Support	Compliant
7 Resources	Compliant
8 Transparency & Documentation	Compliant
9 Quality Assurance	Compliant
Programme as a whole	**Positive**

Annex 1: General information on the programmes

Institutions	Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Belgium Aalborg Universitet København, Denmark Paris-Lodron Universität Salzburg, Austria (coordinating institution) Wageningen University & Research, the Netherlands
Address, institution website	Pleinlaan 2, 1050 Brussels, Belgium - https://www.vub.be/ Fredrik Bajers Vej 5, 9100 Aalborg, Denmark - https://www.aau.dk/ Kapitelgasse 4-6, 5020 Salzburg, Austria - https://www.plus.ac.at/ Droevendaalsesteeg 4, Wageningen, the Netherlands - https://www.wur.nl/ https://dclead.eu/
Qualification	Master of Arts / Master of Science in Digital Communication Leadership
(Additional) title	NA
(Parts of) field of study(s)	Political and Social Sciences
Specialisations	Digital Communication, Policy and Innovation in Europe [POLINN] Digital Technology and Management [TECMAN] Information and Communication Technologies for Development [ICT4D]
Programme routes	NA
Location where the programme is offered	Brussels (Belgium), Copenhagen (Denmark), Salzburg (Austria), Wageningen (the Netherlands)
Teaching language	English
Study load (in credits)	120

Annex 2: Programme-specific Learning Outcomes

1. Applied Academic Knowledge
   a. Students are able to apply their academic knowledge by providing critical contextualization and evaluation
   b. of current national and international developments and discussions and independently deepening
   c. insights and expanding the theoretical basis of their field of study. Students can translate their
   d. understandings and findings into conclusions, scenarios, advice, policy recommendations and strategies
   e. in a competent way. They can finally apply the acquired knowledge and skills in a professional context.

2. Specialization Knowledge & Study Tracks
   Students gather advanced knowledge in their specialization field according to their chosen study track in the following manner:
   a. Digital Communication, Policy and Innovation in Europe [POLINN]: Students are able to understand and analyse the relationship between policy makers, market mechanisms and the users considering the cultural dimension of the field of digital communication. This includes the delivery of profound policy analysis, advice and recommendations for future policy developments, critical market analysis and a socially grounded contextualization of current developments and debates on digital communication in a globalized world.
   b. Digital Technology and Management [TECMAN]: Students are able to understand and analyse the relationships between technology developments and business potentials in the field of digital communication. This includes the promotion of developments of new business models, the evaluation of technology trends and the use, adoption and domestication of ICT and new media.
   c. Information and Communication Technologies for Development [ICT4D]: Students are able to understand and analyse the possibilities and risks connected with the use of digital communication for the enhancement of human, social and economic conditions particularly of people living in developing countries.

3. Solution-oriented Skills
   Students demonstrate entrepreneurial spirit, responsibility, communicative attitude, creativity and the ability to plan, coordinate, supervise and advise. The acquired skills enable the graduates to become independent, responsible, inquiring and reflective professionals.

4. Social competence
   Students show and open and constructive attitude, have respect for other views and beliefs and remain open-minded concerning alternative points of view. In a culturally diverse international context they act upon an open attitude and critically reflect on their own position. They are open to scientific doubt and societal pluralism.

Annex 3: Composition of the panel

The composition of the panel that assessed the quality of the Master of Arts / Master of Science of Digital Communication Leadership of Vrije Universiteit Brussel in Flanders in cooperation with Paris-Lodron University of Salzburg, Aalborg University & Wageningen University was as follows:

Dr. Rolf Heusser *(chair)*, University of Zurich, Switzerland, Former Director of the Swiss Accreditation Agency in Higher Education, Former President of the European Consortium for Accreditation in Higher Education (ECA)

Prof. Dr. Tom Evens *(panel member)*, Professor in Media industries, platforms, tech policy & sports media @imec-mict-Ghent University, Belgium;

Kirsty Styles *(panel member)*, journalist, campaigner, researcher and performer, advocating for good information, ethical technology and diverse leadership, PhD Candidate – University of Central Lancashire, United Kingdom;

Tobias Munch *(student panel member)*, Student MSc in Business Administration and Information Systems – Digitalisation, Copenhagen Business School, Denmark.

The panel was assisted by:
- **Dr. Dagmar Provijn**, policy advisor Flanders NVAO, process coordinator;
- **Dr. Jetje De Groof,** secretary.

All panel members and the process coordinator/secretary have signed NVAO's code of ethics.

Annex 4: Schedule of the site visit

The site visit by the panel to the programme was conducted on 12 July 2022 as part of the external assessment procedure regarding the Master of Science/Master of Arts in Digital Communication Leadership of Vrije Universiteit Brussel in collaboration with Aalborg Universitet København, Paris-Lodron Universität Salzburg, and Wageningen University & Research

12 July 2022 – virtual meeting	
Time	**Meeting**
09:00-10:30	**Programme Board (members & SER coordinators)**
10:30-12:00	**Students and alumni**
12:00-13:30	**Panel break/lunch**
13:30-14:30	**Teaching staff**
14:45-15:15	**2nd meeting with programme board**
15:30-17:00	**Panel: Break + Internal discussion**
17:00-17:30	**Wrap up & concluding dialogue**

Annex 5: Documents reviewed

During the site visit the programme management presented the following documents:

Information file
- Self-Assessment Report

Annexes to the information file
- Consortium agreement
- Curriculum document
    - Overview programme structure
    - Course files
- Conversion table grades
- Overview of faculty involved

Annex 6: List of abbreviations

AAU	Aalborg Universitet København
ECTS	European Credit according to the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
ICT4D	Information and Communication Technologies for Development
ILOs	Intended Learning Outcomes
NVAO	Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (Nederlands-Vlaamse Accreditatieorganisatie)
PLUS	Paris-Lodron Universität Salzburg
POLINN	Digital Communication, Policy and Innovation in Europe
TECMAN	Digital Technology and Management
VUB	Vrije Universiteit Brussel
WUR	Wageningen University & Research

The panel report has been ordered by NVAO for the accreditation of the Master of Science/Master of Arts in Digital Communication Leadership of Vrije Universiteit Brussel in collaboration with Aalborg Universitet København, Paris-Lodron Universität Salzburg, and Wageningen University & Research according to the Framework for the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint programmes.