

EVALUATION AND ACCREDITATION DOCUMENTS

Master of Commercial Law

Prince Sultan University
College of Law

Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

June 2024

Rapport publié le 12/07/2024

CONTENTS

Evaluation report	pages 1 to 16
Comments of the institution	pages 17 to 20
Accreditation decision	following pages



International evaluation and accreditation

EVALUATION REPORT

Master of Commercial Law

Prince Sultan University
College of Law

Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

May 2024



Prince Sultan University has mandated the Hcéres to perform the evaluation of its Master of Commercial Law programme. The evaluation is based on the “External Evaluation Standards” of foreign study programmes, adopted by the Hcéres Board on January 31st, 2022. These standards are available on the Hcéres website (hceres.fr).

In the name of the expert committee¹ :

Sandrine CLAVEL, President of the committee

In the name of Hcéres¹ :

Stéphane Le Bouler, Acting President

The Higher Council for Evaluation of Research and Higher Education (Hcéres) is an independent public authority. It is responsible for evaluating higher education and research institutions, research organisations, research units, and training programmes.

1. In accordance with articles R. 114-15 and R. 114-10 of the French Research Code, evaluation reports are signed by the President of the expert committee and countersigned by the President of Hcéres.

CONTENTS

I. Study programme Identity Sheet	2
II. Composition of the experts panel.....	4
III. Evaluation process	4
Visit description	4
People met	4
IV. Overall presentation	6
Presentation of the programme's self-evaluation approach	6
V. Evaluation report.....	7
Field 1- training policy and characterisation.....	7
Field 2 – pedagogical organisation of the study programme	8
Field 3 – attractiveness, performance and relevance of the study programme	10
Field 4 – academic programme management and continuous improvement	11
VI. Conclusion	13
Strenghts.....	13
Weaknesses	13
Recommendations for the institution.....	14
VII. Comments of the institution	15

I. STUDY PROGRAMME IDENTITY SHEET

- University/institution: Prince Sultan University (PSU)
- Component, faculty or department concerned: College of Law (CL)
- Programme's title: Master of Commercial Law (MCL)
- Training/specialty: Commercial Law
- Year of creation and context: 2016
- Site(s) where the programme is taught (Town and campus): Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

PROGRAMME DIRECTOR

- Name, first name: Prof. Jawahitha Sarabdeen
- Position held: Full professor
- Discipline: Commercial Law

METHODS AND RESULTS OF THE PREVIOUS ACCREDITATION(S)

This programme has not undergone yet any national nor international accreditation.

HUMAN AND MATERIAL RESOURCES DEDICATED TO THE PROGRAMME

The College's human resources needs are established by the *College Council* and the *Deanship office* in line with the PSU policy.

The permanent teaching team for the MCL consists of a dozen professors annually, comprising six men and six women, chosen from a pool of 38 faculty members holding PhDs. The selection may vary from year to year, depending on the elective courses available. In addition to the professors, the team includes individual supervisors, selected from the faculty members with PhDs and publication records, with a maximum of two students per supervisor.

The administration of the Master programme primarily relies on the joint resources of the College of law, which encompass:

1. the *Deanship office*, comprising the Dean, supported by an administrative assistant, the Chair of the Department, the Female Campus Associate Chair, the Director of the MCL Programme, and four secretaries. The College of Law Deanship office is in turn supported by the *PSU Deanship of Admission and Registration* for the enrolment of law students and classroom reservations, as well as from the *Deanship of Student Affairs for extracurricular activities*, including College student clubs.
2. the *CL Quality assurance and curriculum review committees*, further supported by the *Deanship of Quality Assurance and Development (DQAD)* and the *institutional curriculum committee (ICC)*.

Regarding material resources, the programme utilises the infrastructures and resources of both the College of Law and the University, which are impressive in terms of:

1. Installations: six buildings, sports facilities, social amenities such as in-house nursery, healthcare facilities like infirmaries, numerous and user-friendly cafeterias, and parkings areas with shuttles for those located further away.
2. Educational resources: These encompass large halls for prestigious events and a substantial number (over 129) of classrooms; as well as splendid libraries with extensive on-campus and online documentation. Significant efforts are undertaken to promote accessibility for individuals with disabilities.

All of these facilities are duplicated to offer a non-mixed gender environment for female students. Moreover, ongoing campus development projects are underway.

STUDENT POPULATION: EVOLUTION AND TYPOLOGY OVER THE LAST 4 YEARS, including number of graduates

		2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024
Enrolled Year 1	Male	-	-	-	6	
	Female	13	0	14	7	11
	Nationals	13	0	14	6	16
	Foreigners	0	0	0	1	0
	Total	13	0	14	13	16
Enrolled Year 2	Male	-	-	-	0	6
	Female	11	20	13	16	8
	Nationals	11	20	13	16	7
	Foreigners	0	0	0	0	1
	Total	11	20	13	16	14
Total (Years 1 & 2)		24	20	27	29	30
Graduated	Male	-	-	-	-	
	Female	3	7	11	15	0
	Nationals	3	7	11	15	0
	Foreigners	0	0	0	0	0
	Total	3	7	11	15	0

II. COMPOSITION OF THE EXPERTS PANEL

Chair:

Dr. Sandrine Clavel, Full Professor of Private Law, Université Paris Saclay

Experts:

- Dr. Walid Ben Hamida, Full Professor of Private Law, University of Lille
- Dr. Nawal Daffeur, Postdoctoral researcher, University of Poitiers
- Dr Alexandra Mendoza-Caminade, Full Professor of Private law, Toulouse Capitole University

Hcéres was represented by Michelle Houppe, Head of project, Europe and International Department.

