

# **Institutional Accreditation of the Network Swiss Graduate Programme in Gender Studies**

*(Netzwerk Graduiertenkollegien Gender Studies Schweiz)*

Report presented by the international expert group, July 2005

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# 1. Introduction :

## Structure of the experts report

The present report has been structured according to the format recommended by the Organ für Akkreditierung und Qualitätssicherung der Schweizerischen Hochschulen (OAQ) published in the Guide to external evaluation (Recommendations for experts). The aim of the report is to provide an assessment of the unit seeking accreditation and the concluding accreditation statement as a response to the request for accreditation as an academic institution presented by the Network Swiss Graduate Programme in Gender Studies (*Netzwerk Graduiertenkollegien Gender Studies Schweiz*).

The report is divided into five main parts:

1. The accreditation process and the unit to be accredited
2. Assessment of the Network Swiss Graduate Programme in Gender Studies: compliance to the standards.
3. Identification of main strengths and weaknesses. Further recommendations on enhancing quality.
4. Conclusions
5. Recommendation for accreditation

## 1. The accreditation process and the unit to be accredited

### 1-1. The accreditation process.

Article 7, section 2 of the cooperation Agreement between the federal government and the university cantons on matters relating to universities of 14 December 2000 establishes that "Public and private academic institutions and their programmes are candidates for accreditation. Clearly defined academic units are to be accredited. Programmes qualify for accreditation if they lead to an academic or professional degree at university level". Applications for accreditation should be submitted to the OAQ (Art.10). Accreditation procedures are based on evaluations carried out in several steps (Art. 9):

- Self-evaluation by the unit seeking accreditation
- External evaluation, consisting of an on-site assessment of compliance with the quality standards (Section II of Guidelines) by an independent group of experts (peer review).

In this case the group was composed of the following members:

- Dr. María Mercedes Jaime-Sisó (peer leader), University of Zaragoza (Spain)
- Dr. Hildegard Nickel, HU Berlin
- Dr. Barbara Friebertshäuser, JWG Universität Frankfurt a.M.
- Dr. Gabriele Griffin, University of Hull (UK)
- Dr. Stefan Hirschauer, LMU München

- Decision regarding accreditation made by the Swiss University Conference (SUK/CUS)

## 1.2 The unit seeking accreditation

In 1999, eight three-year graduate studies programmes were launched in Swiss universities which meant a most innovative pilot project since no comparable doctoral-level programmes in the arts and social sciences existed at that time in the country. One of these pioneering programmes ("Knowledge-gender-professionalisation") can be considered the forerunner of the Network Swiss Graduate Programme in Gender Studies. The Swiss National Science Foundation's idea of introducing graduate studies programmes as a regular instrument for the promotion of junior researchers had to be abandoned during the implementation of the pilot project due to financial problems. The need for the setting up of graduate studies programmes in the country was made evident in two important reports by the Swiss Science and Technology Council (*promotion of junior researchers*, 2001) and the Federal Office for Education and Science (*promotion of the arts and social sciences*, 2002), respectively. Both reports recommend the establishment of graduate studies programmes which would solve the serious structural problems encountered by candidates wanting to pursue doctoral studies in the arts and social sciences. A need was also detected for the systematic promotion and support of Gender Studies, a field which has different levels of institutionalization in Swiss universities while being acknowledged in the federal message on education research and technology as an equal opportunities instrument and a dynamic area of academic studies.

In this context, the creation of the Network Swiss Graduate Programme in Gender Studies is perceived as a most innovative pioneering solution which can compensate for the weak structure underlying specialized gender studies in Switzerland and which has a fundamental role in the important process of introducing graduate studies programmes in the country. This clever combination derives from the main objective of the programme, aiming at:

- the improvement of the research abilities of the participants
- the training of highly qualified doctoral students
- the promotion of gender competence in the academic field

With these ambitious goals, the network was structured as a three-year interdisciplinary national programme of advanced training and further education for postgraduates in various disciplines (Arts and Social sciences, Gender Studies, Medicine, Economics, Natural Sciences) working on a doctoral or habilitation thesis with gender as a common element in the analysis. The components of the network are four university groups, attached to the following universities:

- Basle (which acts as coordinator of the programme)
- Bern/Freiburg (where a virtual campus is maintained as a working and information tool for all members of the groups)
- Geneva/Lausanne
- Zurich

International exchange in the field of gender studies is a fundamental strategy for reinforcing the network, for which cooperation links have been established with the following foreign HE institutions:

- Centre for Advanced Gender Studies at the University of Vienna (AT)
- Department of Women and Gender Research in Medicine, Institute of Public Health – Panum Institute, University of Copenhagen (DK)
- Réseau Interuniversitaire et Interdisciplinaire National sur le Genre (FR),
- Department of Gender Studies, Central European University (CEU), Budapest (HU)
- Centre for Transdisciplinary Gender Studies at Humboldt University. Berlin (DE)
- ,International Institute for the Study of Culture and Education, University of Lower Silesia (ULS) Wroclaw (PL)
- Interdepartmental Interdisciplinary Graduate Programme in Women's Studies and Feminist Theories, University of Ljubljana (SI)

The management of the programme is carried out by an executive team and a coordinator. Overall responsibility for the content lies with a steering committee composed of representatives of the different groups. Local governing bodies assume the academic responsibility for individual groups. Organizational matters, individual support and advice are dealt with by the coordinators. The interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary character of the programme involves the participation of academics from the various individual disciplines for which cooperation between institutions is complemented with collaboration among individual departments not only at local level but also between the different groups. The range of courses offered varies considerably among the universities making up the network, since there exists a great deal of freedom in the choice of courses in the four groups, and, indeed, they are conceptualised in cycles of different emphases or thematic *Schwerpunkte*. Despite these and other local differences, the graduate studies programme has overarching objectives. This causes the programme to be bound to two different academic systems, that of the German speaking part of the country and the one followed by universities in the French-speaking area. On the basis of this structure, the Network started its activity in 2002. This first cycle, which has just been concluded, had a total of 58 participants and the second cycle (2005-08) started in spring 2005 in the Bern/Freiburg and Zurich groups and will begin only in the autumn in Basle and Geneva/Lausanne.

This summary of the basic features of the unit seeking accreditation provides enough data to conclude that, despite the fact that the *Netzwerk Graduiertenkollegien Gender Studies Schweiz* had to be considered as an *institution* for the purposes of accreditation, it actually does not correspond to this concept. Neither can it be assessed as a *programme*. Rather, it is a collaborative network composed of different groups and operating on the basis of mutual cooperation, interdisciplinarity and coordination, in which synergies exist which potentially make this network a much more valuable tool than the mere adding together of the integrating elements.

There is a difficulty when accreditation procedures designed to be applied to *institutions* and/or *programmes*, have to be used, as in the present case, to assess what could be described as a network of networks where the integrating elements are attached to different institutions and even to different academic systems. As a consequence of this, the OAQ asked the

expert group to analyse and assess the unit mainly from the perspective of compliance with its mission statement, strategic plan and objectives established. The degree of compliance with quality standards formulated for institutional accreditation are also analysed in this report, while considering that responsibility for some of them does not relate to the network but to the institutions the different groups are attached to. Considering the special characteristics of the unit, the OAQ has requested both the unit (for the self-evaluation report) and expert group, to also evaluate some of the quality standards corresponding to accreditation of academic programmes (standards 1.02, 2.03, 3.02 and 4.01).

