ALIGN

ACHIEVING AND CHECKING THE ALIGNMENT BETWEEN ACADEMIC PROGRAMMES AND QUALIFICATION FRAMEWORKS

Co-funded by the Tempus Programme of the European Union

PEER REVIEW REPORT

An Evaluation of the Alignment of the Two Academic Programmes:

Master's Degree Programme «Quality Management in Agriculture and Food Industry»

Master's Degree Programme «International Cooperation in the Field of Protection of Environment and Nature Management»

and their Quality Assurance at «VolgaTech» University

2016

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1. Introduction

The ALIGN project seeks to enhance the intelligibility, consistency and transferability of qualifications through development and implementation of mechanisms for Higher Education Institutions (HEI) to achieve alignment with Qualifications Frameworks (QF) and for European Quality Assurance (EQA) to check such alignment.

It aims at:
- promoting a better understanding of HEIs and EQAs of the role of QFs, their structure, the differences between the different kinds and levels of student achievement:

- building on the capacity of HEIs to write and assess Learning Outcomes (LO) that define the various types of student achievement;

- building on the capacity of the HEIs to use the QF alignment to facilitate student transfer, joint qualifications and benchmarking;

- enabling the EQAs to check whether proposed LOs and their assessment mechanisms match the QF descriptors at each level by establishing mechanisms for ensuring consistency of judgments across institutions.

2. The Peer-Review Process

The aim of the Peer Review process is to review two academic programmes, and the quality assurance principles and processes that relate to the approval/validation, review and enhancement of academic programmes at the university. The panel will seek to advise the university (through discussion and a written report) on the nature and extent to which

(a) the two selected academic programmes have been aligned with European ((European Higher Education Area) EHEA) standards and national qualification frameworks;

(b) the HEI's quality assurance processes are aligned with European and national requirements and expectations; and provide

(c) any recommendations that may help the university to further the alignment of its academic programmes and quality assurance processes with European and national standards.

Same edits as NARFU for the above.

The Peers visiting «VolgaTech» University were as follows:

1) André Govaert (chair), visiting professor KULeuven andre.govaert@kuleuven.be

2) Zbigniew Palka, Professor, Dr hab., Head of Department of Algorithms and Programming, Faculty of Mathematics and Computer Science, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań, Poland. zbigniew.palka@amu.edu.pl

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5) Dr. Maria Smolentseva, Associate Professor, Department of Foreign Languages, SmolencevaMV@volgatech.net

6) Dr. Evgeny Sharapov, Senior Researcher, Department of Innovations and Research Transfer, sharapoves@volgatech.net

7) Ms. Svetlana Ivanova, MA student, Linguistics (1st year), ivanova_si@hotmail.com

8) Dr. Vladislav Pylin, Deputy Director, Research Institute for Quality Monitoring in Education, member of the Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs (RSPP), pylin_vlad@mail.ru

3. Observations on the Documentation Submitted and the Conduct of the Site Visit

Before the site visit «VolgaTech» submitted to the Peer Panel the following documents:

- The Self-Evaluation Document, with detailed descriptions of the University, its quality assurance system and the programmes reviewed, as well as comments on all the indicators of the review process;
- Programme Handbook of the Master's Degree Programme «Quality Management in Agriculture and Food Industry»;
- An example of a Diploma Supplement used in VolgaTech;
- Detailed matrices with courses and attached timetables and credits for both programmes reviewed.

All of these documents were helpfully submitted in English.
On site, «VolgaTech» also provided lists of students and Masters theses, samples of Masters theses and exams, and other documents as requested by the Panel.

I will note the professionalism of the staff who served in the panel, the helpfulness and honesty of the whole staff, the students and the other stakeholders during the meeting with the panel. The professional organisation and support by the staff of the programmes ensure that our work could be conducted as efficiently and effectively as possible. I will underline the perfect cooperation with the National Centre for Public accreditation during the whole review process.

4. Review of Two Academic Programmes

4.1 Programme «International Cooperation in the Field of Protection of Environment and Nature Management»

The expectation of the panel will be:

In designing, delivering and monitoring an academic programme, the programme team (including its teachers and supporters of student learning) will meet the appropriate European and national standards and requirements.

The panel has used a rating-scale to assess each of the «10 indicators of good practice» for alignment of academic programmes. Each assessment may be accompanied by a short commentary on the rating given.

INDICATOR 1	ASSESSMENT
The academic programmes are properly titled and lead to awards at the appropriate level, consistent with European and national frameworks for higher education qualifications, and the Dublin Descriptors for Masters' awards.	**partly achieved**

Comment

The title of the programme would be difficult to find if compared with similar programmes at other EHEA universities. It should be better adapted to the mission and content of the programme.