III. EVALUATION PROCESS

VISIT DESCRIPTION

- **Date of the visit: 29-30 January 2024**
- **Summary of the proceedings:** Before the visit took place, the self-assessment report and many appendices had been received by the experts. During the on-site visit, the panel met with over 30 individuals over a span of two days, following the schedule included hereinafter. Once written by the panel chair, the report was circulated to all panel members for review.
- **Cooperation of study programme and institution to be accredited:** the university provided full access to the areas and documents, and answered all the committee's questions.
- **Any problems:** None

PEOPLE MET

Day 1: Monday January 29th, 2024

Time	Session	Audience
9:00 – 9:30	Opening session with top management	Meeting with the top management of the university: PSU President; Vice President for Academic Affairs; Vice President for Campus for Women (CW); Assistant to the VP for Administrative and Financial Affairs
9:30 – 10:30	Presentation of the MCL & Discussion	Meeting with the Dean of College, the General Supervisor of the Graduate Studies Unit; the MCL study programme director, and the Chair of the Law Department
11:00 – 12:30	MCL Teaching staff	Meeting with a panel of professors teaching in the programme, representative in terms of position, status, discipline, nationality
12:30 – 2:30 pm	Campus tour	
2:30 – 3:30 pm	Alumni & Employers	Meeting with alumni and current employers of students or alumni, representing different sectors of activity (employment or internships)

Day 2: Tuesday January 30th, 2024

Time	Session	Audience
9:00 – 10:00	Quality assurance	Meeting with Quality assurance - Evaluation & Academic Accreditation representatives
10 :00 – 11 :00	MCL Students	Meeting with a representative panel of students from the programme
12:00 – 1:00 pm	Closing session (last questions /no restitution)	Closing meeting with the Dean and the Study programme director.

IV. OVERALL PRESENTATION

Prince Sultan University (PSU), established by King Salman, was the first private university instituted in Saudi Arabia. Founded in 1998 as a College and later elevated to university status in 2003, it opened to women in 2001. Currently, it is composed of six Colleges, catering to approximately 7,400 students with a distribution of 3400 men, and 4000 women. Operating as a "non-profit institution", although the tuition fees exceed those of other universities in Riyadh (double as compared to public universities; and substantially above other private universities), all the benefits are reinvested into enhancing teaching conditions and programmes. Partial scholarships are extended to students, with 15 scholarships currently available for 30 enrolled students in the MCL programme, covering 50 to 60% of tuition fees. PSU is committed to realising the objectives the Kingdom's vision 2030, striving to emerge as the first non-profit private university in the Middle East region and attain an international acclaim. At present, it holds the top position among Saudi universities in international rankings such as Times Higher Education.

The programme *Master of Commercial Law* is part of the College of Law, established in 2006. Alongside, the Master's programme, the College of Law administers a Bachelor's programme, which spans four years, after one preparatory year. The Bachelor programme was accredited by HCERES for a five-year term in March 2023. As of 2022, the College of Law boasted an enrolment of 814 students across its various programmes.

The Master of Commercial Law was established in 2016, with a primary focus on imparting comprehensive knowledge of commercial law to support the ongoing transformation of the Saudi economy. The programme is designed to cultivate law professionals capable of meeting the demands of the numerous multinational companies, governmental bodies, and international organisations based in Riyadh. A notable aspect of the programme is its emphasis on teaching in English, with 80% of the courses delivered in this language. This unique feature distinguishes the Master's programme as one of its kind in Saudi Arabia and among selected few in the wider Middle East Region. In the same line, the programme is globally oriented, with contributions from international experts and concerted efforts to encourage international mobility, including opportunities for summer courses abroad, and foster international cooperation. Research plays a pivotal role for both faculty members and students alike. Upon completing the second semester, students have the option to choose between two tracks: the *Courses* track (six core courses + four elective courses) or the *Courses and Thesis* track (six core courses + two elective courses + a Master's thesis). Regardless of the track chosen, all students receive education in research methodology and ethics.

The programme accepts candidates holding a LLB degree, either from PSU or from other universities, with a significant portion of candidates originating from institutions such as King Saud University and Princess Nourah University. However, merely practising or possessing a degree in Sharia Law is insufficient for admission. The Law Faculty is currently developing a foundational course, completion of which may become a pre-requirement for students with a background in Sharia Law seeking entry into the Master's programme. Almost 100% of the enrolled students are concurrently employed, necessitating a schedule that accommodates their work commitments. Accordingly, all courses are scheduled in the late afternoon or evening, so that students may attend classes after their workday. Classrooms are typically organised separately by gender, with mixed-gender classes being the exception and limited to specific instances such as conferences led by visiting professors. Furthermore, courses are usually conducted in very small groups to facilitate effective learning.

PRESENTATION OF THE PROGRAMME'S SELF-EVALUATION APPROACH

The Self-Evaluation process has been meticulously conducted, overseen by an internal committee jointly led by the Director of MCL programme and the Chair of the Law Department. The effort received substantial support from various services within both the College of Law and the University, notably from the *Quality Assurance Centre (QAC)*, the *Evaluation Academic Accreditation Centre (EAAC)* and the *Graduate Studies Unit (GSU)*. The resulting Self-Evaluation report is exceptionally clear, comprehensive, and well-crafted. Each standard is thoroughly analysed and meticulously documented.

V. EVALUATION REPORT

FIELD 1- TRAINING POLICY AND CHARACTERISATION

The Master of Commercial Law programme aligns seamlessly with the Kingdom's 2030 vision and Prince Sultan University's pedagogical and socio-economic goals.