### **1.3 Assessment of the self-evaluation report**

Due to the special features of the *Netzwerk Graduiertenkollegien Gender Studies Schweiz* mentioned above, the self-evaluation report presented by the unit seeking accreditation consists of three parts :

- A) Introduction: basic conditions for creation and organization
- B) Quality standards for university institutions
- C) Quality standards for academic programmes

In order to show evidence of data presented in the main document, the *Netzwerk Graduiertenkollegien Gender Studies Schweiz* also offered a long series of annexes which provide support for the descriptions and comments offered in the self-evaluation report .The report has been prepared by a large group of contributors, gathering all levels of participation in the project so ensuring that different viewpoints and perspectives were taken into account. The contributors to the report are listed below:

- Lic. Phil. Nat. Sabin Bieri, student Bern
- Dr. Christa Binswanger, coordinator, Bern
- Prof. Dr. Sylvie Durrer, member of the governing body, Geneva
- Lic. Phil. Dominique Grisard, coordinator, Basel
- Lic. Phil. Hist. Nicole Gysin, student Bern
- Lic. Phil. Anelis Kaiser, student Basel
- Prof. Dr. Andrea Maihofer, director Basel
- MA, MA Stephan Meyer, student Basel
- Dr. Lorena Parini, coordinator, Geneva
- Dr. Brigitte Röder, coordinator of the Swiss national programme, Basel
- Prof. Dr. Therese Steffen, director, Zurich
- Prof. Dr. Thanh-Huyen Ballmer-Cao, director, Geneva
- Prof. Dr. Doris Wastl-Walter, member of the governing body, Bern
- Prof. Dr. Regina Wecker, director of the programme
- PD Dr. Elisabeth Zemp, member of the governing body, Basel
- Dr. Brigitte Schnegg, director, Berne
- Lic. Phil. Wening Udasmoro, student, Genève/lausanne
- Lic. Phil. Jasmine Champenois, student, Genève/lausanne

The self-evaluation report is an extensive document which offered the expert group a detailed description of the network, its origin, creation, context and organization. Due to the complexity inherent in the description of a unit which has different and diverse subunits, at certain parts of the document, especially when analysing the achievement of the standards it was not easy to perceive these in global terms, but rather as the sum of the individual descriptions of four local groups, with its distinctive peculiarities, strengths and weaknesses. This fact is evident in the annexes accompanying the report, which have been added according to different criteria and insufficient explanations for the reader. While diversity is considered a positive and enriching aspect of the unit, some harmonization of processes, procedures, including presentation and volume of information would greatly benefit the understanding of the unit as such.

The group responsible for the preparation of the report made a serious and honest descriptive effort, not ignoring the problems (mainly derived from the weak funding system) they have encountered. However, the report would have benefited from a more analytical approach, which could have led to the proposal of improvements and further developments.

The on-site visit evidenced a higher degree of commitment, and indeed enthusiasm from both participants and those responsible for the project at all levels. The report was not as successful in reflecting clearly this sense of unity around a common shared aim. For further introductions to the network, a clearer and more unified presentational structure in the self-description of the groups would be desirable, and would help to emphasize and strengthen the network structure.

## **1.4. Description of the on-site visit.**

### **1.4.1. Visit to the Bern group**

The on-site visit had been scheduled to be held in the University of Basle, as coordinator of the programme, during the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> June 2005. The OAQ, however, taking into account the special characteristics of the unit, mainly the fact that it is a network whose integrating members present significant differences among themselves, thought it appropriate to organize a previous visit to the Interdisciplinary Centre for Womens´ and Gender Studies of the University of Bern, where the Bern/Freiburg group has its venue. This two-hour visit took place on the 13<sup>th</sup> June. Two members of the experts´ group had the opportunity to meet Bern representatives of the steering committee, coordination and governing body, who provided more detailed information about the connexion between this group, the Centre for Womens´ and Gender Studies, the faculties of the supervisors of the different individual disciplines and the use of all these synergies in and for the Network. The visit offered us the possibility to observe the working conditions of the participants and the easy access they have to gender resources (both human and material). Particularly interesting was the conversation with participants of the programme. Since the visit took place in Bern, where the second cycle (2005-08) had already started, we could meet students from the first and second cycle working together. This coincidence in time and space of

participants at different levels of development of their studies, which is seen as a positive aspect of the network, will not be easily maintained in the future due to lack of space and time (new students will require both). As mentioned above, the Bern group is responsible for the virtual campus of the Network. We were strongly recommended to visit and analyse the web site [www.gendercampus.ch](http://www.gendercampus.ch). To this purpose the necessary codes and passwords were offered to us. A comment on this working and information tool will be provided below.

#### **1.4.2. Preparatory meeting of experts.**

The on-site visit in Basle was preceded by a briefing session which gave members of the expert group the possibility to meet one another, comment on the self-evaluation report and prepare the timeframe and content for the agenda to be followed during the meetings of the visit.

The expert panel would like to thank the representatives of the OAQ for the excellent organization of this session, which developed according to this plan:

- Information on the Swiss university system and the Swiss accreditation system
- Introduction to the OAQ's work philosophy, the areas for evaluation and the evaluation standards
- The experts' tasks
- Announcement of the definitive schedule for the visit
- Distribution of tasks between the experts.

#### **1.4.3. The on-site visit**

The expert group would like to express its gratitude to members of the *Netzwerk Graduiertenkollegien Gender Studies Schweiz* at all levels who took part in the meetings. Special thanks are given to the representatives of the Basle group (as hosts of the visit) for the overall organization of the visit and for the friendly and comfortable atmosphere, which greatly facilitated the experts tasks.

During the on site visit the expert group attended 5 meetings with the following groups:

- Steering Committee
- Graduates
- Coordinators
- Supervisors
- Employers and other stakeholders

All participants were extremely receptive to questions and comments and provided the expert group with valuable additional information which shed light on those aspects which remained unclear after the self-evaluation report, mainly those that referred to the internal organization of the network, relationships between different levels of supervision, levels and degrees of responsibility and funding problems. The meetings were extremely useful for the understanding of this complex and most innovative structure which integrates elements of different universities,

different disciplines, different academic systems and different languages. The visit was developed in English, which allowed participation in the expert panel of non-German speaking experts but may have been the cause for certain misunderstandings due to the lack of exact terminological correspondence between these two languages. The explanations offered by the participants in the meetings provided the expert group with an answer to all the questions raised. Especially interesting was the meeting with the stakeholders, since it offered an outside viewpoint of the network and valuable explanations of the Swiss research funding system. Considering that the individual discipline supervisor may not belong to the doctoral school and even be totally detached from the field of Gender Studies, the presence of one of these academics could have been interesting in order to clarify further the degree of connexion between the different actors who play a part in the students preparation.

## **2.- Accreditation of *Netzwerk Graduiertenkollegien Gender Studies Schweiz*.**

The following section offers an assessment of the *Netzwerk Graduiertenkollegien Gender Studies Schweiz* as an institution. The special characteristics of this unit (see comments above), however, recommend the inclusion in the analysis of some of the standards applicable to academic programmes as prepared by OAQ.

**Preliminary Remark:** In the following, the word "institution" is used to describe the Swiss National programme and the constituent parts which are relevant to the overall conception of the programme; the specifics and detailed individual reports of the graduate programme groups are dealt with under "Academic Programmes". However, neither these cycles nor the divisions correspond in every case to the structure of the network. A certain amount of overlap and redundancy cannot be avoided.

### **2.1 Quality Standards for University Institutions**

#### **Area 1: Strategy, Organisation and Quality Management of the Institution**

##### **Standard 1.01**

*The academic institution has a mission statement available to the public which states its educational and research objectives and describes the position of the institution in its academic and social context. It has a strategic plan.*

The Swiss graduate programme in Gender Studies is developed on the basis of the mission statement which was jointly established by the participants in the network and made public, in German and French, in the internet platform <http://www.gendercampus.ch> which is the official website of the network. It states the objectives of the network with regard to the basic and advanced training and promotion of students. The individual groups provide further details and adjustments to suit their specific local conditions. While the mission statement lists the goals of the network concerning further education and support to the students, the expectations of the network toward the students are not clearly specified. At the site visit, the meetings with the different groups offered the expert group a clearer picture of the mission stated by the network

The network has a strategic plan which was included in the first project application to the SUC and again in the renewal application for the cycle 2005-08. The strategy was designed to ensure implementation of objectives at three levels:

- Qualification process of students
- Inter-university coordination
- Internal coordination

As in the case of the mission statement, the individual groups have adapted the strategy to suit their specific local conditions.

