PROGRAMME REVIEW

International Master of Science in Soils and Global Change (IMSOGLO)

Ghent University, Aarhus University, BOKU University and University of Göttingen

Brussels - January 2026

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PROGRAMME REVIEW IMSOGLO

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This report is electronically available at www.qualityassurance.vluhr.be/assessment-reports.

Legal deposit number: D/2026/12.784/1

Content

Preface VLUHR Quality Assurance Board

This assessment report deals with the programme review of the International Master of Science in Soils and Global Change (IMSOGLO). This programme review was conducted by an independent panel of experts between January 2025 and January 2026.

This report is intended for all stakeholders of the programme and provides a snapshot of its quality following the review principles for quality assurance for programme assessments in Flanders. As chair of the VLUHR Quality Assurance Board I hope that the panel's findings, judgements, recommendations and commendations will advance this programme. Additionally, this report intends to provide information regarding the quality of the programme to a wider audience. For this reason, this report is published on the website of VLUHR QA.

I would like to thank all members of the panel for the time they invested and the dedication they showed carrying out this programme review. At the very same time, this review was only possible because of the commitment of all those involved at the programme. I hope this report does justice to their efforts.

Mia Sas
Chair VLUHR Quality Assurance Board

Programme review

Introduction

In this report, the panel of the programme review IMSOGLO presents its judgements and recommendations regarding the quality of the International Master of Science in Soils and Global Change at Ghent University (Belgium), Aarhus University (Denmark), BOKU University/Universität für Bodenkultur Wien (Austria), and the University of Göttingen.[1]

The programme review was carried out in accordance to the VLUHR QA manual for the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes. Nina Geenen, policy advisor quality assurance at VLUHR QA, acted as project supervisor and secretary of the programme review.

Panel composition

The proposal of candidate panel members was approved by the VLUHR QA Board on 10 February 2025. The composition of the panel IMSOGLO was ratified by the VLUHR QA Board on 5 June 2025.

The panel has the following composition[2]:

- Prof. Dr. Arnaud Temme, Professor and Head of the 'Montane Soil-landscape Evolution' research group at Universität Innsbruck, Austria (chair)
- Dr. Annik van Keer, Deputy Head of Education Policy at the Faculty of Science and Team Leader of the Undergraduate School at Universiteit Utrecht, Netherlands
- Dr. Eline Vanuytrecht, R&D project manager at VITO en guest lecturer on 'Water Productivity and Irrigation Design' at KU Leuven, Flanders/Belgium
- Sam Lacquaye, Master of Science in Biology student at KU Leuven, Flanders/Belgium

Review process

The European Approach is mainly based on the ESG and on the Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA). In addition, the European Approach takes into account the distinctive features of a joint programme and, thus, specifies the 'standard' approach accordingly.

The nine standards and related substandards for quality assurance of joint programmes in the EHEA are:

1. Eligibility
   - 1.1 Status
   - 1.2 Joint design and delivery
   - 1.3 Cooperation agreement
2. Learning outcomes
   - 2.1 Level
   - 2.2 Disciplinary field
   - 2.3 Achievement
   - 2.4 Regulated professions

[1] Administrative details of the programme can be found in annex 1.
[2] A short CV of each panel member can be found in annex 2.

3. Study programme
    - 3.1 Curriculum
    - 3.2 Credits
    - 3.3 Workload
4. Admission and recognition
    - 4.1 Admission
    - 4.2 Recognition
5. Learning, teaching and assessment
    - 5.1 Learning and teaching
    - 5.2 Assessment
6. Student support
7. Resources
    - 7.1 Staff
    - 7.2 Facilities
8. Transparency and documentation
9. Quality assurance

More detailed information regarding the (sub)standards can be found in the programme report.

Decision rules

The rules set out below are applicable to each standard.

- Compliant: The programme acts in accordance with the standard, and its implementation is effective.
- Partially Compliant: Some aspects or parts of the standard are met while others are not. The interpretation of the standard is correct, but the manner of implementation is not effective enough.
- Non-Compliant: The programme fails to comply with the standard.

Preparation

In preparation of the review, the programme wrote a self-evaluation report in accordance with the VLUHR QA manual for the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes. The panel received the self-evaluation report (including supporting materials) several weeks before the visit of the programme. The panel thoroughly studied the self-evaluation report and its annexes to prepare for the visit.

Prior to the visit, the panel members attended a training session on 17 October 2025. During the training, the panel members received more detailed information on the review and the practical details of how the review process takes place. Special attention was given to the status of the programme, quality assurance in Flanders and Europe, the Review Principles and interview techniques. The panel got acquainted with the standards for quality assurance of joint programmes in the EHEA and was informed about how this framework relates to the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG). The visit schedule was also discussed and is attached in Annex 3. Finally, the self-evaluation report was discussed in depth to prepare the site visit.

Visit

The panel carried out the programme review on 17 and 18 November at Ghent University in Belgium. During the site visit, the panel spoke with all those involved in the programme in order to gain insight into the quality of the programme, for example the programme managers, the students, the teachers, the alumni, the professional field and the persons responsible for quality assurance, student guidance and internationalisation. Part of the site visit was dedicated to review the programme-specific infrastructure. The panel was able to review the programme-specific infrastructure of the four programme locations. In order to give students and staff the opportunity to talk confidentially to the panel there was an open consultation At the end of the site visit, the panel discussed its findings, judgements, recommendations, suggestions and commendations with the programme management in a co-creative session. After a final panel meeting, the panel shared its main conclusions with the programme management in an oral report. The interviews took place in an open and constructive atmosphere and provided the panel, in addition to the documents studied (see Annex 4 for an overview), relevant insights regarding the quality of the programme.

Report

In the subsequent assessment report the panel provides the findings, judgements, recommendations, and commendations regarding the quality of the programme as a whole. The panel also formulates a conclusion at the end of the report, readable for a broad audience and including an advice for accreditation, as well as a list of commendations, suggestions and recommendations. The judgements, commendations, recommendations and suggestions in this report apply to all tracks, unless specified otherwise. The programme management was given the opportunity to respond to the draft of this report before finalisation.

Programme report

Context

The International Master of Science in Soils and Global Change (IMSOGLO) is a two year master's programme that consists of 120 ECTS credits, organised jointly by a consortium of four European universities: Ghent University (Belgium), Aarhus University (Denmark), BOKU University/Universität für Bodenkultur Wien (Austria), and the University of Göttingen (Germany). Ghent University is the coordinator of the programme.

The consortium describes IMSOGLO as a master's programme with an integrated, research-based curriculum that aims to develop students as experts with an in-depth understanding of soil processes in relation to global change, who can develop and apply evidence-based sustainable solutions. The curriculum's depth, breadth, and exploration of diverse ecosystems - made possible through the complementary expertise of the four partner universities - are presented by the consortium as the programme's unique selling point.

The four partners universities indicate complementary backgrounds on two fronts, namely the geographic focus of their research and their disciplinary expertise. Concerning the geographic focus, AU cites a specialisation in arctic soils, where research at UGent, BOKU and UGOE focusses on tropical and subtropical soils. All four institutions claim expertise in temperate soils. In terms of disciplinary expertise, UGOE and BOKU focus on soil biogeochemistry, particularly its role in ecosystem dynamics, nutrient cycling, soil fertility, and greenhouse gas fluxes in natural and managed ecosystems (forests, croplands and grasslands), with a strong emphasis on soil-plant interactions. AU and UGent declare their specialisation in optimising soil-water management, soil degradation and land evaluation for land functioning in an ecosystem services context, with additional focus on upscaling and mapping.