There is still lot of work to be done on the learning outcomes for the programme, which is understandable as the learning outcomes approach is still new to Russia. The learning outcomes should better describe generic and generic professional competencies and be made more specific, also by aligning them with the Dublin Descriptors.

INDICATOR 2	ASSESSMENT
The academic programmes are informed by and consistent with professional/industry standards/requirements, where appropriate.	**largely achieved**

Comment

As it is noted in the SED, the process of aligning the programme with the FSES (Federal Educational Standards) and with the Occupational Standards has not been completed, also because the Occupational Standard has not been completed yet. While completing this process, it is important, as noted above, to focus on generic (including generic professional) competencies and avoid focusing too literally on the demands of a specific job position.

INDICATOR 3	ASSESSMENT
The aims of the programmes are appropriate for the student intake, and can be realised through students' attainment of the programme/module learning outcomes.	**largely achieved**

Comment

Applicants are enrolled to Masters programmes on the basis of the entrance test and examination results. There are currently no students enrolled and the number of students admitted has been very small when compared to usual practices at similar programmes within EHEA, leaving no doubt that the intake is appropriate from the perspective of students' learning. The aims of the programme can largely be realised through students' attainment of learning outcomes. However, as programme staff noted, there has been a permanent problem with English competencies, so there should be more focus on learning English, using it on courses and in speaking and writing, as well as on student mobility.

It should also be noted that the duration of part-time studies should be lengthened so that they become truly «part-time».

INDICATOR 4	ASSESSMENT
All learning outcomes at module level are at the appropriate level, and are assessed through fair, valid and reliable student assignments/tests.	**not applicable in this stage of the alignment**
Comment The Student Handbook does not exist, so there are no descriptions of the modules. Assessment is regulated at the University level (so comments for the second programme below also apply).	

INDICATOR 5	ASSESSMENT
Throughout their course of study, students are able to monitor their academic progress and development, and receive advice on how they can improve and enhance their work.	**fully achieved**
Comment Students are able to monitor their academic progress and development due to the individual plan that aims at guiding and monitoring students' progression, and a university module-rating technology called the RITM system that suggests continuous use of formative assessment according to the technological map. Students can receive advice during contact hours or get feedback by addressing their academic advisors, the chairs and the deans. The official university website has all contact information (including e-mails and phone numbers). The availability of professors and the quality of feedback – which can be written or oral, depending on the type of exam – has been confirmed by the students.	

INDICATOR 6	ASSESSMENT
The teaching and learning activities employed within the modules are informed by reflection on professional practices, and designed to enable students to develop the knowledge, skills, abilities and professional competencies that will enable them to achieve the modules' learning outcomes.	**not applicable in this stage of the alignment**
Comment There is currently no student handbook nor any active teaching. It can be said however that it is not quite clear how the teaching and learning activities employed within the modules would be informed by reflection on professional practices, or adapted to intended learning outcomes. More work would be needed, probably also in cooperation with the Academic Department who are in charge of teacher training.	

INDICATOR 7	ASSESSMENT
The structure of the programme ensures the progression of students' learning, and provides appropriate opportunities for student choice.	**largely achieved**
Comment Student progression and choice are ensured through selection of the programme modules and their content, and also through a combination of mandatory (federal part of the curricula), optional (variable part of the curricula determined by the university/department), and elective modules in the programme structure. Alumni have confirmed they were free in selecting modules according to their preferences, with the support of their research advisors. The alumni also confirmed they had no problems in going through the programme, except the already mentioned issues with the English language.	

INDICATOR 8	ASSESSMENT
The credits ratings (national and ECTS) for modules are properly aligned with the designated student workloads for the modules.	**not applicable in this stage of the alignment**
Comment The programme is not taking place at the moment so there is no student handbook; if it is re-launched, comments on the other programme may apply.	

INDICATOR 9	ASSESSMENT
Students are provided with clear and current information about the learning opportunities and support available to them.	**fully achieved**
Comment Based on the SED and the conversations with students, it can be concluded that students are provided with clear and current information about the learning opportunities and support available to them.	

INDICATOR 10	ASSESSMENT
The design, delivery and monitoring of the academic programmes is «student centred», engaging students collectively and individually as partners in the development, assurance and enhancement of their educational experiences (e.g., through effective representation of the student voice, discussions about opportunities for course enhancement, involvement in quality assurance processes, and the monitoring and evaluation of student experiences).	**partly achieved**
Comment «Student centeredness» is ensured through individual student plans and different opportunities of forming their individual learning paths, sharing opinions on programme delivery and learning; making suggestions about the ways to improve the learning process with academic advisors; surveys, questionnaires regarding the courses, teaching staff, learning conditions; and meetings with the deans and the rector. Students are also collectively engaged in quality assurance processes through the Student Council. Students' involvement is coordinated and monitored according to a number of regulatory documents (SED Annex 4). However, just like most other universities in the EHEA, VolgaTech has to do more in achieving student centeredness, on the one hand by consulting guidelines produced, for example, by the European Students' Union, and on the other hand through actively encouraging involvement of students in programme design, as expected by the ESG (QA standards and guidelines in EHEA).	