The steering committee and coordinators have periodically made adjustments to update the strategic plan and adapted its goals to the needs of the participants. In support of this, a retreat was held in May 2005 where experience gained throughout the first cycle was to be used to suggest improvements and changes for the second cycle of the graduate programme which would have an influence in the strategic planning of the network. Due to the date of the retreat, the self-evaluation report could not include the results and the proposals made. The on-site visit allowed the expert team to find out details of the retreat, where important proposals were made in order to solve problems found in the implementation of the first cycle. The variety of languages, university structures and traditions, while could be considered as enriching aspects of the network, were also sources for some of those problems. The expert group makes some recommendations in this respect in the final section of the present report.

Since strategic planning is geared towards the achievement of the teaching objectives, more comments on this are offered in the section related to Quality Standard for Academic Programmes Area 1.

The information given by the network regarding the mission statement and strategic plan is supported by the following enclosures:

Enclosures:

- 1 National Swiss mission statement (German and French)
- 2 Target agreement of the Basle programme group with the corresponding position papers (programme of work, expectations on participation and the doctoral/post-doctoral thesis, voluntary commitment of the governing body)
- 3 Bilan d'activités de l'école doctorale lémanique
- 4 Project application
- 5 Renewal application

The documentation shows that there is an imbalance in type and amount of information provided by the different groups. The expert group would have appreciated a more unified concept of the network.

**Standard 1.02**

*Decision-making processes, competencies and responsibilities have been determined. The academic staff participates in decision-making processes affecting teaching and research. The students participate in decision-making processes affecting their education and are able to state their opinions.*

The original decision-making processes, as outlined in the former project application have been further developed and optimised. The help of an organizational consultant was enlisted for this purpose. Governing bodies, national and local management and coordinators take part in the planning of both national and local programmes with the active collaboration of graduates, which not only obtain the benefit of an academic training designed to meet their needs but also gain experience in the design and organization of conferences. The network shows the success achieved by

using this structure and the intention of maintaining it. The experts team, however would like to remark that the increasing participation of students in organizational matters to the point that "some parts of the programme were planned and executed by themselves", might lead to an undesired dispersion of contents which while being punctually beneficial for individual students, could distort the original conception and objectives of the programme as it was designed. The participation of the students in the design and planning of future editions (even the second cycle of the programme) is a very positive and useful decision. However, once the programme has been approved, the main objectives, contents and activities proposed should be maintained in order to offer a more stable, transparent and coherent image of the common aims of the programme.

### **Standard 1.03**

*The institution has the human resources, structures and financial and material means to enable it to realise its stated goals and objectives according to its strategic plan.*

The first edition of the programme (2002-05) was jointly financed by the Swiss University Conference (SUC) and the participating universities, since it was presented as a cooperation project and the financing procedures of cooperation projects in Switzerland require a 50% contribution from the universities of the cost of funded projects. The participant universities, therefore, had to provide extra funding to match the contribution of the SUC. This ensured the necessary funding to cover personnel, equipment, material and other needs (colloquia, workshops, block seminars and conferences). The salaries of the coordinators and graduate scholarships (17 out of 58 participants) were funded by the SUC. The quality of funding for the first cycle of the programme even allowed the organization of international conferences and the invitation of national and foreign specialists.

In 2004 the SUC approved the continuation of the project for another three-year cycle (2005-08). However, substantial cuts in the funding of this new edition, mainly related to the lack of scholarship awards, create a difficult situation for future participants in the project and might put in danger the maintenance of the quality standards achieved. The reasons for the funding cuts are that scholarship funding is responsibility of the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNFS), which has agreed to supply funding for graduate studies programmes from 2006 until the end of the agreed cycle (2004-07). This fragile funding system leaves the graduate school, which has already started its second three-years cycle (2005-2008) in a weak situation in financial terms. So far, only the Zurich group seems to have been able to arrange scholarships for the second programme cycle to be financed via the local research commission. The on-site visit, especially the meeting with State Secretariat of Education and Research and the representative of the Swiss National Science Foundation offered to the expert group a very comprehensive description of the general financial situation in Swiss education and the different modalities of funding contemplated in the system. It became clear that at present graduate school funding remains a problem to be solved. Scholarships respond to different types, none of which involves funding of graduates to write their thesis. The expert panel would like to express surprise at the fact that doctoral students in Switzerland do

not receive grants. It is also recognized that this situation pertains in many European countries even those with no automatic funding for doctoral students offer at least some competitive funding on the basis of excellence. The experience of the first cycle indicates a correlation between the advanced level of the achievement of the goals (completion of thesis) and those participants who enjoyed financial support, as they were able to concentrate exclusively on their research work. The financial instability of participants may have a negative influence on the implementation of the programme and fulfilment of the objectives. It also invites the question of equality of chances for gifted students from economically weaker families within Switzerland. Consequently, we strongly recommend that further efforts should be made towards the achievement of additional funding resources. The network already advises and offers support to graduates in their applications for financial help. This initiative should be refined, especially by way of an enhanced research-oriented cooperation within the network, and integrating students into research projects, which could obtain additional funding resources.

#### **Standard 1.04**

*The sources of the financial means and all the conditions attached to the financing are stated transparently and do not restrict the autonomy of the institution in taking decisions in teaching and research.*

The financial sources are clearly stated and the way the amount of funding is used is presented in detail in the project and in the renewal application for the graduate programme and the funding notification of the SUC.

Both, the individual programme groups and the national coordination (which are financially independent from one another) prepare an annual financial report on the basis of guidelines provided by the State Secretariat for Education and Research (SER) which is integrated into a general report by the national coordinator and made known to the SUC.

According to the information provided in the self-evaluation report and confirmed during the on-site visit, the individual programmes have not in the past established specific conditions (apart from attendance to study programme and elaboration of the thesis) for the award of scholarships. One of the participating universities had established –laudably- individual contracts with students that laid out clearly what the obligations as well as the rights of the students are. The expert group recommends this as a model to be emulated by the other partner universities. Due to the present lack of scholarships and the urgent need for ensuring scholarships, the expert team suggests the more general establishment of concrete chronological expectations with respect to students' achievements, directing the support and demand of students to effective work on their dissertations. Since one of the main objectives of the graduate school is "to provide junior researchers with the opportunity to prepare their doctoral and postdoctoral thesis within the context of a specific study programme", this programme, and the demands on the participant students should be designed in such a way as to ensure a maximum degree of correlation between completion of the programme

and advanced state (that is conclusion) of the thesis. This might require some reflection on the possibility of adapting the programme to the actual time requirements of the dissertations, not least in line with the Bologna Agreement (1999) of which Switzerland is a signatory. It is our opinion that the identification of the programme with the achievement of concrete, visible results would greatly enhance the possibilities of obtaining further financial support.

### **Standard 1.05**

*The institution has a quality assurance system.*

The institution demonstrates concern and great interest in providing an effective quality assurance system. To this end, different levels of assessment have been set up:

- External evaluation (external system and impact analysis commissioned by the SUC, 2003), which offered positive results.
- Internal evaluation
  - National quality assurance (by way of regular meetings of the governing body, steering committee, retreat May)
  - Internal group evaluations (carried out by the different groups, with students participation)
- Accreditation. The request for accreditation contemplated as early as in the project application, clearly demonstrates the determination of the network towards the assurance of quality.

The issue of quality assurance will be dealt with again under the Quality standards for Academic programmes, area 2: Internal organization and Quality assurance measures

### **Standard 1.06**

*The institution has set up a committee dealing with questions relating to gender equality, or has arranged access to such a committee.*

All participating universities already had departments or committees dealing with gender equality matters. Consequently, the creation of one specific body for the network was considered unnecessary, although an ombudsperson's office was opened to assist students in these and other matters. The project of course has gender equality as a central theme, even as the backbone of the programme.

Gender balance, however has not been achieved in the programme, which, - as most gender programmes internationally- reports both at the level of graduates and among teaching staff, researchers and people in charge of the different areas of responsibility, a clear majority of female participants. The promotion of women in academic life is a part of the mission statement of the network, which has been very successfully

implemented. However, the necessary promotion of women and the usual under-representation of men in the area of gender studies in general should not represent insuperable obstacles for a more balanced ratio male-female within the network. The implantation of a gender quota introduced during the forerunner of the programme (in support of a higher presence of male participants) does not seem to be the most appropriate solution, mainly because it would run against the quality criterion that should be central to any selection process. It is our view that a more unified structure of the programme and the processes followed in its implementation could strengthen the outside image as a network and would therefore be better understood and considered as a valuable tool for the promotion of both, graduate studies in general and gender studies in particular. This could increase the number of national and foreign candidates which could, in turn, increase the possibility of improving the gender balance. The question of harmonization of the different groups will be dealt with again later in this report.