The combined disciplinary expertise of the consortium partners is clearly reflected in the programme's two specialisation tracks. Students may choose between the *Soil Ecosystem Services and Global Change track*, delivered jointly by Ghent University (UGent) and Aarhus University (AU), and the *Soil-Plant System Processes and Global Change track*, delivered by Ghent University, BOKU University (BOKU), and the University of Göttingen (UGOE). The judgements, commendations, recommendations and suggestions in this report apply to all tracks, unless specified otherwise.

IMSOGLO has hosted 135 students from 49 different countries divided over six cohorts, from 2019 to 2025. The statistics show a gender balance of 54% female and 46% male when looking at the total of enrolled students. Since 2019, 93% of the graduates have obtained their master's degree within two years. The remaining students generally require one or two additional semesters. On average, the programme has a dropout ratio of 4%.

IMSOGLO is an Erasmus Mundus Joint Master (EMJM) Degree Programme. It started in 2019 with financial support of the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) of the European Commission, following the successful evaluation of the proposal.[3] The programme received scholarship funding for 96 students spread over four intakes (from 2019 to 2022). In 2019, the programme also received its first accreditation in the Flemish Community (Belgium) as a new Joint Master Degree Programme. This accreditation remains valid until 30 September 2026.

The panel notes that, over the course of this first accreditation period, the IMSOGLO consortium developed a revised curriculum more closely aligned with the needs of the professional field, reflecting new developments such as the EU's Green Deal and the Mission "*A Soil Deal for Europe*". In this context, the programme also restructured its original specialisation tracks *Physical Land Resources and Global Change* and *Biogeochemistry and Global Change*, resulting in the two tracks currently offered.

[3] Project 20181365, submitted to the Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters call with reference EAC-A05-2017.

It is also worth noting that since the start of the programme, the consortium was expanded to include 11 associate partners, with which the consortium aimed to further strengthen strategic collaboration in research, student internships, and master's thesis projects.[4] Through another positive evaluation following a call for Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters[5] by the EACEA in 2023, the "second edition" of the IMSOGLO programme received scholarship funding for 91 students, once again spread over four intakes (2024-2027). The year 2023 was a transitional year without funding.

The programme's governance is carried out by the following bodies, all of which have a joint composition:

- **Management Board (MB)**: In charge of the overall management, the Board bears final responsibility for the programme. It is chaired by the Coordinator of IMSOGLO, joined by three national coordinators. The MB is assisted in its duties by the following bodies:

- **Programme Steering Group (PSG)**: The Steering Group advises on modifications of the programme content and monitors the courses in terms of success of delivery and grades achieved by students, in accordance with legal and institutional regulations. The PSG verifies whether all learning outcomes of the programme are covered by the learning objectives of the individual courses. The Steering Group advises on many education related matters, including but not limited to the following: individual study programmes and curricula, selection of elective courses, thesis topics, and the nomination of lecturers. The PSG is composed of at least one lecturer nominated by each partner university (preferably also a member of the local education committee(s) at the partner university), one student representative per master year, and one alumnus. It is chaired by the Coordinator.

- **Student Selection Group (SSG)**: This committee proposes the selection and ranking of students to the MB. It also selects Erasmus Mundus scholarship holders and awards partial programme participation cost waivers. The SSG is composed of one representative nominated by each partner university, with the Coordinator as chairperson.

- **Education Quality Assurance Committee (EQAC)**: This committee checks if the educational quality assurance of IMSOGLO is in agreement with the local institutional regulations. The EQAC monitors the quality of the education of the programme. The EQAC is consulted when the PSG observes issues with certain courses or other problems (based on formal student evaluations and/or input from student representatives). The committee operates independently from the Management Board, submitting advice either at or without request to the MB. It comprises one member from each partner university, all of whom have experience with the local quality assurance frameworks.
- **Examination Committee (EC)**: The committee convenes after the examination periods and executes the following tasks: translating the scores for individual courses to a common grading system, checking obtained credits to confirm that UGent may issue a joint diploma for graduating students, and taking action in case of irregularities during examinations when the local regulations of partner universities do not apply. The EC is composed of all lecturers involved in the programme, including the (co-)supervisors of master dissertations. It is chaired by the Coordinator and supported by a yearly appointed Secretary.

The abovementioned governing bodies are supported by the **Technical Secretariat (TS)**, which is hosted at UGent whilst closely collaborating with the local secretariats of the partner universities. The secretariat offers technical and administrative support for the programme's day-to-day operations, such as the onboarding of incoming students (including visa and residence permit applications), mobility arrangements, administrative tasks

[4] The 11 Associate Partners are: Can Tho University (Vietnam), Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (Ghana), Maseno University (Kenya), Federal University of Pelotas (Brazil), Universitas Padjadjaran (Indonesia), Washington State University (US), Universidade de Sao Paulo (Brazil), International Livestock Research Institute (Kenya), Österreichische Bundesforste (Austria), Flanders Research Institute for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Belgium), and GreenGrass consortium (Germany).

[5] The Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters call with reference ERASMUS-EDU-2023-PEX-EMJM-MOB.

concerning study progress, organisation of the selection procedure, financial management, PR and communication, etc. The TS works under supervision of the Coordinator.

Standards

1 Eligibility

The panel assesses standard 1 as compliant.

1.1 Status

> *"The institutions that offer a joint programme should be recognized 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 panel assesses substandard 1.1 as compliant.

Ghent University (UGent - Belgium), Aarhus University (AU - Denmark), BOKU University/Universität für Bodenkultur Wien (BOKU - Austria), and the University of Göttingen (UGOE - Germany), the institutions that offer this joint programme, are recognised as higher education institutions by the relevant authorities of their countries. Their respective national legal frameworks enable them to participate in the joint programme. The institutions awarding the degree ensure that the degrees belong to the higher education degree systems of the countries in which they are based. This is proven by legal documents examined by the panel.

At Ghent University, IMSOGLO is currently accredited until 30 September 2026. According to Flemish regulations (Codex Hoger Onderwijs, Art. II.151), EU-funded joint master's programmes receive an automatic accreditation for the first seven years, after which they are subject to an evaluation based on the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes framework. The European Approach review described in this document is being carried out as part of the programme's Flemish reaccreditation process.

Aarhus University has received institutional accreditation in 2018 and 2024 and has therefore, based on the Danish Accreditation Act of 2013, the right to award master's degrees. Under Austrian law, universities can independently develop and revise their curricula. BOKU University's quality management system is certified by AQ Austria until 27 January 2029. This certification gives BOKU the mandate to award master's degrees. The University of Göttingen also has the right to award joint diplomas, as stipulated in Saxonian law (Niedersächsisches Hochschulgesetz, §8).

1.2 Joint design and delivery

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

The panel assesses substandard 1.2 as compliant.

The panel confirms that the IMSOGLO programme is jointly designed and delivered by a consortium of four partner universities, namely Ghent University (Belgium), Aarhus University (Denmark), BOKU University/Universität für Bodenkultur Wien (Austria), and the University of Göttingen (Germany), based on their complementary expertise. The four partner institutions actively contribute to the programme's organisation and governance, with Ghent University (or UGent) as the Coordinating Institution.

The joint nature of the programme is clearly reflected in its governance structure. Educational, administrative, and technical aspects of IMSOGLO are overseen by five bodies: the Management Board, Programme Steering Committee, Student Selection Committee, Examination Committee, and Education Quality Assurance Committee (see above for details). Each body includes representatives from all four partner universities. Their activities, along with the day-to-day operations of the programme, are supported by a dedicated Technical Secretariat, hosted by UGent.