Assessment of the Expectation for Alignment of the Academic Programme

The International Cooperation programme is currently virtual, so the Panel could not see the programme handbook, and its alignment process is also not yet completed. So it is possible only to briefly comment on this programme. It should also be noted that a number of strengths and weaknesses are shared by both programs.

The learning outcomes approach is new for Russia. Input of the occupational standards is very important, however the learning outcomes can be made much more specific by including also descriptors such as those included in the Dublin Descriptors. The most important elements of the level 7 are included, but there is too much focus on occupational competences and not enough on generic and generic professional competences. Currently, the learning outcomes do not include knowledge in a sufficient measure.

There is a good system of coaching and consultations for students, and students say that teachers can be approached easily; they also seem to provide good support in choosing electives and developing individual plans. There are webinars and online consultations for distance students which makes the education more flexible and affordable.

The programme title should be discussed again, possibly when benchmarking with similar programs.

The programme should test for English upon admission, and then there should be more tutoring in English (not any foreign language, as now stated). While there are contacts and information packages, mobility needs to be increased. Information on mobility and similar learning opportunities should also be disseminated via websites, social networks etc., and students should be encouraged to use such opportunities.

There is a competence matrix which is nicely presented; however, there are some course units which seem to be a relic of history, and do not seem to contribute to the achievement of the learning outcomes. There should be a discussion about this.

Student workloads – the use of credits differs from the one used in other Bologna countries. For example, it is strange to give credit for exam only, as credits should not be connected only to time but also to learning outcomes. Real workload measurement should be done (through any of the existing methods, such as interviews with students etc.) Other countries also include more credit for students' final thesis.

A lot of work is done on learning and assessment technology, different ways of teaching etc., and while this is something that can always be improved, the situation is good.

The staff relationship with students seems to be good and the staff seem to be enthusiastic.
Almost 90% of staff have PhDs. There are good processes of staff monitoring, development and professionalization.

The assessment and testing system is very good: it seems very well organized and transparent, however it probably still needs to be adapted to the real learning outcomes assessment.

Students should be much more involved in the design of the programme, as filling-out questionnaires is not sufficient input. Students should not have to ask for this, but be encouraged by the institution. In order to enhance the process of teaching, more open questions could be added to the students' questionnaire.

It would also be good to involve more employers in the programme design because they could be more helpful in choosing necessary competencies and disciplines for this field of education.

4.2 Programme «Quality Management in Agriculture and Food Industry»

The expectation of the panel will be:

In designing, delivering and monitoring an academic programme, the programme team (including its teachers and supporters of student learning) will meet the appropriate European and national standards and requirements.

The panel has used a rating-scale to assess each of the «10 indicators of good practice» for alignment of academic programmes. Each assessment may be accompanied by a short commentary on the rating given.

INDICATOR 1	ASSESSMENT
The academic programmes are properly titled and lead to awards at the appropriate level, consistent with European and national frameworks for higher education qualifications, and the Dublin Descriptors for Masters' awards.	**partly achieved**
Comment The name might be misleading. Quality Management in these specific industries is related to technology and products, to real industry with equipment, measuring devices, laboratory experiments and other processes. Only regarding agricultural materials and products hundreds of items (including wood) exist with very specific technologies and equipment. It is really hard to prepare a specialist in quality in all these products and cover all agricultural and food industries. Also, some alumni work successfully in unrelated industries (such as the oil industry). It can be concluded that the programme is much more general than the name implies. Another issue is that when considering the curriculum and the composition of the alumni, the programme is more similar to what in the rest of EHEA would call a lifelong learning course, than to what would be a «real» Masters course. The recommendation is thus to cooperate much more closely with other faculties in creating engineering programme(s) with a quality management component, and to offer quality management courses also as lifelong learning (obviously, both steps would require a name change).	

INDICATOR 2	ASSESSMENT
The academic programmes are informed by and consistent with professional/industry standards/requirements, where appropriate.	**largely achieved**

Comment

The programme is aligned with the FSES and OS. The input of the occupational standards is very important, however the learning outcomes can be made much more specific by including also descriptors such as those included in the Dublin Descriptors. The most important elements of the level 7 are included, but there is too much focus on occupational competencies and not enough on generic and generic professional competencies. Currently, the learning outcomes do not include knowledge in a sufficient measure. However, good work was done on the domain-specific competencies.

Additionally, industry professionals (including alumni) should be more directly involved in programme design and implementation at all stages, through the QA system as well as teachers and supervisors.