## **Area 2: Study Programmes**

### **Standard 2.01**

*The institution offers a range of programmes leading to academic or professional degrees with stated goals and objectives. They integrate with the existing range of higher education programmes or complement them in a meaningful way.*

Although the medium-term aim of the graduate programme -as stated by the steering committee- is to offer a doctorate in Gender Studies at a national level, the graduate programme at present does not lead to a programme-specific degree. The academic objective is, therefore the production by the students of doctoral or postdoctoral theses in their respective disciplines. Further academic objectives have been formulated by three of the groups (Zurich, Basle, Bern/Freiburg). The programmes offered are research and learning process oriented and represent a most valuable contribution to the traditional offer made by the corresponding universities, by adding three outstanding features, unusual in Swiss universities: training in the field of gender studies, further qualification and specific promotion of junior scholars at doctoral and postdoctoral levels, and interdisciplinary collaboration. The structure involves both national and local elements in the programme.

The local study programmes present different thematic emphases, deal with different disciplines and show differences in the experience on Gender Studies of the participating graduates, while they share the common aim of providing the students with knowledge and skill in Gender Studies theories and methodologies. The nationwide networking among participants is appreciated as a clever, innovative solution to the need of postgraduate research training in the country. Synergies are generated among the different groups, both at the level of graduates and that of teaching and academic staff.

The acquisition of skills such as writing academic texts, designing posters, writing research applications, networking strategies are secondary objectives of the programme.

In order to offer a more compact and coherent profile of the network, we suggest that the concept of gender competence, as understood by the network, should be further specified. The advantages obtained through collaboration between the four units would be increased with the strategy of division of labour, specialization of units not only in terms of topics but competences and profiles.

### **Standard 2.02**

*The institution participates in a national and international exchange of students, teaching staff and academic staff.*

The mobility of students and teaching and academic staff is a characteristic inherent in the network structure of the programme. The participants can benefit from the possibility of taking part in the activities organized by the different groups and those held at the national level, where Swiss and foreign experts are invited. Attendance of these events provides the students with enormous possibilities to widen their own relationships and offers them the possibility to make international contacts. The self-evaluation report offers examples of academic exchanges derived from this strategy.

As already mentioned in the description of the unit, cooperation links have been established with seven European institutions in order to reinforce the international dimension of the network.

No examples are provided in the self-evaluation report of staff teaching having been on exchange visits abroad as members of the network. The expert team commended the members of the governing bodies and advisers on their extensive personal international contacts which are used in the benefit of the network, and on the clear benefits that students derive from these.

The expert team recommends that some these contacts and others which may have arisen from past and future local and national events to be formally institutionalised by way of the establishment of cooperation agreements which will ensure the continuity of the collaboration and offer a framework where specific aims of the collaboration could be agreed. We also encourage the planning of common projects with collaborating institutions abroad which could facilitate the external funding award. We therefore suggest the adoption of a more proactive policy in certain aspects of the mobility matters.

### **Standard 2.03**

*The institution has specified the conditions for attaining records of achievement and academic qualifications and monitors adherence to these conditions.*

Since no credit system is used in the country in the assessment of doctoral students in arts and social sciences, the indication of what is compulsory or voluntary for the students in the programme is a matter for the individual groups and, eventually, to the student advisors. Two of the groups (Bern/Freiburg and Basle) established regulations and course requirements for the students. Students of the former group had to sign a set of regulations on being granted scholarships for the graduate programme. The coordinators check the fulfilment of the obligations stated in the regulations.

In no case, are there any sanctions for non-observance of the agreed commitments. The other groups do not offer any information on this issue

The expert team would like to recommend strongly that a more standardized procedure regarding records of achievement between the groups composing the network is put in place. The obligations should be the same for all participants in the programme, and these should be aimed at providing the students with the necessary theoretical, methodological and conceptual background to their doctoral or postdoctoral theses which should be their first personal priority in the three-year programme. A more systematic control of the students' developments and achievements would improve the rate of finished or advanced dissertations at the end of the programme.

At the end of the programme participants receive a certificate with a graded evaluation of their performance, which was especially created by the network for this programme. The existence of a common document for all parts of the network is a very positive aspect, which serves to enhance the image of the unit. To take advantage of this, however, it is necessary to give the certificate further value. It should be not only a description of the activities of the students, their level of participation and attendance of courses, but could also serve as a harmonizing tool: by showing comparable records of achievement of students, the network could gain transparency and be better identified as a distinctive and valuable element in the university system.

#### **Standard 2.04**

*The institution makes use of periodically collected information on its graduates.*

Apart from the systematic collection of data about students performance (both academic and professional) carried out by coordinators the alumni association has decided to create a database gathering information on doctoral graduates in gender studies. Especially interesting to the expert group was the project funded by SNSF, with participation of several members of the network with the aim of exploring career perspectives for gender studies graduates. Conversations during the on site visit revealed that although the labour market already values gender competence in the fields of health, media, law and human resources offices, further efforts are needed to make society aware of the potentiality of this academic field and its applications in the other disciplines and in the professional world. A more detailed information on the abilities, capacities and skills developed by participants in the study programme would facilitate understanding by

employers and society in general of the usefulness of this approach to postgraduate studies.

### **Area 3: Research**

#### **Standard 3.01**

*The institution's current research activities are in keeping with its strategic planning and meet international standards.*

The network provides support to the research activities of the graduate programme students but does not undertake research itself (although staff members are engaged in a range of research activities). The local programme groups offer different thematic emphases but this does not involve the existence of research programmes specific to each individual group. Doctoral and postdoctoral students select their own research topics with the only condition that gender is at the core of the selected theme. The expert team, however, would like to suggest that the network consider enhancing its joint research orientation. The identification of the network with a centre of excellence in research training requires a more clearly defined orientation, a common project beyond the aim of providing support to junior researchers. The coordination and adaptation work carried out by the academic and teaching staff throughout the first cycle is really impressive and so are the advances made in only three years. This invites us to suggest further efforts to promote research within the network as a powerful means to attract state funding via research projects in which graduates are involved.

The achievement of international research standards is reflected in the international events organized by the network and by the foreign experts who cooperate in the programme.

#### **Standard 3.02**

*The institution ensures that current research findings are made use of in its teaching.*

The self-evaluation report offers numerous examples, which indicate that the latest research and newest methodologies are applied in the teaching of the programme both at local and national level.

### **Area 4: Academic Staff**

#### **Standard 4.01**

*The procedures for selecting, nominating and promoting academic staff are regulated and made public. For teaching staff, these procedures consider both teaching skills and academic qualifications.*

The appointment of academic staff is regulated by the universities integrating the network, which guarantees their academic abilities and academic qualifications. Competence in gender studies and interest in promoting junior scholars have been further criteria in the selection of

academics participating in the network. The on-site visit provided evidence of their deep vocational attitude and availability to contribute to the achievement of the objectives established in the programme. Foreign experts are invited on the basis of their academic prestige and their adequacy to the academic interests of the graduates.

The coordinators are selected by the governing body. These positions are publicly advertised.

#### **Standard 4.02**

*The institution regulates the continuing education of its academic staff with respect to both teaching skills and subject.*

Apart from having access to the policies of continuing education of their corresponding universities, the academic staff of the network can benefit from the multiple activities organized by the graduate programme. No formal arrangements have been made in this respect, but this does not minimize the wide range of possibilities offered to the staff for further professional training. Financial support is provided to facilitate and encourage participation in conferences and similar events.