In addition to fulfilling the Kingdom's 2030 vision, PSU places significant emphasis on providing "quality education to the highest international standards" and "equal to other reputable universities in the world". Special attention is dedicated to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Likewise, the College of Law is committed to providing "an outstanding legal education and training that promotes the rule of law, ethics, and sustainability". The Master of Commercial Law actively embraces these goals and is committed to achieve them. At the outset of each academic year, a comprehensive action plan is prepared by the CL and implemented by the MCL programme to advance strategic goals.

The substantial focus on commercial law and the predominant use of English as the medium of instruction are highly relevant with a market-oriented national strategy and is consistent with the international context of globalization. The programme apprehends commercial law from a sustainable development perspective, an orientation which is particularly evident in the research dissertation topics chosen by students. The programme maintains a good balance between research (Master's dissertation in the "Thesis track"; research training and assignments in both tracks), and practical professional skills (extracurricular activities). It also strikes a balance between the acquisition of knowledge through coursework and the development of skills through case studies, moot courts competition, and participation in law clinics). Eventually, the promotion of women lies at the core of the Master's programme. Originally open exclusively to women, this initiative aligns with national policy and with the university's overarching strategy.

Although the organisation of the programme as well as the incentives for foreign students are highly compatible with a satisfactory openness of the programme to international students, the institutional and legal context has, so far, made incoming mobility challenging.

Achieving internationalisation and enhancing the programme's attractiveness to foreign students are imperative in attaining the goal of providing "quality education equal to other reputable universities in the world". However, existing institutional and administrative constraints, such as national visa policies, have hindered the mobility of foreign students. Over the past four years, only two female international students have enrolled at the College of Law. Although a scholarship programme aimed at foreign students exists, its effectiveness seems limited due to the insufficient number of foreign candidates. However, a relaxation of visa formalities in the near future could potentially reverse this trend. The CL seems to be willing to increase the enrolment of international students.

Compared to other Saudi private universities, PSU's College of law enjoys the advantage of a robust research centre that actively supports research activities associated with the MCL programme. Ongoing discussions regarding the establishment of a doctoral school are relevant and warrant further attention.

The MCL programme places a strong emphasis on research. In addition to the place reserved for research in the organisation of the programme, the MCL benefits from a stimulating research environment, distinguishing it from other Saudi private universities. The *Governance & Policy Design Research Lab* (GPDRL), established by the College of Law in 2019, serves as a focal point for research initiatives, with distinct research wings dedicated to key areas of legal science: public law, private law, and commercial and international law. The GPDRL regularly hosts research events aimed to foster the faculty scientific activities but also to complement training activities organised for students. For instance, in 2022, the GPDRL organised the inaugural MCL student research Colloquium, during which eight MCL students presented their research projects. The second MCL student research Colloquium was held on 5th November 2023. Furthermore, concerted efforts are underway to engage international scholars and researchers in delivering conferences, workshops, and webinars on research topics. Faculty members strive to develop links with the international scientific community and with the realm of international legal publishing. Notably, there is a commitment to assisting students enrolled in the "thesis track" to publish in Scopus-indexed journals. However, the requirement to publish in Scopus-indexed journals may be deemed challenging, given the poor indexing of legal journals in Scopus, raising questions about its relevance. The lack of doctoral programme within PSU may be perceived as a weakness, potentially undermining the attractiveness of the "Thesis track". However, it is worth noting that most students pursue the MCL programme with the aim of securing a new or elevated positions in the job market. Nevertheless, discussions regarding the establishment of a doctoral school within the College of law are ongoing, and such an initiative would not only enhance the attractiveness of the "Thesis track" but also align PSU with international standards in higher education.

The special bonds of the MCL with its socio-economic surroundings is one of the major strengths of the programme.

The MCL programme has developed strong links with the socio-economic world, mainly through the College of Law, with several purposes such as:

- 1) Supporting the delivery of practical knowledge and skills to students. Since 2019, the CL has implemented a professional guest programme, which involves inviting experts from various fields of practice to deliver lectures in class.
- 2) Adapting the programme's structure and content to meet the expectations of the job market. The *College of Law Advisory Board*, which consists of professionals and experts from practice and the government, gives advices on the programme's organisation. PSU also conducts annual employers' surveys and alumni surveys.
- 3) Favouring the students' professional integration. Partnerships exist with legal offices such as Clyde & Co, Latham & Watkins, White & Case, Eversheds, and Al Tamimi, as well as government bodies such as the Bureau of experts at the Council of Ministers, the Saudi Authority of Intellectual Property, the Capital Market Authority, and the Saudi Bar Association.
- 4) Building interactions with the civil society through community services, such as free conferences open to the public and legal aid programmes through the soon-to-be legal clinic developed in partnership with the Saudi Bar Association.

Students are also encouraged to establish direct links with the socio-economic world through law clubs where they invite alumni and national and international legal professionals.

To conclude, the training policy implemented in the Master of Commercial Law programme, along with its key characteristics, align perfectly with PSU's overarching strategy, the expectations of the national socio-economic sphere, and the Kingdom's vision. The programme's focus on commercial law, combined with Sustainable Development Goals and the predominant use of English as the language of instruction, reflects the realities of today's global economic and legal environment. The balance between research-based education and the acquisition of practical skills is satisfactory, the former based on a solid research environment and the latter on strong links with the socio-economic world. The programme is poised to welcome international students, pending relaxation of the national admission policy regarding students' visas.