The Management Board, chaired by the UGent coordinator and complemented by the three other national coordinators, holds overall responsibility for the programme. Its remit covers the evaluation of student applications, scholarship allocation, financial management, curriculum oversight, student support, and quality assurance. The Board receives advice from the four other governing bodies on specific educational matters, as well as operational support from the Technical Secretariat. It convenes at least three times per year, and—as Board members told the panel—they aim to meet in person whenever possible to foster open and meaningful dialogue, strengthen (informal) connections, and remain familiar with each other's campuses.

The panel confirms that all partner universities contribute proportionately to the programme, reflecting their respective geographical focus areas and disciplinary strengths. The jointly developed curriculum includes a fully integrated joint semester at UGent, followed by three semesters at the partner institutions, depending on the student's specialisation. Additional joint activities include the Primer Event as part of student onboarding (see Standard 3), the Living Lab Summer School, and the graduation ceremony at UGent. Master dissertations are jointly supervised, and can lead to joint publications. A unified grading system is applied across all partner institutions.

Based on the documents that the programme provided, the panel confirms that IMSOGLO graduates receive a joint diploma. The awarding of the IMSOGLO joint degree is confirmed by the joined Examination Committee, for students who successfully obtained all the credits of the IMSOGLO programme. The Consortium Agreement states that the joint diplomas are signed by UGent and by the partner(s) at which minimally 40 ECTS credits were obtained. In line with this, graduates following the specialisation *Soil Ecosystem Services and Global Change* receive a diploma signed by UGent and AU, those following the specialisation *Soil Plant System Processes and Global Change* receive a joint diploma signed by UGent, BOKU and UGOE. Graduates also receive a diploma supplement and a Transcript of Records, issued by UGent as the coordinating university.

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 awarded in the programme; Coordination and responsibilities of the partners involved regarding management and financial organization; 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 assesses substandard 1.3 as compliant.

The panel received the most recent version of IMSOGLO's consortium agreement, which was signed by the four partner institutions in 2024. After a thorough examination, the panel finds that the agreement clearly and comprehensively sets out the programme's terms and conditions.

The cooperation agreement defines the partners' mutual commitments and covers, among other matters, the denomination of the degrees awarded by the programme, coordination structure and responsibilities of the partners involved, student admission and selection procedures, mobility arrangements for students and staff, examination regulations and assessment methods, credit recognition and degree-awarding procedures, programme structure and content, costs and financing, quality assurance, confidentiality requirements related to theses and examinations, and the management of personal data and privacy within the consortium.

2 Learning outcomes

The panel assesses standard 2 as compliant.

2.1 Level

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

The panel assesses substandard 2.1 as compliant.

The programme has defined 18 intended learning outcomes (ILOs), which were updated in 2023 to reflect curriculum revisions made for the "second edition" of IMSOGLO. These comprise 12 overarching ILOs and six specialised outcomes corresponding to the two specialisation tracks: *Soil Ecosystem Services and Global Change* and *Soil Plant System Processes and Global Change*.

In addition to the ILOs, the programme has formulated 10 domain-specific learning outcomes (DLOs), as required for all Flemish higher education programmes. Whereas ILOs articulate the specific profile of a programme, DLOs serve as jointly agreed minimum standards per field of study, providing a reference point within the Flemish Qualifications Framework (FQF). The DLO system is designed to ensure consistent qualification levels and to enhance the transparency and comparability of degrees nationally and internationally. The panel assesses that the programme's ILOs correspond with the DLOs.

IMSOGLO's domain-specific learning outcomes were developed under the coordination of the Steering Committee "Learning Outcomes" of the Flemish Higher Education Council (VLUHR). The process involved consultation with various external stakeholders, including international experts, alumni, and representatives of the professional field. The learning outcomes and their alignment with the FQF level 7 were approved by the VLUHR Board on 23 September 2025. As legally required, the programme submitted its DLOs to the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO) on 15 October 2025, where validation was still pending at the time of this review.[6]

The programme's self-assessment report demonstrates to the panel that the learning outcomes align with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), supported by a detailed matrix mapping the ILOs to the EQF. Based on the additional documentation provided, the panel concludes that the learning outcomes are also consistent with the qualification levels of all four National Qualifications Frameworks.

2.2 Disciplinary field

> *"The intended learning outcomes should comprise competences in the respective disciplinary field(s)."*

The panel assesses substandard 2.2 as compliant.

The IMSOGLO programme and its curriculum are jointly developed by the consortium partners. According to the programme, all four universities are actively engaged in national and international research projects on soils and global change, with expertise covering all soil-related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Each institution contributes courses grounded in its own academic strengths and the expertise of its teaching staff, ensuring comprehensive coverage of both specialisation tracks. As part of the programme's redesign in 2022–2023, a needs analysis of the professional field — consisting of a job market survey and an alumni survey on employment outcomes — was conducted to verify that these insights were appropriately reflected in the learning outcomes.

In Flanders, the aforementioned system of domain-specific learning outcomes provides a minimal benchmark to ensure that knowledge, skills, and competencies of the respective disciplinary field(s) are adequately

[6] Addendum: The domain-specific learning outcomes (DLOs) were validated by NVAO on 26 November 2025.

represented, as assessed by a group of international experts. Awaiting validation by NVAO, the approval of the DLOs by VLUHR confirms that this requirement has been met.

Based on the documentation reviewed, the panel concludes that IMSOGLO's intended learning outcomes clearly articulate the discipline-specific knowledge, skills, and competencies expected of graduates, thus contributing to the programme's distinct academic profile.

2.3 Achievement

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

The panel assesses substandard 2.3 as compliant.

In its self-evaluation report, the programme presents a competence matrix demonstrating how students develop the knowledge, skills, and competencies described in the 18 intended learning outcomes across its mandatory courses and within each specialisation track. The programme ensures that each common ILO is addressed in at least eight courses, while the six specialisation-specific ILOs are each covered by at least one mandatory course in the corresponding track.

The master's thesis serves as the final component of the curriculum, integrating the full range of knowledge, skills, and competencies acquired throughout the programme. It provides a key opportunity to assess the extent to which students have achieved the intended learning outcomes. In this assessment process, particular attention is paid to the assessment of soft skills and attitudes. Students generally achieve high grades on the master's thesis, with three-quarters obtaining an average score of 16 or higher on a scale of 20 - corresponding to 'very good' to 'excellent' on the programme's joint grading scale - across both specialisations.

According to an IMSOGLO alumni survey conducted in 2022, 80% of respondents had commenced PhD studies in the disciplinary field of soils and global change. Another survey in 2023 shows that graduates feel well prepared in competences such as scholarly thinking, academic research, different research methods, and the principles of academic integrity. These results underline the research-oriented nature of the programme and demonstrate that the related competencies embedded in the ILOs are being successfully achieved.

The panel also reviewed a sample of examinations, assignments, and completed and graded master's theses. Insights from the panel interview with alumni, supported by feedback from student and alumni surveys, confirm that the programme makes a significant contribution to graduates' personal and professional development. Alumni consistently reported that the programme equipped them with the knowledge, skills, and competencies required to work effectively in the field, and the available evidence indicates that graduates readily secure employment relevant to their studies.