#### **Standard 4.03**

*The institution pursues a long-range policy of promoting junior researchers.*

The efficacy of graduate programmes in the promotion of junior researchers has been officially acknowledged. The network, as responsible for graduate programmes at local and national levels has established this as its main goal, as indicated in the mission statement of the institution. The main concern with respect to the maintenance of this fundamental objective is the present weakness in the funding system. The steering committee is well aware of the problem and has expressed their concern both in the self-evaluation report and during the visit. Several steps have been taken in order to raise public awareness of the problem and sensitise the education policy committees responsible for financial support. The network has organized multiple activities (lectures, discussions, publications) and has opened some of the programme events to external guests.

The expert group would like to encourage the steering committee to continue with this policy, but also invites them to follow the recommendations made throughout the present report aimed at enhancing and developing the potentialities of the network.

The coordinators of the network, are encouraged and supported to combine their duties within the network with advancements in their academic careers. Although it is admitted that the coordinators posts are too demanding and time consuming, the self-evaluation report offers evidence of the progress made by coordinators in their academic promotion.

#### **Standard 4.04**

*The institution ensures that their academic staff has access to advice on career development.*

The graduate programme academic staff can and does make use of the advisory services of the corresponding universities. They can also take advantage of the contact possibilities derived from the network structure, which facilitates meetings and discussions about career planning with other members of the programme and invited participants.

### **Area 5 Administrative and Technical Staff**

#### **Standard 5.01**

*The procedures for selecting and promoting administrative and technical staff are regulated and made public.*

Throughout the first cycle of the graduate programme, the only administrative support (apart from the occasional help received by the Bern coordinator from an assistant in the Interdisciplinary Centre for Women's and Gender Studies) consisted of one assistant for the national coordination and the Basle group. This position was publicly advertised and the selection was made following the current regulations of the University of Basle.

#### **Standard 5.02**

*The institution ensures that continuing education is available to administrative and technical staff.*

As in the case of academic staff, the administrative workers of the network can make use of the continuing education resources offered to administrative and technical staff in the universities that make up the network.

With the future development of the programme it is expected that further administrative support may be needed. In this case, the expert team would recommend an emphasis in the administrative staff selection criteria on those requirements that are specific to international networking structures, such as sound knowledge of languages (basically English, French and German) and experience in web page creation and maintenance.

### **Area 6 Students**

#### **Standard 6.01**

*The admission requirements and application procedures for the institution's range of programmes have been declared and justified.*

Applicants to the programme have to meet the formal requirements for admission to a doctoral or postdoctoral study programme at a Swiss university. Admission conditions are stipulated and made public by the

respective universities. Applications are submitted to the chosen programme and evaluated by the corresponding governing body. The selection is discussed within the steering committee.

While the established procedure is respectful of the formal requirements and guarantees transparency in the process, the expert group recommends some changes in the student selection process:

- Developing common standards for acceptance criteria. The network needs to be considered as a unit. Diversity is, no doubt, an enriching aspect of the programme, but this should not be an obstacle for the development of standardised procedures and requirements which help the student, partner institutions, educational authorities and society in general to identify the *Netzwerk Graduiertenkollegien Gender Studies Schweiz* as a centre of excellence to promote and support junior scholars in the development of their thesis and to enhance gender studies in the country. To be understood as such, common criteria should be used, most especially with respect to demands put on the students, which includes a more uniform procedure in their selection. The fact that applications are sent to the respective universities, while facilitating their classification, does not contribute to the vision of the network. The present ratio of acceptance of the network overall is about 50%. This data has not been provided, though, it is the result of our evaluation of the independent data provided by the different groups, which range from 30% (Zurich) to 60% (Bern) for the first cycle of the programme. Such imbalances should be minimized, in order to avoid a "ranking" of the groups on the basis of the difficulty of acceptance to the different programme groups.
- Enlarging the pool of applicants by further international advertising of the programme. The unique and most interesting features of the network make of it a very useful and attractive tool which deserves wider publicity. The language problems which could result from the participation of graduates from different countries have been dealt with during the retreat held in May 2005. The diversity of languages used in the country (and consequently in the different programme groups), was the cause of several problems detected at the national level by the coordinators, governing bodies and steering committee. The use of English at national-wide events, in the internet platform gender campus and in the advertising of the programme could be a solution which is already being considered by the network.
- Stressing the criterion of excellence of candidate students (master's degree, quality of research proposal, availability to work on dissertations as a priority, language competence). This would result in a higher rate of finished or very advanced dissertation at the end of the three-year programme.

For further comments and suggestions on this matter, please refer to **Quality Standards for Academic Programmes: Area 1: Implementation and Teaching Objectives**

### **Standard 6.02**

*Equality of women and men is assured.*

Please refer to the answer under Area 1: Strategy, Organisation and Quality Management of the Institution. Standard 1.06

### **Standard 6.03**

*The institution observes the development of study achievements and the duration of study.*

A great variety of methods were used to observe the students' developments during the first cycle of the study programme. This is a very positive feature of the programme and a consequence of networking practices which greatly benefits the student, who can receive support and advice at various levels. The exact manner of assessment of the student's work, however, is a decision of the individual groups, what can result in significant differences in the results. During the meeting with the students in the on-site visit, these differences became evident, showing that the degree and intensity of supervision received could differ considerably. The self-evaluation report reflects the intention to standardise the individual measures and systematise the control steps. The expert panel strongly agrees with this proposal and encourages the steering committee to establish common procedures in this respect.

For further comments regarding study achievements, please refer to Quality Standards for Academic Programmes. Area 1 Implementation and Teaching Objectives. Standard 1.02

### **Standard 6.04**

*The ratio of staff to students must be adequate to ensure that the educational goals and objectives of the institution and its organisational units can be achieved.*

According to the mission statement students should receive a particularly intensive level of support and guidance, implemented at various levels: through previously assigned regular guidance advisors, who complement the support given by the doctoral advisor, through members of the governing body and coordinators, by peer mentoring, by qualified supervisors, through workshops with external experts. The range of possibilities of supervision and support that the networking, interdisciplinary, national and international structure of the programme provides is really impressive. The graduates can benefit from an unusually varied offer that allows for tailor-made support at individual level. According to the report and the interviews made during the visit, most students make use of these supervisory options. However, as commented in the previous paragraph, a more highly standardized structure is recommended, since the risk exists of responsibility and process control getting somewhat lost between these parties.

With the start of the second cycle, the number of graduates needing support may have increased due to the low rate of finished dissertations

from the first cycle (in most cases only one out of the cohort), which adds to the number of new graduates and constitutes a heavy additional workload for coordinators and local supervisors who already have to face many time-consuming responsibilities and tasks with no compensation other than that of satisfaction for contributing to a better situation for graduate students in the country.

In order to avoid overlapping of students from different cycles we recommend the programme should be designed to ensure that at the end of the cycle the graduates have either finished their dissertations or are in a position which allows them to be self sufficient and work individually.

#### **Standard 6.05**

*The institution ensures that potential and current students have access to counselling services and guidance to the studies. The institution implements measures which allow the students to assess their progression through the programme.*

Potential students can find information about the graduate programme in the internet platform Gender Campus, where apart from information about the network and the programme they can find the e-mail addresses of the coordinators whom they can contact personally for further information and to arrange advisory interviews with members of the programme or the governing body. The network is presently working on a more complete English version of the information provided by the website which will facilitate understanding and open the way for a more international participation of graduates and scholars in the network. The expert team encourages the network to continue with efforts on this line.