INDICATOR 3	ASSESSMENT
The aims of the programmes are appropriate for the student intake, and can be realised through students' attainment of the programme/module learning outcomes.	**largely achieved**

Comment

Applicants are enrolled to Master's programmes on the basis of the entrance test and examination results. The students noted that their entrance tests assessed very thoroughly their knowledge on food and agricultural industry. One issue is that entry requirements for Bachelor and Master seem to be the same, which should not be the case. Specific outcomes for Bachelors must be taken into account for entering the Masters level.

Most courses seem to be quite generic, while a few are really specific. The titles of courses need to be better specified. One should also bear in mind that a foreign student would not understand what these courses are exactly about. The student handbook thus needs to be improved. It is also a part of the quality management system.

The above is true also of mandatory courses. In addition to this, the courses are not really student-centred – e.g., there is a lack of preparation for future entrepreneurial tasks, and not a real choice (the Quality Management programme) of electives.

INDICATOR 4	ASSESSMENT
All learning outcomes at module level are at the appropriate level, and are assessed through fair, valid and reliable student assignments/tests.	**largely achieved**

Comment

As noted above, there might be some modules and content missing from the programme, but the learning outcomes of the modules that are provided are appropriate (bearing in mind the comment on the grading below).

The Regulations on Developing Syllabi for Academic Programmes (Modules) and Internships in Accordance with the Requirements of the FSES (2015) and Regulations for Teaching and Methodology Complex of a Discipline (Module) at Volga State University of Technology (2013) give a precise description on forms of formative and summative assessment; list the competencies, describe the indicators and criteria of competence assessment at different levels of maturity, define the grading scale; and determine assessment tools for conducting formative and summative assessment. The Panel was also able to see examples of assessments, and the student complaints procedure was described. Practical assignments are assessed both by employer and an academic supervisor.
The grading scales, however, should be adapted to ensure that all students, even those with only passing grades, achieve the learning outcomes at the appropriate level – lower grades cannot imply a lower level of a learning outcome.

INDICATOR 5	ASSESSMENT
Throughout their course of study, students are able to monitor their academic progress and development, and receive advice on how they can improve and enhance their work.	**fully achieved**

Comment

Students are able to monitor their academic progress and development due to the individual plans that aim at guiding and monitoring the students' progression, and a university module-rating technology called the RITM system that suggests the continuous use of formative assessment according to the technological map. Students can receive advice during contact hours or get feedback by addressing their academic advisors, the chairs, and the deans. Part-time students cannot use the RITM system: they can use e-learning and contact their teachers via webinars – however, they note that they would benefit from an opportunity to participate in the programme also physically (for example, through annual «orientation days» that can be introduced for such students, or similar opportunities). Students seem to be satisfied with the oral and the written feedback they were offered, as well as contacts with the staff in general.

INDICATOR 6	ASSESSMENT
The teaching and learning activities employed within the modules are informed by reflection on professional practices, and designed to enable students to develop the knowledge, skills, abilities and professional competencies that will enable them to achieve the modules' learning outcomes.	**largely achieved**

Comment

It is not quite clear how the teaching and learning activities employed within the modules are informed by reflection on professional practices.
In the SED it is stated that teachers are describing knowledge, skills and abilities that are compliant with the module competence(s), when developing a module/course syllabus. They also describe the course/module connection to other courses in the programme and the educational technologies they are to use to ensure that the module's learning outcomes are achieved. They may choose to employ strategic or tactic education technologies listed in Table 5. But Table 5 indicates that the information on alignment of intended learning outcomes with the 7th level descriptors of the Russian NQF at this Master programme is given partly.
There are no real laboratories for Food and Agriculture though it seems that this does not present a problem for students as they use those in their companies. This can also be improved by improving contact with other programs at the university and with other universities, which own adequate labs. So the programme team needs to look at what exists already, establish contacts and carry out cooperation agreements\ set up communication.
The cooperation with the work field and the alumni should be improved – it might be too expensive to hire them as teachers, but they can be members of advisory boards, mentors for final papers etc.

INDICATOR 7	ASSESSMENT
The structure of the programme ensures the progression of students' learning, and provides appropriate opportunities for student choice.	**largely achieved**

Comment

The programme is logically structured to ensure the students' learning progression. This is evidenced by cohesion and coherence of the modules/course in the academic programme; clear definition of «input» and «output» competencies; a tool called «matrix of competence acquisition». According to the SED the programme is flexible enough, and gives students the freedom to choose from courses available (variable part). However, in practice it seems that all students take the same electives but vote which will these be, and this should be improved, again in cooperation with other programs and employers.