Based on the evidence provided by the programme and the interviews conducted during the site visit, the panel concludes that IMSOGLO produces highly trained and capable graduates who are immediately employable. The programme effectively enables students to achieve the intended learning outcomes and demonstrates this convincingly through its assessment.

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."*

The panel assesses substandard 2.4 as compliant.

The minimum agreed training conditions specified in the European Union Directive 2005/36/EC, or relevant common trainings frameworks established under the Directive, are not applicable to the IMSOGLO programme.

3 Study programme

The panel assesses standard 3 as compliant.

3.1 Curriculum

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

The panel assesses substandard 3.1 as compliant.

The IMSOGLO curriculum spans two academic years and combines mandatory courses, electives, and a final master's thesis in a coherent structure. The programme offers two distinctive specialisation tracks, allowing students to align their study trajectory with their background and interests while maintaining a strong common foundation. The balance between mandatory courses and electives is appropriate, ensuring both breadth and depth of learning. Courses are delivered by each partner university in line with its disciplinary strengths and teaching expertise, which the panel considers a clear added value for achieving the programme's learning outcomes. The programme is constructed as follows:

The first semester, delivered at Ghent University, focuses on soil fundamentals and serves to bring all students to a comparable academic level, regardless of their prior educational background. It is preceded by a three-day joint Primer Event, which introduces students to the programme, its thematic focus on soils and global change, and the research expertise of the partner institutions. The panel finds the graduates' poster session, introduced in 2025, a valuable addition to the event. The first semesters' courses provide a solid foundation in biological, chemical, and physical soil processes, soil evolution, land information systems, and statistics, thereby equipping students with the core scientific knowledge required to achieve the programme's learning outcomes. The panel considers this intensive introductory phase to be a strong element of the curriculum, as it establishes a shared conceptual framework and prepares students for subsequent specialisation.

The second and third semesters are dedicated to progressive specialisation and mobility. Depending on the chosen track - *Soil Ecosystem Services and Global Change* or *Soil Plant System Processes and Global Change* - students continue their studies at different partner universities, benefiting from the specific expertise of each institution. These semesters address more advanced disciplinary content and place increasing emphasis on the development of transferable skills, such as data science, scientific communication, and project-based work. The panel notes positively that the curriculum integrates experiential learning through excursions and applied activities, including opportunities to observe the impacts of global change on soils in diverse geographical contexts.

A joint element within this specialised phase is the Living Lab Summer School, organised annually by one of the partner universities in collaboration with associated partners. The panel considers this component particularly relevant for enabling students to apply their academic knowledge to real-world, complex land-use challenges. By engaging with stakeholders and addressing "wicked problems" related to ecosystem services, sustainability, and policy objectives, students further develop interdisciplinary competencies and professional skills that are directly aligned with the programme's ILOs.

Students also have the opportunity to undertake an internship (3 or 5 ECTS) in both specialisations. The panel considers the internship a valuable component of the curriculum, directly contributing to the achievement of the intended learning outcomes. However, the programme reports that a very limited percentage of students complete an internship. Over the course of the site visit, it became evident to the panel that both the availability of internships and their feasibility within the curriculum could be improved to encourage greater participation. The panel addressed this issue during the co-creative discussion with the programme management, who agreed with the panel that a larger scale and duration of the internship could enable a wider range of workplace opportunities, particularly in industry. The panel therefore recommends that the programme explores the possibility of expanding the elective internship at BOKU from 3 to 6 ECTS.

The fourth semester is fully dedicated to the master's thesis, which integrates the knowledge, skills, and competencies acquired throughout the programme. Students conduct individual research under joint supervision from partner universities, and where relevant, in collaboration with associated partners or external organisations. The panel finds that the thesis plays a central role in assessing the achievement of the ILOs, particularly with regard to research competence, critical thinking, and academic integrity. While formally positioned in the final semester, the panel observes that thesis preparation often begins earlier in practice. The panel recommends introducing a preparatory course in the third semester to align the curriculum with current practice and better reflect the actual workflow – and corresponding workload - of the master's thesis.

Overall, the panel concludes that the structure and content of the IMSOGLO curriculum are well designed and fit for purpose in enabling students to achieve the intended learning outcomes. The coherent progression from foundational knowledge to specialised expertise and independent research provides a strong basis for academic and professional development. During the site visit, students confirmed that courses are carefully reviewed to minimise repetition and overlap, and to build logically on previously acquired knowledge - a notable strength in the context of a joint programme with mandatory mobility tracks. The panel also notes that the required ECTS course descriptions are available on the programme website and provide transparent insight into the curriculum's structure, content and alignment with the intended learning outcomes.

The panel identifies one other opportunity where the curriculum could be further enhanced. The 2023 survey of graduating students indicates that one third of respondents felt insufficiently stimulated to reflect on societal challenges, a finding that was echoed during interviews with students and alumni. In a master's programme focused on soils and global change, the panel considers it essential to more consistently frame physical and natural science learning within broader socio-economic, policy, and legal contexts. This could be achieved by strengthening this perspective as a recurring thematic thread throughout the curriculum - from the Primer Event, through selected course components, to the Living Lab Summer School - or, alternatively, by introducing a dedicated course or seminar series addressing topics such as environmental law, the socio-economic impacts of soils and their changes, and the implications of global change. Such an approach would further strengthen the programme's interdisciplinary profile and its alignment with real-world challenges.

3.2 Credits

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

The panel assesses substandard 3.2 as compliant.

The IMSOGLO programme comprises 120 ECTS. All consortium partners apply the European Credit Transfer System, in which an ECTS credit corresponds to 25–30 hours of study. The panel notes that the ECTS system is applied correctly. The programme website provides a clear and up-to-date overview of the ECTS distribution: https://imsoglo.eu/programme.

The consortium has established a common grading system to convert grades obtained at the partner universities to the 20-point scale used by UGent, the coordinating institution. Overall grades are expressed on a 1000-point scale, also in line with the grading conventions of UGent, and is calculated as the weighted arithmetic mean of all course grades, with weights corresponding to the number of ECTS credits per course. The panel discusses this further under Standard 5.

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."*

The panel assesses substandard 3.3 as compliant.

The International Master of Science in Soils and Global Change amounts to a total student workload of 120 ECTS. The joint programme is designed to be completed in two years, consisting of four semesters that each account for 30 ECTS.

The programme has several measures in place to monitor student workload. The IMSOGLO management actively encourages students and student representatives to raise questions or concerns, including workload-related issues, at any time. During the first semester at UGent, the Coordinator also holds informal meetings with all students to discuss practical matters, including workload. Reported issues are discussed by the Programme Steering Group, which include representation from both students and teaching staff. Workload is also a standard topic in the programme's recurring student surveys.

Additionally, workload is monitored through first semester-lecturer surveys, which track the average hours students spend on assignments on a weekly basis. To further support planning and time management, the programme has recently implemented an inventory of assignment deadlines in the first semester. This helps redistribute workload when necessary and informs students so they can plan their time effectively. The programme also monitors study progression and graduation statistics, showing that since 2019, 93% of students have completed the programme within the expected two years. The remaining 7% generally require additional time, mostly for personal reasons. These data indicate that the workload is manageable for the vast majority of students.

During the site visit, the panel discussed workload with all stakeholders and learned that it is relatively evenly distributed across the semesters. The workload is considered demanding, but manageable. However, students reported, and lecturers confirmed, a particularly high workload in the first semester at Ghent University. The programme attributes this workload peak partly to the diversity of students' academic and cultural backgrounds. The first semester comprises intensive foundational courses in soil science, some of which may be academically demanding depending on students' prior knowledge and previous degree. In addition, international students must adapt to the local teaching, learning, and examination system, a process that requires time and effort despite the substantial support provided by the programme.