FIELD 2 – PEDAGOGICAL ORGANISATION OF THE STUDY PROGRAMME

The MCL programme is designed to train highly qualified lawyers able to grasp the complexity of a globalising economic world. The structure of the programme, based on the acquisition of in-depth knowledge and ability to reason, combined with practical and technical skills, is in line with its objective.

The Master's programme in Commercial Law demonstrates remarkable adaptability to meet the demands of the market, distinguishing itself through its bilingual framework, a distinctive feature absent in similar programmes across the Kingdom.

The programme is structured in four semesters designed according to the principle of progressive specialization, which is consistent with most of international standards, even if the two-year study duration is internally debated as it raises issues in terms of competition with one-year long programmes (LLM) offered abroad. The study programme offers two distinct tracks: the "courses track" and the "thesis track", the latter including the crafting of a research dissertation, thereby enhancing the educational experience with a profound research-oriented dimension. Both tracks share common mandatory courses, supplemented by optional courses, the number of which is specific to each track. Special attention is given to the design of these courses, ensuring alignment with the Master's programme objectives and tailored to cater to the evolving demands of the local legal market, while also addressing the individual expectations of the students. The self-imposed limitation on the number of students admitted to the program, typically fewer than 15 students annually, has occasionally resulted in difficulties in opening certain optional courses due to not meeting the minimum enrolment threshold. This discrepancy between the advertised optional courses and those actually offered may understandably generate feelings of frustration among students. However, students have acknowledged the efforts made to facilitate enrolment in the options they consider essential. Still, this point deserves attention, insofar as one possible development of the Master's programme could be to broaden the range of options offered, which seems difficult given current enrolment levels.

The teaching of legal practice is imparted through various methods, such as presentations, case studies, and class debates. Additionally, extracurricular activities play a pivotal role in reinforcing practical skills, with moot court sessions and related programmes serving as prominent examples.

For students who have completed the thesis track, transitioning to a Ph.D. programme is presented as a seamless and beneficial progression for both intellectual and professional development. The support for a doctoral school project signifies a natural evolution within the academic journey. The completion of this project would be the culmination of a well-designed study cycle.

The MCL programme focuses on supporting student success through a carefully designed pedagogical approach. This approach includes attention to organisation, ensuring that students can balance their studies with employment, a common scenario for MCL students. The teaching methods selected are aimed at facilitating the acquisition of both theoretical knowledge and practical skills.

Current pedagogical approaches at MCL are characterised by their diversity, incorporating both traditional methods, such as lectures, and more interactive approaches like presentations, case studies, debates, and seminars. The learning experience extends beyond the classroom to encompass optional extracurricular activities such as moot court competitions and international contests, providing students with unique opportunities to apply their skills in real-world contexts. However, feedback from the interviews conducted by the experts' panel acknowledged that not all students are fully aware of the range of extracurricular activities available. To ensure an optimal balance between theoretical instruction and practical application, it would be opportune to promote active student participation in these activities. This approach would contribute to strengthening their engagement and maximizing the benefits derived from these complementary experiences.

The programme distinguishes itself through a holistic approach focused on achieving tangible results and fostering adaptability. This approach leverages digital tools and platforms such as Moodle and Edugate to maintain continuous communication and monitoring with students, both pedagogically and administratively. Additionally, each student receives personalised pedagogical support from an assigned mentor (supervisor) upon admission to the Master's programme.

This pedagogical approach and the organisation of teaching are designed to meet the needs of employed students, allowing them to balance their studies with professional commitments. Access to a wide array of documentary resources is facilitated through a library equipped with cutting-edge technologies, including access to various databases. These measures contribute to fostering a flexible and inclusive learning environment that supports the academic and professional development of students.

Even if the appropriate conditions are in place to encourage international mobility, contextual reasons - such as the national visa policy for incoming mobility and the situation of employment of students for outgoing mobility – are creating impediments difficult to overcome.

However, the MCL programme offers substantial opportunities for international exposure, particularly towards the Middle East, through its predominantly English (80%) and Arabic (20%) courses offerings. These prospects are supported by a significant number of already established or ongoing negotiations for international agreements and partnerships with foreign universities, as well as the active participation of foreign professors in interventions and conferences.

Currently, institutional and administrative constraints, such as visa policies, have posed challenges for the incoming mobility of foreign students. However, the program's design should facilitate the integration of foreign students once national formalities are relaxed. Incentives envisioned by the College of Law, including the establishment of a doctoral programme and the promotion of exchanges such as joint supervision and co-supervision of these, aims to support this trend towards international openness.

Although the faculty encourages outgoing mobility through initiatives such as summer programmes or moot court competitions abroad, interest in such opportunities is often limited, due to the predominant professional commitments of the majority of students. Despite this, PSU encourages its students to pursue study abroad opportunities by offering to cover 70% of their costs if they are accepted into a top-ranked foreign university.

The study programme maintains strong ties with the socio-economic world, continually adapting to meet its expectations.

This adaptability includes aligning with the Saudi National Qualifications Framework (SNQF) to reflect regulatory changes and institutional directions while considering socio-economic needs. The emphasis on teaching in English aligns with the internationalisation of the economic sector, characterised by the establishment of numerous multinational companies and world-class law firms in the Kingdom.

Though the College does not have promotions for students in continuing education, it possesses the necessary human and material resources to ensure a proper reception process. However, no feedback on this process has been documented thus far. To enhance the visibility and attractiveness of this initiative, a more proactive approach to communicating its existence could be explored.