INDICATOR 8	ASSESSMENT
The credits ratings (national and ECTS) for modules are properly aligned with the designated student workloads for the modules.	**largely achieved**

Comment

This is regulated by the rules set by the FSES and the requirement of a maximum amount of student workload as 54 hours (1,5 ECTS) per week. The maximum amount of contact hours equals 14. The approved number of exams, tests, project papers is set in the programme curricula (SED Annex 6A and 6B).

The Russian higher education system still combines student's workload both in academic hours and in credits (compatible with the ECTS). The AP follows the rules set by the FSES requiring the maximum amount of student workload as 54 hours (1.5 ECTS) per week, including contact (classroom) and independent work. The maximum amount of contact hours equals 14. The approved number of exams, tests, project papers is set in the programme curricula (Annex 6A). However, there is still a lack of understanding that ECTS are related also to learning outcomes, not only time invested in studying. There is also a need to empirically look at the actual time invested, as it might seem that the current estimate of the workload is a bit over-blown when considering that many students also work while studying, and that part-time students take only half a year longer than regular students to complete the programme.

INDICATOR 9	ASSESSMENT
Students are provided with clear and current information about the learning opportunities and support available to them.	**fully achieved**

Comment

It can be concluded that students are provided with clear and current information about the learning opportunities and support available to them. However, it should be noted that students need to be encouraged to participate in mobility, also by raising the information level and using various communication channels.

INDICATOR 10	ASSESSMENT
The design, delivery and monitoring of the academic programmes is «student centred», engaging students collectively and individually as partners in the development, assurance and enhancement of their educational experiences (e.g., through effective representation of the student voice, discussions about opportunities for course enhancement, involvement in quality assurance processes, and the monitoring and evaluation of student experiences).	**partly achieved**
Comment «Student centeredness» is ensured through the student individual plans and different opportunities of forming their individual learning paths; sharing opinions on programme delivery, learning and making suggestions about the ways how to improve the learning process with academic advisors; surveys, questionnaires regarding the courses, teaching staff, learning conditions; meetings with the deans and the rector. Students are also engaged collectively in the quality assurance processes through the Student Council. Students' involvement is coordinated and monitored according to a number of regulatory documents (Annex 4 of the Self-Evaluation). As in other universities, there is a problem that students are not always informed on the improvements made in the light of their opinions and suggestions. And just like most other universities in the EHEA, VolgaTech has to do more in achieving student centeredness, on the one hand by consulting guidelines produced, for example, by the European Students' Union, and on the other hand through actively encouraging involvement of students in programme design, as expected by the ESG (QA standards and guidelines in EHEA).	

Assessment of the Expectation for Alignment of Academic Programme

Summing up the results of preliminary analysis, it can be concluded that the rating-scale was used to assess each of the «10 indicators of good practice» for alignment of academic programmes. Some indicators were fully achieved, but there are some criteria that were largely or partly achieved. For example, it is worth paying attention to indicators 2, 4, and 6. The mechanisms and procedures for aligning the AP «Quality Assurance Management in Agriculture and Food Industry» with NQF were shown, but there are some points that should be improved.

The module syllabus is developed and approved; the learning outcomes are described in terms of knowledge, skills and abilities that are assessed via appropriate student assignments.

The information on alignment of intended learning outcomes with the 7th level descriptors of the Russian NQF at this Masters programme is given only partly. It would be better to finalize this part of the document.

Finally, it is advisable to balance the titles of the disciplines with their content, as not all disciplines correspond with the stated programme.

5. Review of Quality Assurance for Academic Programmes

The Expectation of the Panel will be:

In setting and maintaining standards and assuring quality, the university will operate clear and effective processes for the design, approval, delivery, monitoring, and support and development of its academic programmes in accordance with European and national standards and requirements.

The panel has used a rating-scale to assess each of the 10 indicators for alignment of quality assurance. Each assessment may be accompanied by a short commentary on the rating given.

INDICATOR 1	ASSESSMENT
There are clear criteria against which academic programmes are assessed in the programme approval, monitoring and review processes.	***fully achieved***
Comment According to SED, the academic programme approval, monitoring and review process at Volga Tech is regulated by the newly adopted Guidelines for academic programme development. The Guidelines took into account the requirements consolidated in various documents at European and national levels.	

INDICATOR 2	ASSESSMENT
The roles and responsibilities for programme design, development, approval and monitoring are clearly articulated.	***fully achieved***
Comment The Guidelines for academic programme development and review describe the roles and responsibilities of people involved at each stage of an academic programme cycle (Table 8 and Section 2). It should be noted that the use of external expertise, such as programme reviews, is not clear. There should be more use of external expertise not only when developing programs, syllabi etc., but also when doing self-evaluations, for example. More objectivity in the processes can also be introduced by external testing of students, benchmarking, attracting other stakeholders etc.	

INDICATOR 3	ASSESSMENT
Students are involved in programme design and in the processes of programme development, approval, monitoring and review.	***partly achieved***

Comment

Students are involved in programme design and in the processes of programme development, approval, monitoring and review both individually and collectively.