The interviewed students and alumni confirmed that the first semester is intense but ultimately manageable and "worth the effort". They expressed a strong sense of achievement and confidence in having met the programme's academic expectations, which the panel considers a very positive indicator. At the same time, students suggested that additional opportunities for academic reflection, feedback, and feedforward would help them remain engaged and successful during this demanding period. The panel therefore strongly encourages the programme to continue closely monitoring student workload and to ensure systematic follow-up within its governance bodies, while also providing sufficient formative feedback - particularly during the initial semester - in order to maintain high academic standards without compromising student progression or student wellbeing.

4 Admission and recognition

The panel assesses standard 4 as compliant.

4.1 Admission

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

The panel assesses substandard 4.1 as compliant.

The IMSOGLO management reports a steady increase in applications since the programme's first intake in 2019, rising from 364 to 1,121 in 2025. Each year, an average of 22 to 23 students are awarded an Erasmus Mundus scholarship, while a small number of students (never more than 10) participate as self-funded. The panel notes that this results in a highly competitive selection process for the scholarships.

To be eligible for the IMSOGLO programme, applicants must hold a bachelor's degree (minimum 180 ECTS) in pure or applied sciences, with at least 40 ECTS credits in natural sciences. Academic performance must be very good or excellent, typically within the top 30% of the cohort. Applicants must also demonstrate English proficiency through a recognised test or, alternatively, provide an English Language of Instruction Certificate if their previous higher education degree was completed in a recognised English-speaking country.

Applicants who meet the academic and English language requirements can apply for admission, Erasmus Mundus scholarships, or partial tuition fee waivers through UGent's online application portal. The IMSOGLO website provides guidance on the application procedure, selection criteria, and practical matters. Applications are evaluated and ranked primarily on academic excellence, with geographical and gender balance considered when candidates are comparable. Scholarships are awarded to the highest-ranked students, with equal distribution across specializations, and reserve candidates may receive partial tuition fee waivers.

The panel finds that the IMSOGLO admissions process is well designed and effective, successfully selecting capable and motivated students while ensuring compliance with Erasmus Mundus requirements and a balanced distribution across specialisations. The panel also notes that the admissions committee applies careful and thorough judgement in ranking candidates. The students met during the site visit attest to the fact that the programme's information regarding the application process is clear and comprehensive, and that they receive careful guidance throughout the admission procedure, including detailed instructions on required documents, and timely responses to questions about eligibility, deadlines, and selection criteria.

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 assesses substandard 4.2 as compliant.

IMSOGLO's consortium agreement indicates that it follows the Lisbon Recognition Convention. This guarantees fair recognition of academic qualifications. For admission applications on the basis of a diploma issued in a country that ratified the Lisbon Recognition Convention, the principles of this convention will be honoured by the programme. The candidates need to meet the local eligibility requirements for admission (see Standard 5.1.) of the partner universities.

5 Learning, teaching and assessment

The panel assesses standard 5 as compliant.

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 panel assesses substandard 5.1 as compliant.

IMSOGLO's curriculum is firmly grounded in the principles of constructive alignment, ensuring a strong link between intended learning outcomes and the teaching and learning activities. The study of the SER and the provided materials confirm that a wide range of activating didactic approaches is employed across the programme, combining a strong academic and theoretical foundation with applied and practice-oriented learning. Teaching methods are selected by lecturers in line with course-specific ILOs and are reviewed annually at programme level by the Programme Steering Group, which monitors balance, coherence, and alignment across the curriculum.

Lectures form the backbone of all mandatory courses and are typically delivered in relatively small groups, fostering interaction and active engagement. They are complemented by preparatory assignments, plenary exercises, guest lectures, and, in some cases, flipped-classroom approaches using video lectures, as described in the SER and confirmed during interviews with students and teaching staff. Seminars further deepen learning through interactive and case-based formats that support analytical reasoning, communication skills, and the use of quantitative tools and modelling software. Innovative practices, such as the critical use of generative AI tools and the integration of students' regional and professional contexts, illustrate the programme's commitment to reflective and forward-looking teaching approaches.

Hands-on learning is a key feature of the programme and is supported through practicals, excursions, and project-based work. Laboratory sessions and PC classes allow students to develop experimental, analytical, and methodological skills, particularly in the core soil science disciplines. The panel highly values the laboratory and fieldwork, as well as excursions, that place learning in authentic real-world contexts, enabling students to apply theory to practice while developing fieldwork, experimental, and integrative competencies. Independent and guided group work aim to further strengthen students' ability to work autonomously and collaboratively in interdisciplinary and international teams, thus contributing to both academic development and employability-related skills.

The programme also provides experiential learning through optional internships and culminates in the master's thesis, which integrates and consolidates the full range of acquired knowledge and skills. The thesis is overseen by at least two supervisors, one from each partner university involved in the specialisation, and enables students to design and conduct independent research, critically analyse results, and communicate their findings effectively. Internships offer professional exposure and are jointly supervised by academic staff and host institutions. While the panel recognises internships as a valuable component of the curriculum, participation has been extremely low. As noted under Standard 3.1, expanding the scope and duration of the internship could improve accessibility and provide broader workplace opportunities, particularly in industry.

The panel concludes that IMSOGLO employs a wide variety of learning and teaching methods that effectively contribute to the achievement of the intended learning outcomes. Graduating student and alumni surveys, as well as interviews conducted during the site visit, confirm that these methods accommodate the diversity of students and actively stimulate collaboration between students from different cultural backgrounds.

5.2 Assessment

> *"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 assesses substandard 5.2 as compliant.

Lecturers in the IMSOGLO programme grade students according to the local education and examination codes of their respective universities. This is as monitored and reviewed annually by the Programme Steering Group (PSG), to ensure that assessment methods across courses are well-balanced and aligned with the ILOs. To further ensure consistency across the programme, the four IMSOGLO universities jointly developed a common grading system that uses a grade conversion table to convert all students grades to UGent's 0–20 scale. The Examination Committee (EC) oversees grade reporting, conversion, and deliberations, ensuring the fair application of assessment rules and confirming students' eligibility for the joint degree diploma. The students met confirm that the criteria of the system are explained during the Primer Event and made accessible via the digital learning platforms.

The panel notes that assessment methods across the programme are diverse and carefully chosen to measure knowledge, skills, and competencies in alignment with the ILOs. Methods include written and oral exams, presentations, assignments, practicals, professional practice assessments, participation, and peer or self-assessment. Written and oral exams primarily evaluate students' theoretical knowledge and understanding of soil systems, while seminars, practicals, and field activities allow students to apply concepts and develop technical and analytical skills. Group work and presentations foster communication, collaboration, and interdisciplinary problem-solving skills, while professional practice assessments and assignments support the development of employability-related competencies. Graduating student and alumni surveys, as well as interviews during the site visit, confirm high satisfaction with the alignment of assessment methods with course content and the focus on essential aspects of the programme.

The master's thesis enables students to demonstrate independent research, critical analysis, and effective communication of results. To ensure consistency, IMSOGLO recently introduced two joint assessment forms: one for the written dissertation and one for the oral defence, with a common grading scale converted to UGent's 0-20 system. These forms are introduced to address previous concerns raised by the PSG about grading discrepancies across universities. However, the panel's review of a sample of master's theses reveals that the likelihood of achieving high scores still varies substantially across the different specialisations. This observation was confirmed during the interview with the programme management, who acknowledged that the newly introduced assessment forms have not yet been consistently put into use throughout the programme. To address this issue, the panel strongly recommends the introduction of measures such as detailed grading rubrics or regular calibration sessions - ideally on an annual basis - to ensure fairness and consistency in the assessment of master's theses across the programme.