To conclude, the MCL programme is tailored for students holding a bachelor's degree in law, typically with one or more years of experience in the job market, seeking for an upgrade in knowledge and skills for career advancement or job transition. The pedagogical organisation of the programme adheres to established standards, aligned with the objectives set by the College of Law and in coherence with the Kingdom's policies. Furthermore, it is designed to interact with and cater to the local socio-economic environment. The programme's efforts to foster its international dimension are particularly relevant in a socio-economic landscape marked by continuous internationalisation. These efforts are poised to yield significant results once the socio-political-context permits.

FIELD 3 – ATTRACTIVENESS, PERFORMANCE AND RELEVANCE OF THE STUDY PROGRAMME

The measures taken to monitor the attractiveness and to improve awareness of the programme have proven to be effective.

The MCL employs an efficient information system supported by various tools. Edugate, a digital resource, plays a central role in collecting statistical data and facilitating the evaluation and reporting of the different courses by students. Furthermore, comprehensive information about the programme is readily accessible on a modern and user-friendly website. Additionally, the programme actively utilises social media platforms to promote events, extracurricular activities, and achievements. Regular surveys are conducted to gauge student satisfaction across various aspects of the programme, including research facilities and equipment, learning resources, scientific supervision, and course quality.

The number of students has risen by 76% between 2016 (date of creation of the MCL) and 2023-2024. While the institution offers a scholarship programme open to both Saudi and foreign students, the programme appeal to international students remains somewhat constrained. Nevertheless, recent changes in the Kingdom's visa policy present a fresh prospect to address the issue. Thus, it is imperative for the MCL to actively promote the incoming mobility of foreign students from both the MENA region and beyond.

Adequate monitoring processes are implemented to assess student success.

The *Center for Statistics and Information (CSI)* oversees student success, utilizing various key performance indicators such as the duration of studies, programme completion rate, first-year retention rates, and graduation rates. These indicators are regularly updated and available for review. PSU also publishes pertinent information on its website, notably data on enrolled and graduating students.

Furthermore, several features are specifically designed to evaluate student success and facilitate appropriate measures in order to enhance this success. Each student is assigned an academic supervisor tasked with monitoring his/her success. A system of academic warning is implemented to alert students falling below 3.0 GPA, prompting intervention from their supervisor to address any academic challenges. The Dean and the MCL Director engage regularly with students, soliciting feedback and addressing any issues they may encounter. A Students' Advisory Board, positioned at the top of the organisational structure and directly connected to the Dean, is established to oversee the study programme.

The MCL has implemented efficient mechanisms, involving various stakeholders, to analyse the integration of its students into the job market. These mechanisms facilitate regular adjustments of the programme to respond to the market's needs and expectations.

To this end, the College of Law has established an *Advisory Board* composed of professionals from the private and public sectors. The Advisory Board's primary mission is to provide regular feedback regarding the needs of companies and governmental bodies, as well as to advise on the compliance of the MCL programmes with the market's expectations.

To gauge and enhance students' integration into the job market, the *CSI* conducts regular surveys on market integration, involving alumni, employers, and graduated students. Based on these surveys, the *Curriculum Committee* and the *Graduate Studies Unit* regularly decide on programme changes and courses adaptation. During the visit, data were communicated to the experts' panel evidencing a high level of performance relating to:

1. the employability of the students: in 2022, at least 87,5% of the graduates were employed within a year of graduation, being observed that some students did not answer to survey
2. the satisfaction rate of employers: 98,4% in 2021-2022 and 100% in 2022-2023.

Even if available, these data are not systematically published on the website. To reinforce the attractiveness of the MCL, it could be relevant for PSU to make these data available to the public.

To conclude, the MCL is an attractive, high-performing, and relevant offering at Prince Sultan University. It benefits from effective instruments to monitor its attractiveness and appropriate infrastructures to measure student success. The programme offers numerous competitive advantages, such as: a good management system for evaluating the programme's results in terms of attractiveness, performance, and relevance; a strong employability rate; high rates of employer satisfaction; a comprehensive surveying policy involving various stakeholders; a digitalised and efficient monitoring policy to assess student success; an efficient communication strategy; structural links with socio-economic actors, facilitating an understanding of the market's needs. These competitive advantages should be preserved and further promoted to enhance the programme's attractiveness. The programme's appeal to foreign students is bolstered by the fact that 80% of the courses are taught in English, providing a significant competitive edge in attracting international students.

FIELD 4 – ACADEMIC PROGRAMME MANAGEMENT AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

The organisational structure of the Master's programme aligns with all international requirements. It operates within a highly structured organisational chart within the College, with clearly defined roles and responsibilities for each authority. Over time, the teaching team has shown positive growth in terms of quantity, quality, diversity of academic profiles and skills among faculty members.

The director of the Master's degree, maintains close collaboration with several councils, including the *Master's Council*, the *College Council* and also the *Advisory Board*. The *Advisory Board* comprises experienced and esteemed professionals who convene annually to offer insights and guidance on the strategic orientations of the Master's programme. Interactions among these councils are characterised by fluidity and effectiveness, facilitating productive exchanges of ideas and initiatives. Furthermore, the University extends significant support to the Master's programme, with backing from both the University Presidency and various central components and committees, such as the *Graduate Studies Unit* or the *Committee of Quality Assurance*.

The Master's teaching team relies on 12 professors selected annually from among the 38 faculty members, depending on the courses offered. The quality of recruitment is a key feature of the College of Law, with an increasing number of professors holding a PhD at the Faculty level; all professors teaching in the Master programme possess a PhD. While the representation of women in the MCL team is very satisfactory (around 50%), there is still room for improvement. In fact, at the Faculty level, Saudi female professors are mostly assistant professors (19/22). However, opportunities for academic advancement are provided through a specific promotion procedure based on a double-fold evaluation:

1. external evaluation of research activities conducted by experts from King Saud University;
2. internal evaluation for teaching conducted by the College of Law.