«Student centeredness'» is ensured through the student individual plans and different opportunities of forming their individual learning paths; sharing opinions on programme delivery, learning and living conditions and making suggestions about the ways how to improve the learning process with academic advisors; surveys, questionnaires regarding the courses, teaching staff, learning conditions; meetings with the deans and the rector.

Students are also engaged collectively in the quality assurance processes through the Student Council. Students' involvement is coordinated and monitored according to a number of regulatory documents (Annex 4). But at the same time, students' involvement in all the QA processes is not explicit, being thoroughly represented at the stages of academic programme implementation, but rather limited at design and approval stages.

As already noted, fully involving students is a common challenge.

INDICATOR 4	ASSESSMENT
There are effective policies which ensure that the academic standards for credits and awards are rigorously maintained at the appropriate level, and that student performance is judged against these standards.	***largely achieved***

Comment

According to the SED it can be noted that there are effective policies which ensure that the academic standards for credits and awards are rigorously maintained at the appropriate level, and that student performance is judged against these standards. Students' learning process on both Masters programmes is performed according to the individual plan, which is a mutual work of a student, his/her academic advisor and a programme director, with due regard for students' interests and with official approval by the dean of the faculty. The plan specifies the intended learning outcomes the student has to attain upon completion of an academic programme.

Formative assessment at the university for full-time students is implemented based on a module rating technology 'RITM' through which academic standards for credit and awards are maintained. The standards are documented and available to students on the university portal. Before starting the course, each teacher makes sure that students know and understand how their learning progress will be assessed. Such a mechanism ensures the high level of academic standards for credit and awards maintenance.

However, as noted above, grading scales should be adapted to ensure that all students, even those with only passing grades, achieve the learning outcomes at appropriate level – lower grades cannot imply a lower level of a learning outcome.

INDICATOR 5	ASSESSMENT
There are clear and effective policies and processes for assessing the recognition of prior learning and supporting student mobility between courses of study and institutions.	***largely achieved***

Comment

There are several documents ensuring the recognition of students' achievements: the rules for admission to VolgaTech; the rules for recognition of individual applicant's achievements; the list of master programmes; the list of entrance exams and tests, etc. The regulations on the procedure of transfer, exclusion from and resumption of studies at Volga Tech prescribe the possible procedures for student mobility. Volga Tech has been effectively using policies and procedures that pre-define the student life-cycle by clearly describing and making publicly available these documented processes on the university webpage.

While there is recognition of previous formal and potentially non-formal learning, there is no system of recognition of informal learning, which should be developed, especially in cooperation with local employers and part-time students.

INDICATOR 6	ASSESSMENT
Knowledge of professional standards/requirements and external expertise (e.g., from subject experts, employers and professional associations) is used to inform the design, development, approval and monitoring of academic programmes.	***largely achieved***

Comment

Volga Tech has a set of regulations ensuring that professional standards and external expertise are used for academic programme design, development, approval and monitoring: the Guidelines on developing new academic programmes of higher education in the Federal State Budgetary Educational Institution of Higher Professional Education "Volga State University of Technology"; Regulations on academic programme of higher education description; Regulation on Public Expert Councils, etc.

Public Expert Councils seem to be a new introduction, partly also connected to the Align project. Even so, the use of external expertise, as for programme reviews etc., is not clear. There should be more use of external expertise not only when developing programs, syllabi etc. but also when doing self-evaluations, for example.

More objectivity can also be introduced by external testing of students, benchmarking, attracting other stakeholders etc.

INDICATOR 7	ASSESSMENT
There are appropriate arrangements to train and support academic and professional/administrative staff who are involved in the design, delivery, approval and monitoring of academic programmes.	***fully achieved***
Comment Staff support is ensured by the document titled Regulations on Qualification Enhancement of teaching and support staff. The document explains the procedure for sending the university staff on professional development/training, internships and other forms of qualification enhancement; forms of reporting. The university provides organizational and financial support for qualification enhancement. There is an Institute for Lifelong Learning (LLL) at the Volga Tech that offers various short and longer programmes contributing to professional/administrative/management growth. The qualification can be enhanced as needed but not less than once in 3 years according to the rules. The staff of the Academic Department also organise trainings for teachers in pedagogy and the methodologies of teaching, and other topics, and there are also peer reviews of classes and similar activities.	

INDICATOR 8	ASSESSMENT
There are clear policies and processes in place to ensure the integrity of student assessment (e.g., though marking schemes, moderation processes, examination board regulations), and the effectiveness of these policies is regularly reviewed.	***fully achieved***
Comment Integrity of student assessment is ensured by the Regulation on formative and summative assessment of students and Regulation on examination board (for final state certification). There is a possibility for students to complain, request observers on oral exams etc. A plagiarism check is used for Masters theses.	