Overall, the panel concludes that IMSOGLO employs a comprehensive and well-structured approach to student assessment, fully aligned with the intended learning outcomes and the principles of constructive alignment. While the panel has observed some discrepancies in the awarding of high scores for master's theses across the different partner universities, this does not undermine the overall assessment and grading system. The panel confirms that the programme evaluates students' learning outcomes and academic level in an appropriate and consistent manner, an observation that is also attested by the students met. Furthermore, the panel expresses its appreciation for the procedures IMSOGLO has established to monitor assessment, as well as for the commitment of the joint bodies responsible for implementing them going forward.

6 Student support

> *"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 panel assesses standard 6 as compliant.

Based on the programme's self-evaluation report, supporting documentation, and interviews conducted during the site visit, the panel finds that student support within IMSOGLO is comprehensive, well organised, and effective. Support is provided through a clearly structured system that combines central coordination with local implementation at the partner universities. This approach contributes positively to student progression and the achievement of the intended learning outcomes, which is also reflected in the low dropout rates and positive feedback from graduating students and alumni.

A cornerstone of this system is the IMSOGLO Technical Secretariat at Ghent University, which acts as a liaison between programme management and students. Embedded in the International Training Centre (ITC) of the Faculty of Bioscience Engineering at the coordinating institution, the Secretariat serves as the single point of contact for administrative and practical matters. Its responsibilities include student arrival and onboarding, mobility arrangements, collection and consolidation of grades, organisation of master's thesis and internship activities, communication and dissemination, and alumni follow-up. During the site visit, the panel met with representatives of the Technical Secretariat and confirmed that its roles and responsibilities are clearly defined and effectively carried out.

This central coordination is complemented by dedicated local secretariats at each partner university, ensuring continuity of support across the different campuses. Based on meetings with local support staff and students, the panel confirms that these secretariats provide hands-on assistance during mobility periods, including support with housing, registration and visa procedures, mobility logistics, elective course selection, and integration into the local student community. The panel also notes that support staff are well informed about procedures for referring students to professional services, such as medical or mental health support, when needed.

Evidence from the interviews with students and programme management highlights the added value of the centrally coordinated "TakeOff" trajectory, which is complemented by welcoming and orientation activities at the partner institutions. These initiatives provide timely administrative guidance and support students' academic and social integration. Students confirmed during the site visit that these services significantly facilitate the transition into a demanding, internationally mobile programme. The panel considers the programme's predeparture and onboarding support a particular strength, as well as a best practice for joint programmes with mandatory mobility.

In addition, IMSOGLO students benefit from extensive curriculum- and course-related support at all partner universities. Dedicated counselling services offer guidance on study progress, course choices, academic regulations, and personal wellbeing, with particular attention to the needs of international and mobile students. While these services are introduced during onboarding and documented in the Student Handbook, the programme has acknowledged the need to further enhance their visibility and has planned concrete measures from 2025 onwards. Teaching staff across the consortium are described as highly approachable, providing academic guidance throughout the programme. Master's theses are supervised by at least two supervisors and, where relevant, additional tutors, with regular meetings and feedback. Student and alumni survey results confirm high levels of satisfaction with staff accessibility and the quality of supervision and feedback.

Overall, the panel concludes that IMSOGLO offers a well-functioning, responsive, and student-centred support system that is well aligned with the needs of a highly international student population and effectively supports the achievement of the intended learning outcomes. As a concluding observation, based on interviews and student feedback, the panel notes that informal peer support plays an important role in student wellbeing and success. While the existing support structures are effective, the panel encourages the programme to consider further facilitating interaction between different student cohorts in order to strengthen peer-based support.

7 Resources

The panel assesses standard 7 as compliant.

7.1 Staff

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

The panel assesses substandard 7.1 as compliant.

Based on the teaching staff's resumes, course content, and discussions with students and alumni during the site visit, the panel finds that the programme succeeds in bringing together highly qualified experts in their respective fields. These findings are consistently reflected in student and alumni surveys, as well as course and lecturer evaluations consistently show high student satisfaction. For instance, the alumi survey of 2022, in which the responding graduates consider the lecturers of the programme to be highly approachable, with excellent subject-related expertise and educational competences. The alumni also expressed their appreciation for the quality of the teaching materials provided. The panel considers the high quality of the teaching staff a key strength of IMSOGLO, noting that they not only meet the programme's needs but excel in delivering it.

Each IMSOGLO course is led by lecturers-in-charge, often supported by co-lecturers, all of whom hold research positions and contribute their specialised expertise. The structured inclusion of guest lecturers, who are sometimes invited within courses to share their knowledge and experience on a specific topic, further enriches the programme and provides valuable networking opportunities for students. All teaching staff appointments are overseen by the faculty departments and local programme committees.

Teaching staff indicated during the site visit that they have access to professional development opportunities. While opportunities for international mobility within the IMSOGLO programme exist, staff reported that these have been seldom utilized in recent years. Newly staff members, in particular, often have limited familiarity with colleagues at the other campuses. The panel regrets the limited interaction between lecturers and suggests that programme management actively encourage staff mobility to reinforce collaboration, strengthen the jointness of the programme, and safeguard institutional knowledge and expertise.

7.2 Facilities

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

The panel assesses substandard 7.2 as compliant.

Although the site visit was conducted at the Ghent University campus and the panel did not visit the other locations in person, it gained a comprehensive understanding of the facilities at all partner institutions through the SER, meetings with stakeholders, and a detailed visual presentation of the facilities provided by the programme management.

The programme has access to lecture halls, classrooms, and project rooms across the partner campuses, usually equipped with video conferencing facilities, interactive screens, recording capabilities, and high-speed internet. The institutions also provide flexible workspaces that support both individual study and collaborative group work. Practical exercises are carried out in well-equipped laboratories and are complemented by fieldwork at experimental farms and external sites. The students and alumni met value the access they have to advanced research facilities for their master's dissertation projects, combining state-of-the-art equipment with low-tech approaches that foster adaptability in resource-limited environments. In addition, digital platforms and video conferencing tools support teaching, learning, and communication, including remote lectures and guest presentations by international experts.

Based on the information presented, the panel finds that all IMSOGLO partner universities provide a broad range of high-quality teaching and research facilities that effectively support the programme's teaching methods and

intended learning outcomes. This positive assessment is echoed in interviews with students and teaching staff, who expressed high levels of satisfaction with both the on-site and online facilities.

8 Transparency and documentation

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

The panel assesses standard 8 as compliant.

IMSOGLO has a dedicated website (https://imsoglo.eu) that serves as a central information point for prospective students and other interested stakeholders. The panel commends the programme for the detailed and well-structured information provided on admission requirements, scholarships and fees, intended learning outcomes, and the overall curriculum. Course-specific ECTS descriptions are easily accessible and offer clear insight into each course's learning objectives, as well as the teaching and assessment methods applied.

The students met appreciate that, prior to the start of the programme, they receive a comprehensive student handbook that guides them through all key aspects of the programme, including practical matters such as housing, mobility arrangements, and administrative procedures. The handbook also outlines the programme's governance structure, teaching and assessment approaches, and procedures for complaints and appeals. The panel also finds that the documentation provided is thorough, well organised, and transparent.