For comments regarding current students, please refer to the two previous subsections of this area (standards 6.03 and 6.04)

### **Area 7: Infrastructure**

#### **Standard 7.01**

*The institution has an infrastructure adequate to fulfil its medium and long-range objectives.*

Individual groups and the national coordination department (Basle) are attached to their corresponding universities and can, therefore, make use of the necessary infrastructure to develop their academic and administrative activities. The three groups within the network that are institutionally and physically linked to institutes devoted to gender research provide the graduates participating in the programme with the possibility to make use of their specialized libraries in Gender Studies. All universities hosting local groups provide the students with rooms to work in. The on site visit, as indicated in section 1.4 of this report, offered the possibility to visit the Bern students working site. It is an extremely comfortable and well-equipped room offering the necessary equipment to facilitate graduates research work (computers, photocopier, printer, telephone, easy access to specialized literature, and proximity to the offices of the governing body and coordinators). All this creates a warm

and friendly atmosphere that facilitates relationships between graduates (sharing a common space) and supervisors. Peer mentoring is a natural consequence of this working environment. Students from the first and second cycle (already started in Bern) were interviewed during the visit and showed their satisfaction with this privileged setting. The incorporation of all the participants, past and present, in the second study programme, however, will make it impossible for the Bern and the other groups to maintain this "cohabitation" of students, not only due to infrastructure problem (there will be physically no space, not enough computers etc) but also due to the impossibility of the academics to deal with supervision of a much higher number of graduates. In this respect, please refer to comments and recommendations already offered under Standard 6.04

## **Area 8 Cooperation**

### **Standard 8.01**

*The institution has established successful relationships on a national and international level. It promotes cooperation with other academic institutions, the working environment and relevant stakeholders in society.*

The self-evaluation report offers numerous examples of the many relationships of the network, both at a national and international level. Networking is at the core of the graduate programme and this principle has been successfully developed by participants in this project at all levels, who have made use of their personal academic contacts to strengthen already existing links and establish new cooperation relationships, which are not only restricted to the academic field but also to policy makers, funding awarders, media, NGOs and society in general.

In only three years the work developed in this respect is really outstanding. We therefore recommend these contacts to be further institutionalised where possible by way of the establishment of formal cooperation bilateral or multilateral agreements stating common objectives and ensuring continuity of the relationship.

The fact that Switzerland is one of the 45 countries participating in the Bologna process makes it even more necessary to guarantee that all higher education institutions in the country (in this particular case, the *Netzwerk Graduiertenkollegien Gender Studies Schweiz*) contribute to the establishment of the EHEA. Strengthening of already existing relationships and widening the links with institutions abroad are key elements in the process. This will, in turn, facilitate the achievement of the goal expressed in the self-evaluation report as "contributing towards the emergence of Switzerland as a recognised location for Gender Studies"

## **2.2 Quality Standards for Academic Programmes**

### **Area 1 Implementation and Teaching Objectives**

#### **Standard 1.02**

*The teaching objectives of the programme correspond to the institution's mission statement and strategic planning.*

Both in the self-evaluation report and during the on-site visit the promotion of highly qualified doctoral and postdoctoral theses in Gender Studies was repeated exhaustively as being the teaching objective of the graduate programme. The mission statement of the institution is also clear on this. The strategic planning has been oriented towards the achievement of this teaching objective. The design of the study programmes and activities linked to their development, the establishment of advisory and supervisory measures have been made and eventually adapted with the aim of facilitating success in the fulfilment of the teaching objective. The Basle and Bern groups have made special contributions to the definition of the mission statement to which all their activities have been oriented.

The programme has, no doubt, been extremely useful to the participants who have received conceptual, methodological and theoretical training in Gender Studies while increasing their level of knowledge on their specific disciplines. Expectations related to the completion of doctoral/postdoctoral thesis, however do not seem to have been fulfilled. The self-evaluation report clearly states that "by the end of the three year graduate programme the doctoral and postdoctoral thesis should be at an advanced state". Data provided by the different groups indicate that of the 58 participants in the first programme, 4 have finished their thesis, 29 are in a more or less advanced state (which means that they will finish them in the period of one year or more from Spring 2005) and the rest have a longer way ahead.

Throughout the present report the expert group has made constant references to the importance of identifying the graduate programme with visible, concrete results beyond the indisputable support provided to the graduates. With the participation of the country in the Bologna process this need increases. Studies offered by the programme will have international value as long as they are associated to one or other of the Bologna cycles and the corresponding Dublin descriptors. This means establishment of clear concrete objectives whose achievement will be reflected in the Diploma Supplement. The expert group was surprised that there seemed to be no engagement with the Bologna process in the network as would befit both its status as a pioneering institution, and as a member organization of a signatory of the Bologna agreement. The expert group relies on the enormous potential of the groups and the capacity of the network to establish and achieve realistic objectives which will help to identify the image of the network against other providers of postgraduate training. Some recommendations have already been made in this respect. The last section of this report offers further suggestions for quality enhancement.

## **Area 2: Internal Organisation and Quality Assurance Measures**

### ***Standard 2.03***

*Quality assurance measures exist for the programmes. The institution makes use of the results to periodically revise the programmes.*

For an introduction to this area, please refer to Quality Standards for Academic Institutions: Standard 1.05.

The quality evaluation measures taken at the level of national coordination heavily rely on the students assessment of the programme activities. The steering committee and coordinators analyse the results of the evaluations and use them to constantly adapt the national programme events and also in the planning of future activities. Important decisions, such as the adoption of English in conference contexts have been taken as a result of complaints from the participating students. The expert team values positively the constant concern demonstrated by the programme authorities in trying to adapt the programme to students needs. The interdisciplinary nature of the network, however, the diversity of individual disciplines and consequently research interests of the students require a thorough planning of the programmes in order to ensure that the basic theoretical, methodological and conceptual aspects are covered. We, therefore, recommend that students' opinions and suggestions continue to be used in programme revisions but always ensuring that these adaptations do not lead to a weakening of the programme or a loss of the objectives that the leading academics, using their knowledge and professional experience have carefully established.

The self-evaluation report provides detailed descriptions of the quality assurance procedures established by the different groups. These are absolutely independent, individual descriptions that correspond to different evaluation methods, put emphases on different aspects and, obviously, show different results. In all cases concern for quality exists and a deep interest in improving every aspect of the programme implementation, but no common conclusions are offered after the different descriptions. A more analytical approach to this part of the report would have been appreciated

While it has been made clear that the four groups work on a decentralized basis, have their own thematic emphasis, belong to different academic systems and even use different languages, none of these important reasons should prevent the graduate programme from offering, in this aspect too, a more unified, harmonized image.

The expert group recommends the adoption of a common quality assurance system to be applied in the four local units and in the so-called national programme.

### **Area 3 Curriculum and Teaching Methods**

#### ***Standard 3.02***

*The range of programmes covers the major aspects of the field in question. It allows students to acquire scientific working methods and ensures that research findings are integrated. The teaching and evaluation methods used are in line with the stated teaching objectives.*

According to the objectives established in the mission statement, the aim of the study programme is to provide knowledge in gender studies and gender theories. Both the self-evaluation report and the discussions during the on-site visit provide evidence that the programme covers the major aspects of the field and allows the students to acquire scientific working methods. Furthermore, due to its interdisciplinary character, the parts of the programme dealing with individual disciplines have been adapted to the specialization fields of the different groups.

On the other hand, the lack of basic Gender Studies background of many of the participants in the first cycle of the study programme made it necessary to provide them with an overview of the different methodological approaches to gender studies and basic theoretical grounding in the field. The self-evaluation report offers detailed individual and independent descriptions and explanations of the study programmes in the different groups. Despite the differences, a common feature is evident: at least one year (two semesters) is used to offer the students the gender studies background they need to face their objective of writing doctoral or habilitation theses under this approach. With the exception of the Zurich group (which after making a short reference to the interdisciplinary character of the teaching offered, refers to the benefits obtained from network collaboration), the groups do not explain whether they have taken advantage of the possibilities that the networking structure offers in this context. They all have made the effort to bring the students to an adequate background level in gender studies but do so independently of each other.

It is our view that a specialization of the components of the group in terms of competences and profiles would have avoided unnecessary repetition of efforts by using synergies within the network. For future cycles planning, a more concrete definition of the meaning of gender competence within the network would be desirable, together with the establishment of a certain teaching canon at the level of the network, so that the four local units use a "common language" for students from different disciplines. With respect to other possibilities of facing the problem of lack of gender studies knowledge of candidate graduates, we strongly support the idea briefly suggested in the self-evaluation report of using synergies with the project *Gender Studies Switzerland*. A desirable result derived from this cooperation would be the transfer of this basic education to an MA programme outside the network. This suggestion is further developed in the last section of the present report.