INDICATOR 9	ASSESSMENT
The policies and processes of programme design, development, approval and monitoring are regularly reviewed in order to ensure the effectiveness and continuous enhancement of current practices.	***fully achieved***
Comment The University Quality manual describes the way the internal and external quality assurance processes and mechanisms are working and are reviewed to ensure continuous enhancement of	

practices established. VolgaTech tries to constantly enhance the effectiveness of quality management systems through the use of the quality policy, quality objectives, the results of internal audits, data analysis, corrective and preventive measures, and the analysis conducted by the university management. There is also obligatory accreditation by the state according to the FSES.

The quality system, while commendable, is too much 'top-down'. There is too much focus on quality control and management, rather than quality improvement. Teachers, staff members in general, alumni, students and employers should participate more actively. There should be an interface between the central system and the programmes, maybe through improved cooperation with the Academic Department.

There is a system of surveying students' opinions, however students, including part-time students, should be better informed of it and the results of the survey, as well as of the use of the findings . More open questions should be added to the questionnaires, both for students and other stakeholders such as employers.

INDICATOR 10	ASSESSMENT
There are effective policies in place to ensure that staff appointed to teach and support student learning on academic programmes are appropriately qualified, and that delivery of the programmes is supported by the appropriate learning resources.	***largely achieved***

Comment

The information about teaching staff and appropriate learning resources is provided in the Programme Descriptor document. Almost 90% of staff have PhDs. There are good processes of staff monitoring, development and professionalization. The staff relationship with students seems to be good and the staff seem to be enthusiastic.

The qualifications of staff in the Quality programme might be closer to the industry - the agricultural and food sciences or people from practice. There is a good opportunity for this now as the programme itself states that they need to have new employees due to the age-structure of the current ones. There are also other faculties at the university that used to have similar programmes, so teachers from these faculties should also be involved.

While the resources are mostly sufficient, the Quality Management programme cannot guarantee high-level research without cooperation with other faculties or industry.

Assessment of the Expectation for Alignment of Quality Assurance

To summarize what was noted above, it should be noted that the review of Quality Assurance for APs shows that the university operates clear and effective processes for the design, approval, delivery, monitoring and support and development of APs in accordance with European and national standards and requirements. A rating-scale was used to assess each of the '10 indicators of good practice' for alignment of academic programmes. At first view, we can conclude that most of the indicators were largely achieved.

From the SED and the meeting with the representatives of VolgaTech Quality Assurance we have learned that the academic standards for credit and awards are maintained through the 'RITM' system for full-time students which is a well-laid-out system of assessment in the university, but it is recommended to think over the assessment system for part-time students.

During the meeting with the representatives of VolgaTech Quality Assurance it was mentioned that about 10-15 per cent of the employers are involved in the design and delivery of every programme in the university, and we could recommend attracting more employers and practitioners.

6. Summary of Findings

Learning outcomes

The learning outcomes approach is new for Russia. The input of the occupational standards is very important; however, the learning outcomes can be made much more specific by including also descriptors such as those included in the Dublin Descriptors. The most important elements of the level 7 are included, but there is too much focus on occupational competencies and not enough on generic and generic professional competencies. Currently, the learning outcomes do not include knowledge in a sufficient measure. However, good work was done on the domain-specific competencies.

The titles of the programme must be better connected with the programme content and mission.

Entry requirements for Bachelor and Master programmes seem to be the same. Specific outcomes of Bachelors must be taken into account for entering the Masters level.

Curriculum

The International Cooperation programme is currently virtual, so we could not see the programme handbook.

The programme should test for English upon admission, and then there should be more tutoring in English (not any foreign language, as now stated).

There is a competence matrix which is nicely presented; however, there are some course units which seem to be a relic of history, and do not seem to contribute to the achievement of the learning outcomes. There should be a discussion about this.

Additionally, most courses seem to be quite generic, while few are really specific. The titles of courses need to be better specified. One should also bear in mind that a foreign student would not understand what these are exactly about. The student handbook thus needs to be improved. The Student handbook is also a part of the quality management system.

It is advisable to balance the title of the disciplines with their content: some titles of the disciplines do not correspond with the stated programme.

The above is true also of mandatory courses. In addition to this, the courses are not really student-centred – e.g., there is a lack of preparation for future entrepreneurial tasks, and no real choice (Quality Management programme) of electives.

There is not enough benchmarking with other universities.

There are no real laboratories for Food and Agriculture, though it seems that this does not present a problem for students as they use those in their companies. This can also be improved by improving contact with other programs at the university and with other universities, which own adequate labs. So the programme team needs to look at what exists already, establish contacts and carry out cooperation agreements\ set up communication.