Overall, the panel finds that the programme benefits from a well-designed and effective communication framework. Students confirm that all relevant information is made available in adequate detail through the website, the student handbook, and the digital learning platforms.

9 Quality assurance

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

The panel assesses standard 9 as compliant.

At joint programme level, internal quality assurance of IMSOGLO is coordinated by the Programme Steering Group (PSG), which includes representatives from the teaching staff of all partner universities, as well as student and alumni members. The committee meets at least three times per year to discuss modifications of the programme contents and monitor the courses in terms of success of delivery and grades achieved by students, in accordance with legal and institutional regulations. They check, by means of a competences matrix, whether all the intended learning outcomes are covered by the individual courses. The committee also advises on the grade conversion table, individual study programmes and curricula, selection of elective courses, master's thesis topics and the appointment of lecturers.

IMSOGLO also has an Education Quality Assurance Committee (EQAC). It is a body independent of the programme's Management Board, that checks if the educational quality assurance of IMSOGLO is in agreement with the local institutional regulations. The EQAC can also be consulted by the PSG to analyse quality assurance related data, formulate conclusions, prepare reports and propose measures. It comprises one member from each partner university, all of whom have experience with the local quality assurance frameworks.

The panel notes that student participation and feedback forms a central part of the programme's quality assurance. For example, the programme reports in the self-evaluation report that student and alumni representatives are encouraged to raise topics for discussion at Programme Steering Group (PSG) meetings, a practice the panel values. During the site visit, student and alumni representatives confirmed their active participation in the programme's internal quality assurance processes and indicated that issues raised are systematically taken up, discussed, and – when relevant - followed through in subsequent actions.

Student feedback is gathered on programme and course level. Graduating students, for example, complete surveys on the overall programme, including questions on concerns such as workload, and on the organisation and supervision of the master's thesis. Survey results are discussed by the PSG, and actions are proposed to address potential issues. Course-level evaluation, on the other hand, is primarily the responsibility of the individual partner universities, each of which applies its own internal quality assurance system. Courses and lecturers are evaluated annually by students, and results are shared with the IMSOGLO Management Board. Where necessary, lecturers respond to feedback by proposing remedial actions. Based on reviewed documents, meeting reports, and interviews with programme management and students, the panel finds that the programme actively uses these evaluations to inform improvements at both course and programme levels.

The panel finds that IMSOGLO's approach to quality assurance is in accordance with Part 1 of the European Standards and Guidelines and effectively supports continuous enhancement. The panel observes that the system's strength is bolstered by the high degree of jointness in the programme's governance structure, characterised by close communication and collaboration between the coordinators and technical secretariats across partner universities, despite their geographical separation, as well as by the active involvement of students and alumni. The panel considers that the quality assurance cycle could be further enhanced by introducing structured peer review, and perhaps inspiration sessions, among teaching staff across different partner institutions. At present, the cycle relies mainly on programme management reflections, largely informed by student feedback.

Accreditation advice

Standard 1. Eligibility	
1.1 Status	Compliant
1.2 Joint design and delivery	Compliant
1.3 Cooperation Agreement	Compliant
Standard 2. Learning Outcomes	
2.1 Level [ESG 1.2]	Compliant
2.2 Disciplinary field	Compliant
2.3 Achievement [ESG 1.2]	Compliant
2.4 Regulated professions	N/A
Standard 3. Study Programme [ESG 1.2]	
3.1 Curriculum	Compliant
3.2 Credits	Compliant
3.3 Workload	Compliant
Standard 4. Admission and Recognition [ESG 1.4]	
4.1 Admission	Compliant
4.2 Recognition	Compliant
Standard 5. Learning, Teaching and Assessment [ESG 1.3]	
5.1 Learning and teaching	Compliant
5.2 Assessment of students	Compliant
Standard 6. Student Support [ESG 1.6]	Compliant
Standard 7. Resources [ESG 1.5 & 1.6]	
7.1 Staff	Compliant
7.2 Facilities	Compliant
Standard 8. Transparency and Documentation [ESG 1.8]	Compliant
Standard 9. Quality Assurance [ESG 1.1 & part 1]	Compliant

As all individual (sub)standards have been evaluated as compliant, the panel is confident that the International Master of Science in Soils and Global Change (IMSOGLO) programme as a whole - including its two specialisation tracks *Soil Ecosystem Services and Global Change* and *Soil-Plant System Processes and Global Change* - meets the required criteria. The panel therefore recommends the competent accreditation organisations to grant the programme accreditation.

Summary of the commendations

Standard 2. Learning Outcomes

The intended learning outcomes clearly articulate the discipline-specific knowledge, skills, and competencies expected of graduates, thus contributing to IMSOGLO's distinct academic profile.

The programme consistently produces highly trained and capable graduates who are immediately employable.

Standard 3. Study Programme

The intensive introductory phase in the first semester establishes a shared conceptual framework and effectively prepares students for later specialisation.

The Living Lab Summer School is a highly valuable component of the programme that enables students to apply their academic knowledge to complex real-world land-use challenges while strengthening interdisciplinary and stakeholder-oriented competencies.

The programme has a careful curriculum design, which minimises overlap and ensures a coherent progression of knowledge across courses: a notable strength in a joint programme with mandatory mobility.

The programme offers a demanding yet manageable first semester that fosters a strong sense of achievement and confidence among students and alumni.

Standard 5. Learning, Teaching and Assessment

Excursions and fieldwork offer students valuable learning experiences in authentic real-world contexts, enabling them to apply theory to practice while developing fieldwork, experimental, and integrative competencies.

IMSOGLO employs a comprehensive and well-structured approach to student assessment, fully aligned with the intended learning outcomes and the principles of constructive alignment.

Standard 6. Student Support

The programme's comprehensive predeparture and onboarding support is highly effective and greatly appreciated by students: a best practice for joint programmes with mandatory mobility.

Standard 7. Resources

The high quality of the teaching staff meets not only the programme's needs, but excels in delivering it.

All partner universities provide a broad range of high-quality teaching and research facilities that effectively support the programme's teaching methods and intended learning outcomes.

Standard 8. Transparency and Documentation

The programme benefits from a well-designed and effective communication framework.

Standard 9. Quality Assurance

Student and alumni representatives actively contribute to the programme's internal quality assurance, with raised issues systematically discussed and followed up through concrete actions by relevant governing bodies.

Summary of the recommendations

Standard 3. Study Programme

Expand the elective internship at BOKU from 3 to 6 ECTS to increase its feasibility within the curriculum and open up a broader range of professional opportunities, particularly in industry

Introduce a preparatory course in the third semester to align the curriculum with current practice and better reflect the actual workflow – and corresponding workload - of the master's thesis.

Strengthen the integration of socio-economic, policy, and legal perspectives throughout the curriculum - either as a recurring thematic thread or through a dedicated course or seminar series – to enhance students' engagement with societal challenges and further reinforce the programme's interdisciplinary profile.

Continue to monitor student workload closely, with systematic follow-up within governance bodies, whilst providing sufficient formative feedback (especially in the initial semester), to maintain high academic standards while safeguarding student progression and wellbeing.

Standard 5. Learning, Teaching and Assessment

Introduce detailed grading rubrics and/or regular calibration sessions to further improve fairness and consistency in the assessment of master's theses across all specialisations and partner institutions.