Foreign professors are numerous, providing cultural diversity to the team and a range of legal skills. Some specialise in Sharia law, while others focus on civil law and common law. The recruitment of foreign professors aligns with the Master's objective of bilingualism and increasing internationalisation. Outgoing mobility of staff is encouraged by PSU.

The Master benefits from considerable resources which allow the implementation of the excellence policy advocated by PSU and the College of Law. Regarding the supervision within the Master, the needs of the teaching team are carefully considered.

The overall Faculty staff experienced a fast increase in the number of full-time professors holding a doctorate in law, rising from 32 in 2022 to 38 in 2023. This growth effectively meets the needs of the MCL in terms of both teaching and thesis supervision. Moreover, educational resources are of high quality, encompassing premises, libraries, and other installations. The premises are spacious, with numerous classrooms adapted to the number of students. Access to documentary resources is extensive, with the Central Library providing broad access to a wealth of resources and equipment.

Regarding digital resources, the Master programme relies on the Edugate platform for management purposes. During the visit, the expert panel was introduced to the diverse and extensive functionalities of this platform for managing the Master's degree and the teaching team. For pedagogical purposes, teachers use the Moodle platform, along with Google Drive and Google Meet. According to student feedback, these tools are efficient and effective for their learning needs.

The teaching staff within the university participate in numerous training courses to enhance teaching methods and proficiency in using digital tools. This training is integrated into the annual evaluation of professors, who are also incentivised in their research activities through policies encouraging attendance at international conferences and publication in internationally ranked journals. Additionally, negotiations are underway for professor exchange programmes with several foreign universities, such as Boston, Duke, Saarland. Despite organisational constraints related to course scheduling, which do not allow for intensive courses over short periods, the Master's management successfully attracts renowned foreign professors to deliver hybrid courses and conferences.

Quality assurance is implemented through numerous rules and Committees, ensuring the quality of the courses offered. This is one of the key strengths of the Master's programme, managed with a focus on continuous improvement.

At the end of the semester, students evaluate each course through an exit survey. Professors themselves are required to provide periodic reports on their courses, exams, results and use of Moodle. They undergo training through webinars to ensure compliance with evaluation procedures. The investigation procedure also involves the CSI.

The assessment requirements are crucial, relying on various methods outlined in the academic assessment plan. Incorporating these elements, the Master programme has the ability to implement necessary adaptations of courses and their content. This responsibility lies with the *Programme Review Committee*, with advice from the

Advisory Board. Furthermore, the Master programme benefits from the support of the *Quality Assurance Committee*, which oversees quality assurance at the College's level.

Thanks to a policy of transparency regarding the applicable rules, students benefit from all necessary information before registering for a course, during the course, and until the final exam. A rigorous anti-fraud policy is prominently advertised.

Recruitment and assessment conditions, including those for knowledge assessment and skills validation, are clearly outlined to students on PSU's website. Ethics and integrity are rigorously upheld with measures against fraud and plagiarism. These measures include a Code of good conduct, disciplinary procedure and disciplinary sanctions, an academic integrity questionnaire at the start of each course, and the use of Turnitin anti-plagiarism software for all students.

To conclude, the Master programme benefits from a highly structured and well-documented organisation, both internally and externally, at the College of law and University levels. Strong procedures are in place to ensure an efficient management and a high-quality teaching team dedicated to both to teaching and research, with ample opportunities for advancement. The resources available to the MCL, including faculty staff supported by cutting-edge equipment and digital resources, are significant. Continuous improvement and ethics are key features of the programme, contributing to its overall excellence.

VI. CONCLUSION

Established in 2016, the Master of Commercial Law is affiliated with the College of Law and serves as a potential continuation of the College of Law's Bachelor programme. The Bachelor programme spans four years, preceded by one preparatory year, and was previously accredited by HCERES. The Master programme is central on commercial law in its various facets, aiming to facilitate the transformation of Saudi economy. It seeks to produce legal professionals capable of meeting the demand of numerous multinational companies, governmental bodies, and international organisations established located in Riyadh.

The programme's policy aligns with that of Prince Sultan University and the Kingdom, aiming to meet the expectations of the Saudi job market in a context of economic and legal globalisation. It appears to effectively fulfil this role. The remarkable professional integration of graduates, including female graduates, is facilitated by the programme's excellence and its strong links with the socio-economic world. The programme's pedagogical structure is designed to accommodate working students, who constitute the majority, allowing them to diligently attend classes while continuing their professional pursuits.

The management of the Master of Commercial Law is particularly well-structured and grounded in a robust quality approach. Material resources are entirely satisfactory. The teaching staff is outstanding, comprising a sufficient number of distinguished professors, all holding a PhD and actively engaged in genuine research activities supported by a specialised research centre in the field of law. Continuous training of the teaching staff, career advancement processes, and incentives for research activities are provided.

The organisation of the programme ensures a commendable balance between theoretical knowledge and practical skills acquisition. It provides students with the option to choose between two tracks: the "Thesis track", which emphasises training through research, and the "Courses track". However, the "Thesis track" is chosen by relatively few students, despite being mandatory for scholarship recipients, and the reasons for this requirement are not clearly outlined. The absence of doctoral programme may explain the lower appeal of the "Thesis track", alongside the stringent publication requirements imposed on students (where research results must be published in a Scopus Indexed Journal as a condition for graduation).