## **Area 4 Teaching Staff**

### **Standard 4.01**

*Courses are held by competent teachers with appropriate formal and subject-related qualifications.*

The self evaluation document as well as the site visit offered evidence that the teaching staff participating in the programme are highly competent and academically qualified. As mentioned under Institutional standard 4.01, foreign experts are invited on the basis of their academic prestige in the field and their adequacy to the academic interests of the graduates. The continuous student evaluations carried out in the four groups also serve as an efficient means to ensure the quality standards of the teaching staff.

### **3.- Profile of the main strengths and weaknesses of the unit. Further recommendations on enhancing quality.**

On the basis of the analysis of the unit's fulfilment of the standards and the observations and comments made during the on-site visit, the expert group offers its views on the main strengths and weaknesses below.

Most of these observations were presented to the *Netzwerk Graduiertenkollegien Gender Studies Schweiz* at the end of the visit in mid-June and have been incorporated in more detail into the present report in the corresponding sections of the standards analysis.

The importance of research and research training in maintaining and improving quality and enhancing competitiveness and attractiveness of the EHEA has been underlined by the European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education in the recently published Bergen Communiqué (19-20 May 2005)<sup>1</sup>. We would like to start our comments by commending the network for the most innovative, pioneering idea of gathering efforts around this common, ambitious goal. The main objectives of the programme, stated as the improvement of the research abilities of the participants, the training of highly qualified doctoral students and the promotion of gender competence in the academic field are really impressive and have been cleverly incorporated in the network which offers an answer to the need for the establishment of graduate colleges in Switzerland and to the lack of a systematic promotion and support of Gender Studies in the country.

The meetings during the visit made it clear that the graduates greatly benefit from the conception of the programme. The research training

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<sup>1</sup> The European Higher Education Area-Achieving the goals. Communiqué of the Conference of European Ministers responsible for Higher Education, Bergen, 19-20 may 2005.  
[http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/Docs/00Main\\_doc/050520\\_Bergen\\_Communique.pdf](http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/Docs/00Main_doc/050520_Bergen_Communique.pdf)

groups offer them an intense environment of advice, work and cooperation. The interdisciplinary approach fosters research contacts to students and teachers of other training groups both in Switzerland and abroad. The network structure enhances the graduates' mobility and furthers their methodological and theoretical knowledge. The synergy effects generated by sharing common goals are extremely beneficial for participants at all levels. A most valuable consequence is the creation of internal working groups where graduates support one another, discuss critically their work and create the basis for long-term interdisciplinary cooperation.

Interdisciplinarity is one of the most positive, innovative features of the unit. Once again they have anticipated the challenges expressed by the European HE ministers when they "urge universities to ensure that their doctoral programmes promote interdisciplinary training and the development of transferable skills"<sup>2</sup>. Graduates participating in the programme can benefit from this interdisciplinary dialogue, but also from the acquisition of gender competence, for the most part a non-existing possibility in their own disciplines.

Another valuable feature of the unit is their fundamental role in providing students with key competences that are crucial for the further development of their careers, within and outside the university, such as language competences, moderating techniques, ability to formulate research proposals, acquisition of a professional and discipline-specific attitude as part of their academic culture, establishment of international contacts, enhancement of gender competence and academic writing techniques.

The outstanding personal, temporal and conceptual commitment of academics at all levels of responsibility involved in the network is very commendable. The cooperation between the universities has been most positive, they have succeeded in establishing reliable and productive structures and in developing a common network. One of its best elements, and one which could be an example for future network planning designs within the country and abroad, is the social distribution of the supervisory function, comprising discipline supervisors, peers, experts at a local, national and international level and gender supervisors. The programme acts as a supervisory network, matching student-teacher pairs and peer groups beyond geographical location and accidental acquaintance. Whether the respective discipline supervisors are involved or not in the network, the junior scholars are accompanied, advised and supported by the professors, coordinators and foreign experts in gender studies.

In this respect, although the on-site visit provided more transparency regarding the organizational structure of the different units, we had problems in understanding the responsibilities and specificities gathered under the rather confusing term "Trägerschaft" and the allocation of responsibilities between the different levels of supervision and academic support. As already suggested in the present report, further attention should be paid to the inherent risk of responsibility and process control getting lost between the parties involved.

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<sup>2</sup> Vid. [http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/Docs/00-Main\\_doc/050520\\_Bergen\\_Communique.pdf](http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/Docs/00-Main_doc/050520_Bergen_Communique.pdf)

The responsibilities of the local organizers are very wide. They are experienced scholars specialized in Gender Studies who direct the training group and have academic responsibility for it. They supervise the students progress and, supported by coordinators work on the organizational and conceptual level. It is our view that the network is characterized by a highly motivated and hardworking staff, who create a positive environment and an enthusiastic atmosphere for students. Regrettably, there is not financial or academic compensation for the professors for this time-consuming work and appropriate acknowledgment of this valuable activity should be a priority for the participating institutions. As commented on during the visit, their commitment is purely vocational and disinterested. We would like to commend these professionals for their dedication and enthusiasm in the promotion of junior graduates.

The network presents itself in German and French in the internet platform Gender Campus ([www.gendercampus.ch](http://www.gendercampus.ch)), a most useful information tool and work platform designed and maintained by the Bern group. The brilliant idea of creating this virtual campus offers multiple possibilities to the network that have not been fully exploited so far. The information provided both on the web site and in the self-evaluation report is presented in a way that does not help the reader to understand the structure of the network, which looks like a sum of four different (although coordinated) experiences rather than one network with four different concretions. We would like to recommend the unit to work further on the image of the network in this respect. A more elaborated English version of the web site, including presentation of the work in progress and the results obtained by the training groups would be desirable in order to reach a wider audience of future candidates. This would enhance the international dimension of the network and facilitate selection of graduates among a larger pool of applicants, which, in turn, could offer a solution to the present gender imbalance situation. During the on site visit the language problem was mentioned as having been treated in a retreat held in May 2005. We support the proposal made of adopting English as the conference language to avoid low participation in activities derived from language deficiencies. German and French should not disappear as working languages of the unit, which should promote pragmatic multilingualism. This will have to have an effect in the selection of future candidates.

The expert panel appreciates very positively the efforts made by the different units in the design of a new product in a collaborative way, especially one where so many different levels of the academic environment are involved. The teaching programmes proposed for the 1<sup>st</sup> cycle (2002-05) had not only been seriously and carefully planned but were attractive and promising. In the self-evaluation report, however, the programme does not seem to have been implemented according to the initial plan. We highly value the continuous efforts made by the units in adapting their teaching to the students needs as expressed in the frequent contacts maintained at different levels. Constant concern for student satisfaction is one of the most positive aspects of the network. Their participation in the design of the activities and future editions of the programme is seen as a valuable contribution that should be maintained in the future. However, the network should consider the establishment of

a basic core curriculum of the programme with clear conceptual and methodological objectives, and a clearly defined temporal and organizational structure to be maintained as originally proposed, in order to offer a more stable, transparent and coherent image of the programme and the competences achieved by their participants.

While diversity derived from the co-existence within the network of different university systems and different academic traditions serves to enhance the potential of the network, the network itself would be greatly reinforced by the adoption of a series of common standards shared by the four units. As already mentioned in this report, lack of common standards may lead to excessive diversification in practice and an imbalance in the progress of students. We recommend the adoption of common standards in the following realms:

- Common criteria in the selection of candidates. Enlarging the pool of applicants (as already mentioned) by international advertising of the programme. Stressing the criterion of excellence, establishing clearly the demands put on the student at the start of the programme (basic grounding in Gender Studies, language competence, quality of project, long-term perspectives, funding possibilities). Criteria for accepting or rejecting candidates should be extensively discussed and developed in the network before the adoption of the common criteria.
- Common practices in the evaluation of student progress. Rights and obligations with respect to the expectations for the doctoral and postdoctoral thesis should be the same for participants in the programme irrespectively of their assignation to one or other local group. A systematic and commonly established control of the developments made by the students should be adopted. The certificate of performance should be a unifying tool within the network. The demands put on the students before, during and at the end of their participation in the programme should be harmonized. This will provide a more clearly defined picture of the qualifications provided by the programme.
- It would be helpful for students to offer a commonly defined profile of the competency in Gender Studies that the network offers. The use of a "common language" in the four local groups would be highly beneficial for students.
- Common practices in quality assurance measures. The network is strong in its interest in guaranteeing the quality of teaching and research. Multiple examples were offered in the self-evaluation report and during the site visit of the many mechanisms used in the four groups in this respect which reveals a high degree of commitment but also. the lack of a common system. We strongly recommend the adoption of a common quality assurance system as a useful tool that will be very beneficial for the external image of the network.