Summary of the suggestions

Standard 6. Student Support

Facilitate interaction between different student cohorts to further strengthen informal peer support, as this can contribute to students' wellbeing and academic success.

Standard 7. Resources

Actively encourage staff mobility to strengthen collaboration between lecturers, reinforce the programme's joint character, and help safeguard institutional knowledge and expertise across partner institutions.

Standard 9. Quality Assurance

Introduce structured peer review among teaching staff across partner institutions to further enhance the quality assurance cycle and reinforce the programme's joint character.

Annexes

Annex 1: Administrative details of the programme

Name of the institutions	Coordinating institution: Ghent University Partners: Aarhus University (Denmark), BOKU University (Austria), University of Göttingen (Germany)
Address, institution website	Ghent University, Sint-Pietersnieuwstraat 25, 9000 Gent www.ugent.be
Name, function, phone and e-mail of the contact person	Wim Cornelis (full professor) and Hannes Brouckaert (administrative and technical coordinator) • +32 9 264 60 23 • imsoglo@ugent.be
Name of the programme (degree, qualification, eventually title that holders of the degree conferred by this programme may use)	International Master of Science in Soils and Global Change
Potential programme routes for working students, full-time/part-time education, day/evening trajectories, different formats of certification	/
Tracks	- Soil Ecosystem Services and Global Change (Ghent University, Aarhus University) - Soil-Plant System Processes and Global Change (Ghent, University, BOKU University, University of Göttingen)
Level and orientation	Master level
(Parts of) field(s) of study	Applied Biosciences
Language of instruction	English
The location at which the programme is taught	Ghent, Aarhus, Göttingen, Vienna
Workload (in ECTS)	120
Possible, relevant collaborations with other (higher education) institutions and/or organizations	Associated Partners: • Can Tho University - Vietnam • Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology Kumasi - Ghana • Maseno University - Kenya • Universidade Federal de Pelotas - Brasil • Universitas Pajajaran - Indonesia • Washington State University - USA • Universidade de Sao Paulo - Brasil • International Livestock Research Institute ILRI - Kenya • Österreichische Bundesforste AG - Austria • Flanders Research Institute for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food ILVO - Belgium • Joint Research Centre European Commission JRC – Italy
Additional national and/or international regulations applicable to the programme(s)	

Annex 2: Short CV panel members

Prof. Dr. Arnaud Temme (chair)

Prof. Dr. Arnaud Temme is a Physical Geographer who studied Soil Water and Atmosphere (BSc) and Earth and Environment (MSc) at Wageningen University in the Netherlands, before doing his PhD based on fieldwork in the South-African Drakensberg (2008). In 2014, he reached tenure as associate professor at Wageningen University, before moving to Kansas State University in the United States. Throughout those years, he travelled widely within and outside of Europe and the US, publishing manuscripts based on studies in more than a dozen countries. In 2022, he was promoted to full professor at Kansas State University, and in 2024, he started work at the University of Innsbruck, where he is currently head of the Institute of Geography. Because of professional interest and personal fascination, mountains landscapes were never far away. Multiple research stays at the Institute for Arctic and Alpine Studies in Colorado, United States, as well as fieldwork in the European Alps, the Apennines, the Rocky Mountains and several smaller mountain ranges, combined into a growing research focus on mountain soil- landscapes. He is currently chair of the editors in chief of the international soil-geomorphology journal Catena, and continues to research and study soils in mountain settings with his Innsbruck research group Geosoil.

Dr. Annik van Keer

Dr. Annik Van Keer is deputy director of the Department of Educational Policy at the Faculty of Science, Utrecht University. She holds a PhD degree in Chemistry from the KU Leuven (1997) and a teaching diploma in Chemistry. After completing her PhD, she worked at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel where she became coordinator of the Learning and Guidance Centre at the Faculty of Science. In 2004, she moved to Utrecht University where she initially innovated the Chemistry bachelor's curriculum, and then gradually took on managerial positions. When the Faculty of Science was established in 2007, she joined a new Department for Educational Policy. In 2011, she was asked to write the university's self-evaluation report for the first institutional accreditation review. Since 2013 she's a frequently asked NVAO visitation panel member, first in Flanders, then in the Netherlands, where she got insight in the internal workings of various universities. Today she's leading her own team of policy staff members. She is also interested in primary education, which forms the basis of all continuing education and which inspires her in her own work. She also serves as a supervisory board member of a consortium of 12 primary education schools in Amstelveen, the Netherlands.

Dr. Eline Vanuytrecht

Dr. Eline Vanuytrecht is a project manager at the Flemish Institute for Technological Research (VITO), where she leads several European research projects on biodiversity and natural capital. She is also affiliated with KU Leuven, where she teaches water productivity in agricultural systems. Her professional interests focus on the resilience of natural systems and their role in supporting human and societal well-being. Previously, Dr. Vanuytrecht worked as a researcher and expert at the European Environment Agency (EEA), KU Leuven's Soil & Water Lab, Australia's national science agency (CSIRO) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), with a focus on climate change impacts and resilience across diverse systems and sectors. She holds a PhD and an MSc in Bioscience Engineering, as well as additional MSc degrees in Journalism and Education.

Sam Lacquaye (student)

Sam Lacquaye is a master student at KU Leuven in Biology, majoring in Ecology and Evolutionary Biology. She is currently also pursuing an additional master's in management at KU Leuven. For several years, she has been a student representative at multiple levels, both within KU Leuven and at the level of the Flemish Community. She is currently a part of the LOKO student union where she organises representation of students with the city of Leuven.

Annex 3: Visit schedule

17 November 2025

Start	End	Activity
09:00	11:30	Internal consultation panel
11:30	13:00	Interview with the programme management
13:00	14:00	Internal consultation panel (incl. lunch)
14:00	15:00	Interview with students
15:00	15:30	Internal consultation panel
15:30	16:30	Interview with teaching staff
16:30	17:30	Tour/Presentation of programme-specific infrastructure
17:30	18:15	Internal consultation panel
18:15	19:15	Interview with alumni and professional field

18 November 2025

Start	End	Activity
09:00	10:00	Interview with supporting staff
10:00	11:00	Open consultation
11:00	13:00	Internal consultation panel (incl. lunch)
13:00	14:30	Co-creative discussion with programme management
14:30	15:30	Final considerations panel
15:30	16:00	Oral report

Annex 4: Overview of consulted documents

- Self-evaluation report
- Annexes to the self-evaluation report:

  Annex 1. IMSOGLO joint diploma
  Annex 2. IMSOGLO diploma supplement
  Annex 3. Consortium Agreement
  Annex 4. Domain-specific Learning Outcomes (DLOs)
  Annex 5. Joint Assessment form Master Dissertation
  Annex 6. Joint Final Assessment form Master Dissertation
  Annex 7. IMSOGLO primer event 2024
  Annex 8. Overview thesis topics 2021-2024
  Annex 9. IMSOGLO student Agreements 2024
  Annex 10. Student Handbook 2024-2026
  Annex 11. List of lecturers-in-charge of the mandatory courses
  Annex 12. Overview of research facilities at partner universities
  Annex 13. Course evaluations 2023 and 2024
  Annex 14. Alumni survey 2022
  Annex 15. ESG standards IMSOGLO

- Programme websites (https://imsoglo.eu/ & https://studiekiezer.ugent.be/), incl. admission requirements and ECTS course descriptions
- Online learning platforms at the different partner institutions, incl. a sample of study materials
- A sample of tests and assignments
- A sample of master's theses
- A sample of the minutes of IMSOGLO's Management Board meetings