The attractiveness of the Master of Commercial Law, the success of its students, and their placement on the job market are outstanding. The monitoring of graduates' career path, in line with all supervisory procedures within the College of Law, is extremely professional.

The prerequisites for internationalisation of the programme are established, including courses taught in English, renowned foreign visiting professors, and financial support for incoming and outgoing mobility. However, institutional barriers (such as the national visa policy) and social challenges (such as the employment situation for most students) continue to hinder truly effective internationalisation efforts.

STRENGTHS

- Policy of excellence and high standards, backed by a highly professional organisation
- Quality of Faculty members (recruitment, continuous training, evaluation and career progression)
- Specialised Master, open to international issues and new challenges, whose courses are delivered primarily in English
- Excellent professional integration of graduates, including female graduates
- Important, and relevant use of human and material resources (staff, installations, digital tools, documentation)
- Effective teaching methods (small groups, individual supervision, electronic resources and facilities)
- Strong research support

WEAKNESSES

- Elective courses not always available, depending on the number of the enrolled students, creating a gap between courses advertised and courses actually available.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE INSTITUTION

- Pursue efforts to internationalise the programme, notably through the marketing of the MCL abroad and the promotion of the scholarship programme for foreign students in order to encourage students' incoming mobility, and/or through the formalisation of a visiting professors programme.
- Regarding the content of the programme, broaden the range of optional courses to reinforce specialisation while making sure that elective courses are actually available to students (two objectives which, given the number of students, might not be compatible); and advertise more efficiently extracurricular activities to ensure a better visibility for students.
- Relax requirements for publication in SCOPUS indexed journals which, even if important from the perspective of international rankings, are not necessarily relevant to the legal field; and more generally relax the publication requirement as a condition for graduation, in order to increase the attractiveness of the thesis track.
- Pursue discussions on the relevance of creating a doctoral programme.

VII. COMMENTS OF THE INSTITUTION



April 29, 2024

Mr. Stéphane Le Bouler,
Hcéres Acting President

Dear Mr. Stéphane Le Bouler,

On behalf of the College of Law (CL), its faculty members, and administrative staff, I would like to express deep gratitude for the evaluation of our Master of Commercial Law (MCL) program by HCERES. Our interest in obtaining international accreditation was finding new ways to improve and develop our program and our institution. The accreditation criteria and methodology of HCERES enabled us to analyze our program and activities from a new perspective and to develop further ideas and strategies for our development.

The learning and development process started immediately with the exploratory mission by HCERES to PSU and with the receipt of the new HCERES 2022 evaluation standards for international study programs. The analysis of our program and activities in the self-evaluation report in line with the HCERES international standards demanded a deep screening of all areas of our program as well as revisiting some of our strategic goals and partnerships. While differing in several respects from the national accreditation standards, the methodology of the standards aligns well with the unique experience we sought to achieve.

We are grateful for the experience during the in-person visit by the respected Expert panel members. It allowed us to show our campus and our facilities. Even more so, the committee members got to witness the experience and feedback of our faculty members, administrative staff, students, alums, and stakeholders from the perspective of the HCERES standards. In addition, we learned about our strengths, activities that should be continued and supported more strongly, as well as areas for improvement. In response to the conclusions and recommendations of the Expert panel, we would like to make the following comments:

The Expert panel's evaluation report correctly established the facts based on the self-evaluation submitted by the College of Law and the on-site visit.

- We are grateful that the Expert panel identified several strengths of the MCL program that PSU and the College of Law have worked hard for, especially the policy of excellence and high standards, quality of faculty members, professional integration of graduates including female graduates, excellent infrastructure and teaching methods, and strong research support.
- We appreciate even more the conclusions on the weaknesses and recommendations and we wish to comment on them individually:

1 | Page





1. The elective courses are chosen based on the demand and the request of the students. The students are given options to choose any listed elective courses provided that we have 5 minimum number of students in an elective course. This minimum number will not apply if the student/s who are seeking to register for a course is/are graduating student/s. For example, the MCL program advertised 9 elective courses that are current and relevant to the market. The students with course track will complete 4 elective courses and students with courses and thesis track will complete 2 elective courses (please refer to **Appendix A- MCL Study Plan**). As such, there was no need to offer all the elective courses that have been advertised in a term.

2. As noted by the experts pursuing efforts to internationalize the program, notably through the marketing of the MCL abroad and the promotion of the scholarship program for foreign students to encourage students' incoming mobility is indeed necessary. When the current legal and visa requirements are relaxed, we will be able to attract more foreign students. While waiting for the changes in visa requirements, PSU entered into nine programs at the university level that offer student exchange, whereby PSU covers around 70% of the student's costs for PSU students accepted to study abroad. PSU offers support when applying to the exchange program, as well as guidance on the choice of the most appropriate program. Usually, an exchange is more difficult for the MCL programs because the law is specific to every country; however, 83% of mandatory courses and 100% of elective courses are taught in English and the students could opt to take elective courses outside PSU. This sets a much better foundation for students' mobility, both for outgoing and incoming students.

As regards to formalization of a visiting professor's program, the CL signed MoUs for student and faculty exchanges. For example, the MoUs with the University of Saarland (Germany), University of Boston, Duke University, and King's College London on International Academic Partner allow faculty members to experience exchange. The CL will soon devise a strategy to implement visiting professor programs so that various experts can be brought in to conduct classes and guide the students and faculty members on research achievement.

