

International MSc programme in  
Earth Science, Uppsala University

Evaluation Committee report

Executive Summary

Spring 2020

## 1. Introduction

The report relates to an evaluation of Uppsala University's MSc programme in Earth Sciences. The report was undertaken during the autumn of 2019 on the basis of the programme director's self-evaluation report (2019), a briefing from the programmed director, a site visit (October 2019) and follow-up research (October-December 2019). The joint authors of the report are the evaluation committee consisting of one internal member (Guy Dammann), three external experts (David Harper, Muriel Laubier, Thomas Schuler) and one student member (Christina Volz).

## 2. Evaluation

On the basis of the site visit and further researches, the evaluation committee is happy to report that Uppsala University's MSc programme in Earth Sciences represents a very high standard of education. This is due to a number of factors. The teachers engaged to teach the various programmes and specialisations which make up the programme as a whole are very well qualified both in terms of pedagogical training and scientific expertise. In many cases, the scientific reputation of the teachers is outstanding. The design and content of the courses are research-led, with a high level of scientific credibility found in the teaching materials and literature. In addition, the student environment, both locally within the Geoscience department and more widely in the university and its surroundings, is excellent and conducive to a fruitful and well-rounded studying experience. Within the department, we found there to be excellent opportunities for the personal as well as academic development of students within their chosen academic specialisation, including good support structures for the pursuit of individual research. There is a commendable level of support for all students, including underperforming students, and evidence of excellent communication between students, teaching and administrative staff, all of which impacts on the high levels of engagement we found. Our findings also revealed, through some general research and some interviews with four alumni, that the various programme specialisations all prepare their students well for future careers, whether these be in industry or academia, and that there is also good evidence that student experience in general feeds well into the procedures through which the courses are revised and improved.

With this in mind, the findings of the detailed report which follows, and the recommendations and suggestions that result from them, should be understood in the broad context of representing (mostly) minor improvements to a high quality educational programme that in our eyes is running surprisingly well given the heavy administrative burden on the director and participating teachers. None of the recommendations, outlined below in summary, further below in detail, should be considered as especially urgent but rather as recommended courses of action to bear in mind as part of the already healthy general and ongoing process of self-evaluation and continuous improvement. Any educational programme, and in particular one which incorporates both integrated and hybrid elements such as the MSc in Earth Sciences, where there is a relatively wide degree of divergence between some of the various specialisations (e.g. between Palaeontology and Hydrology), will contain aspects in need of fine-tuning. At the same time, the ever-changing profile of national and international students, their educational background, and the society and economy to which they will contribute, necessitates continual revision as well as – which

is less often credited – a certain amount of courage in retaining aspects which superficially might not seem as fashionable or immediately relevant as they might.

The three exceptions to this general picture, which is to say the three recommendations that we would consider as in need of urgent attention, are the following: i.) solving the question of how the SINReM specialisation is administered; ii.) introducing an informal grading system for SINReM assignments which will mesh better with the grading scales used by the other participating universities; and iii.) providing additional practical information to incoming international students (particularly outside-EU) about moving to Uppsala and Sweden.

### 3. Specific recommendations requiring immediate action

- i. The Geosciences Department and TekNat Faculty should meet in order to agree a plan for resolving the issue of the administration of the SINReM programme.
- ii. The programme board should institute an informal grading scale for examined work by the SINReM students in order to allow for a better integration with the grading systems used by the universities participating in the scheme.
- iii. The department, in conjunction with the faculty and central university administration, should look into producing a welcome package containing practical information about housing, immigration regulations, joining “nations” etc. Account should also be taken of students arriving in Uppsala with families.

### 4. Conclusion

The evaluation committee has found no evidence of serious problems in the administration and teaching of the MSc in Earth Sciences. The recommendations detailed in the report above should be understood as suggested improvements to an educational programme that is already working well. The three more urgent recommendations relate most to issues arising that are specific to the SINReM specialisation/programme and the committee understands that progress has been made on the central issue of the administrative status of SINReM since the site visit was conducted.

The committee would like to thank the TekNat Faculty, Geoscience Department, the MSc programme director Abigail Barker, as well as the many administrative and teaching staff and present and past programme students who took time to answer our questions and make us feel welcome. We hope that the report will be read in general as confirmation of the MSc programme’s high quality and that the suggestions and recommendations we make in the report may be found useful.