Student workload – the use of credits differs from the one used in other Bologna countries. For example, it is strange to give credit for exam only, as credits should not be connected only to time but also to learning outcomes. Real workload measurement should be done (through any of the existing methods, such as interviews with students etc.) Other countries also include more credit for students' final thesis.

The duration of part-time studies study should be longer to be truly part-time.

Lots of work is done on learning and assessment technology, different ways of teaching etc. ,and while this is something that can always be improved, the situation is good.

There are webinars and online consultations for distance students which makes the education more flexible and affordable.

The same seems to be true also of the e-learning environment, while some contact hours should be included even in the distance learning programme. E-learning also requires a good credit system.

The theses seem to be very well organized, just as is the following of students and cooperation with other universities.

Staff

The staff relationship with students seems to be good, and the staff seem to be enthusiastic.

Almost 90% of staff have PhDs. There are good processes of staff monitoring, development and professionalization.

The qualifications of staff in the Quality programme might be closer to the industry, so the agricultural and food sciences or people from the practice. There is a good opportunity for this now as the programme itself states that they need to have new employees due to the age-structure of the current ones. There are also other faculties at the university that used to have similar programs, so teachers from these faculties should also be involved.

The cooperation with the work field and the alumni should be improved – it might be too expensive to hire them as teachers, but they can be members of advisory boards, mentors for final papers etc.

Students

The assessment and testing system is very good: it seems very well organized and transparent, However, it probably still needs to be adapted to the real learning outcomes assessment.

Students should be much more involved in the design of the programme, as filling out questionnaires is not sufficient input. Students should not have to ask for this, but be encouraged by the institution.

While there are contacts and information packages, mobility needs to be increased. Information on mobility and similar learning opportunities should also be disseminated via websites, social networks etc., and students should be encouraged to use such opportunities.

There is a good system of coaching and consultations, and students say that teachers can be approached easily.

Quality system

The quality system, while commendable, is too much 'top-down'. There is too much focus on quality control and management, rather than quality improvement. Teachers, staff members in general, alumni, students and employers should participate more actively. There should be an interface between the central system and the programmes, maybe through improved cooperation with the Academic Department.

The use of external expertise, as for programme reviews etc., is not clear. There should be more use of external expertise not only when developing programs, syllabi etc. but also when doing self-evaluations, for example.

More objectivity can also be introduced by external testing of students, benchmarking, attracting other stakeholders etc.

There is a system of surveying students' opinions. However, students, including part-time students, should be better informed of it and the results, as well as the use of the findings. More open questions should be added to the questionnaires, both for students and other stakeholders such as employers.

From the given SED and the meeting with the representatives of Volga Tech Quality Assurance we`ve learned that the academic standards for credit and awards are maintained through the 'RITM' system for full-time students and it`s a well-laid-out system of assessment in the university, but it is recommended to think over the assessment system for part-time students.

Results achieved

It is not possible at this stage to state which learning outcomes were really achieved. Even so, alumni seem to have good jobs and the level of the final theses is good. Students choose this programme based upon its good reputation. Pass rates are ok. The number of students is low, so starting such a programme would not be possible in some other countries. The methodology for the realisation of learning outcomes is also very good.

However, the results here are more similar to postgraduate specialisation than a real Masters programme. Courses should also be offered as vocational training, which would be another good way to improve cooperation with alumni and employers.
More attention must be paid to internationalisation.

Annex 3: Programme for the Site Visit

PROGRAMME OF SITE VISIT OF PEER-REVIEW PANEL

Time	Activity	Participants	Time
Volga State University of Technology June, 24, Friday			
08.45	Arrival at Volga State University of Technology		
09.00 – 11.00	**Private meeting of the panel**		2 hours
11.00 – 12.00	**Meeting with Align Project Leaders at Volga State University of Technology**	**Align Project Leaders**, peer-review panel	1 hour
12.00 – 13.00	Lunch		
13.00 – 16.00	**Meeting with Volgatech representatives responsible for the AP (Review of the alignment of the AP)**	**Volgatech representatives responsible for the AP**, peer-review panel	3 hours
16.00 – 16.15	Break	Peer-review panel	
16.15 – 19.15	**Meeting with Volgatech representatives responsible for the AP (Review of Quality Assurance Alignment)**	**Volgatech representatives responsible for the AP**, peer-review panel	3 hours
20.00	Dinner		
June, 25, Saturday			
09.00	Arrival at Volga State University of Technology		
09.00 – 10.00	**Meeting with students and graduates of the AP**	Students, graduates**,** peer-review panel	1 hour
10.00 – 11.00	Private meeting of the panel	peer-review panel	
11.00 – 12.00	**Closing meeting on the Align Project results**	peer-review panel	1 hour
12.00 – 13.00	Work with check-lists		
13.00 – 14.00	Lunch		
14.00	Departure		