As already commented in the present report, there is evidence of the usefulness of the programme and of its success in providing the participants with valuable training in Gender Studies while increasing their level of knowledge in their specific disciplines. Expectations about thesis completion have not been fulfilled, though. We would like to insist on the importance of identifying the programmes offered by the *Netzwerk Graduiertenkollegien Gender Studies Schweiz* with visible, concrete academic results linked to realistic objectives. It is our view that the experience gained during the first cycle of the programme and attention to recommendations made in this report will help the network to improve the level of achievement with regards to thesis completion at the end of the programme.

The normal workload of the third study cycle (doctoral) in most European countries corresponds to 3-4 years full time. The programme designed by the *Netzwerk Graduiertenkollegien Gender Studies Schweiz* has been designed on a three year basis, which actually is in line with this timeframe. The lack of a Gender Studies approach in many of the individual disciplines of the participants has made it necessary to invest one of these years in providing them with basic background knowledge. We would like to suggest the need of establishing close cooperation links with the project Gender Studies Switzerland with the aim of transferring basic gender education outside the network programme in the form of a masters programme. This would not be, however, a sufficient measure to guarantee success in the results unless the funding problem finds an effective solution.

This is undoubtedly the principal weakness and the major challenge that the network has to face. Three-four years full time (depending on the disciplines) working in a thesis requires a sound funding system which guarantees that the graduate can spend most of his/her time on this objective. The self-evaluation report, the on-site visit and the experts' report have had the issue of the students scholarships present behind every comment or suggestion. Urgent decisions are needed in order to break the present "vicious cycle" derived from the lack of financial help in the Swiss system for graduates preparing their doctoral or habilitation theses. We hope that the need to increase the numbers of doctoral candidates taking up research careers within the EHEA recently expressed by the ministers<sup>3</sup> will change this situation in the near future. We strongly recommend, however, that the network adopts a more research-oriented approach which could attract state funding by means of research projects in which the participants are involved. This will, of course have an impact on the selection procedures and criteria. The different candidate projects should be put together and contrasted having in mind the possibility (not contemplated so far) of establishing research groups within the network.

Both in the self-evaluation report and during the on-site visit the network referred to the international dimension of the graduate programme as a

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<sup>3 3</sup> The European Higher Education Area-Achieving the goals. Communiqué of the Conference of European Ministres responsible for Higher Education, Bergen, 19-20 may 2005.

valuable feature represented by the organization of international conferences, participation of foreign experts in local and national events, collaboration of these foreign academics in the supervision of graduates, acceptance to the programme of students from other countries, participation of the doctoral programme students in activities organized abroad, and establishment of links with seven foreign institutions . We would like to emphasize the positive results obtained in giving an international dimension to the first cycle of the graduate programme. Considering the deep interest demonstrated by the network at this respect, it is rather surprising that the self-evaluation report does not include any reference to the Bologna process and the establishment of the European Higher Education Area. We recommend the network to start a reflexion on the meaning of institutional internationalisation, well beyond the establishment of the already mentioned cooperation links. Switzerland being one of the signatory countries of the Bologna declaration and member of the Bologna Follow Up Group, all discussions and decisions about any future study programmes should take into account the advancements already made in the last six years. For further editions of the programme, we recommend the network to define its position within the higher education cycle structure as established in the Bologna process. The Dublin descriptors can be useful instruments in the definition of learning objectives and outcomes and would help the graduate programme to clarify the level and type of demands which should be put on students both at the start of the programme and on its completion. As suggested above, a close cooperation with the collaborative project *Gender Studies Switzerland 2004-2008* -in which all universities composing the network participate- would be very beneficial for the future planning of the network. Leaving the basic training in Gender Studies to be covered at other academic levels would allow the network to select among highly prepared and interested candidates who could use the whole length of the programme for developing their skills and applying them in the preparation and completion of their doctoral or habilitation theses.

#### **4.- Conclusion**

It is the overall conclusion of the expert group that the *Netzwerk Graduiertenkollegien Gender Studies Schweiz* fulfils the standards established and has succeeded in the design and implementation of a quality graduate programme. Further possibilities of development and quality enhancement exist which have been suggested throughout this report. We invite the network to follow the recommendations made in future planning of the programme.

#### **5.- Recommendation on accreditation**

The expert group recommends unconditional accreditation as an academic institution of the Network Swiss Graduate Programme in Gender Studies

observing, however, the recommendations and methodological reflections put forward in the present report.

As a response to the present report, the Network Swiss Graduate Programme in Gender Studies has sent to the experts' team a series of observations, modifications of objective data and comments. The data modifications have already been incorporated in the body of the report. After analysing and discussing the institution's comments and observations, the expert's group has thought it convenient to include some of them below as an annex to the report.

## **Annex 1: Some comments and observations made by the institution in relation to the experts' report.**

### **Confirmation of the most important recommendations and of steps undertaken towards quality enhancement**

After three years of experience with the present organization, and having just commenced the second three-year cycle, we consider the present moment ideal to undertake the changes necessary for the further enhancement of the quality of the Network and the development of its potential. Furthermore, it is the perfect opportunity to adjust our programme to recent international developments in the field of advanced training for postgraduates. Finally, introducing the suggestions by the Group of Experts to a broader academic community also allows us to contribute impulses to the national development of Ph.D. programmes in Switzerland; a process which has only just been started by the various university commissions and commissions of the scientific policy making bodies.

Regarding the second cycle of the graduate school programme, we can benefit especially from the following valuable recommendations by the Group of Experts:

- Making greater use of the added-value offered by the national network
- Improving the visibility of the programme as a unit, both nationally and internationally, and transmitting the image of one integrated network consisting of four different subdivisions, each with a field of specialisation
- Elaboration of common standards for selection and acceptance criteria of participants.

Some of the recommendations have already been partly implemented for the second programme or are in a planning stage and will be concretised over the coming years.

Thus we have already started improvements in the following areas:

- Development of a more coherent concept for the Network

- Optimisation of a common quality assurance system which respects the diversity of the conditions within the different Swiss universities
- Development of a nation-wide agreement with the students, which spells out their obligations and rights with respect to participation in the local and the national programme; their presentations of papers at local and national meetings; and their obligations regarding the progress of their research
- Provision of a common basis on the national level within the different methodological and theoretical approaches in Gender Studies
- Agreement upon an extension of the use of English for summer schools and international meetings which respects the Swiss tradition of multilingualism
- Intensification of international networking
- Increased efforts in public relations
- Enlargement of the pool of applicants through broader international advertising of the programme.

Some of the recommendations we consider extremely important could not yet be realised due to organizational and especially financial constraints. This concerns the following issues:

- Procurement of grants for all participants for at least one or two years to allow equally intensive work and to ensure comparability of progress amongst the participants
- Establishment of a research programme as a means to attract funding (NCCR, NFP)
- Financial or other compensation for the Governing Body (*Tägerschaft*) of the programme.

We regard these recommendations extremely important and will therefore continue striving towards their concretisation.

### **Concluding remark:**

The development of Ph.D. programmes in the Humanities and the Social Sciences in

Switzerland is in its initial stages. Developing such programmes is partly the result of the Bologna process and partly the result of the general insight that greater formalisation of the education system will help raise the number of excellent Ph.D. theses. With the Graduate Programme in Gender Studies we wish to counter the structural difficulties of pursuing doctoral studies in the Humanities and the Social Sciences, thereby ensuring that a new generation of highly qualified junior scholars will be available to pursue essential research in Switzerland. The discussion with the experts during the site visit and the recommendations in the

International Group of Experts' report offers us the valuable opportunity to further enhance the quality of the programme and to define our position within the newly evolving structures of the higher education cycle.