3. To broaden the range of optional courses to reinforce specialization, the MCL program uses the course "Selected Issues on Commercial Law (CML547)" to introduce and test a new elective course. If the new course becomes popular and acceptable, the course could be converted into a new elective by assigning a new name and course code. Recently the MCL Program offered a course under Selected Issues on Commercial Law (CML547) that covered 3 selected issues on commercial law: e-commerce, artificial



intelligence, and data protection. These 3 areas of law are the contemporary topics that are commonly discussed today (please refer to **Appendix B- Selected Issues on Commercial Law (CMLS47)**). Accordingly, this course focused on e-commerce and digital technologies, artificial intelligence and digital technologies, and data protection and digital technologies. Since it became a popular elective, the course will be renamed AI, E-commerce, and Technology Law and could be offered to students as another elective course in the future.

While we are widening the elective courses, we are also committed to ensuring that the elective courses are available for the students when they demand. All the core and elective courses have approved course specifications and are ready to be offered when the students request a particular elective to be offered.

They advertise more efficiently extracurricular activities to ensure better visibility for students, PSU and CL use social media and emails. Additionally, individual events and achievements are promoted through Twitter ([@psu_law](https://twitter.com/psu_law)) / Twitter and LinkedIn because Facebook is not as popular in the Middle East. Further, individual programs have separate LinkedIn or Instagram accounts, such as moot programs or law clubs. Extracurricular activities promoted in this way are usually using Zoom or Google Meet for events open to the public. Emails are sent to individual students before an event and reminders are also sent so that they will be able to participate in the extracurricular activities. Since the MCL students are working adults, getting them to participate in all extra-curricular activities is a bit challenging though they actively participate in moot, summer programs and research activities. The MCL program plans to introduce more research and leadership-related activities for MCL students so that we will be able to attract them to attend and participate.

4. Regarding the requirement of publication, the Unified Bylaws of Graduate Studies in Saudi Universities and Implementing Regulations at Prince Sultan University states the publication requirement. Article 47 of the implementing regulation requires a minimum of a scientific paper extracted from a master's thesis must be published in one of the refereed journals or provide proof of its acceptance for publication before discussing the master's thesis or submitting a scientific paper in a refereed scientific conference. Accordingly, the graduation requirement is a refereed journal or conference proceeding (please refer to **Appendix C- Article 47 of Unified Bylaws and Implementing Regulations at Prince Sultan University**). However, the CL encourages MCL students to publish in SCOPUS or ISI-indexed journals to boost their research

capacities and surprisingly many of the students managed to publish in SCOPUS index journals.

5. On the issue of pursuing discussions on the relevance of creating a doctoral program, CL is in the process of finalizing a proposal to be presented to the approval of the higher management at Prince Sultan University. In 2023 College of Law formed a committee for establishing the first PhD program at the College of Law of PSU. The committee firstly established that currently there is no PhD program in legal science in English in Saudi Arabia. Four universities are offering PhD programs in Arabic, all of them are public universities and 3 out of 4 are Sharia based. The bilingual PhD program that PSU would like to offer in law would be the first such program in KSA. As per requirements of the Ministry of Education the PhD program would have 30 or 12 credit hours and would in any case require a doctoral thesis written in English. It will be a three-year program attracting bilingual students coming from a legal or social sciences background. The program would not be narrowed just to commercial law but would be open to all legal fields in general.

A formal proposal including a field study, surveys of stakeholders and a fully developed study plan will be sent to the Higher Management for approval in late 2024. After that one or more external reviewers will give recommendations for improvement before the proposal may be sent to the Ministry of Education for final approval. Until today, there is no private university offering a PhD program in law and PSU strives to be the first one.

We hope our comments prove that we truly appreciate your evaluation and recommendations. We have already learned a lot from the process thus far and we will continue to strive to improve our program. We look forward to working with HCERES again soon and remain open to any questions.

Yours sincerely  29/4/24

Dr. Abdulaziz Altuwaijri

Dean of the College of Law

Appendices:

Appendix A: MCL Study Plan

Appendix B- Selected Issues on Commercial Law (CML547)

Appendix C- Article 47 of Unified Bylaws Implementing Regulations at Prince Sultan University

The evaluation reports of Hceres
are available online : www.hceres.com

Evaluation of higher education and research institutions

Evaluation of research

Evaluation of academic programmes

Evaluation of research bodies

International evaluation and accreditation



2 rue Albert Einstein
75013 Paris, France
T. 33 (0)1 55 55 60 10

hceres.fr

[@Hceres_](https://twitter.com/Hceres_)

[Hcéres](https://www.youtube.com/Hceres)



International evaluation and accreditation

ACCREDITATION DECISION

Master of Commercial Law

Prince Sultan University
College of Law

Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

June 2024

SCOPE OF THE ACCREDITATION GRANTED BY HCÉRES

HCÉRES has based its evaluation process on a set of objectives that study programmes must pursue to ensure recognised quality within France and Europe. These objectives are divided up into four accreditation criteria.

The Accreditation Commission issues an opinion about the accreditation of the study programme after examining the file. The Hcéres President takes the decision based on the Commission's opinion and the final evaluation report of the programme. This accreditation decision, taken in plenary session, is the result of a collegial and reasoned process.

The decision issued by Hcéres regarding the accreditation of the study programme corresponds to the awarding of a label to the evaluated entity.

This decision is independent of the accreditations carried out by the French State and therefore does not entail recognition in France of the institution or the diplomas issued by it.

Decision No. EI-2024-29 on the accreditation of the Master of Commercial Law delivered by Prince Sultan University, Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

The President of the High Council for the Evaluation of Research and Higher Education,

Considering the Research Code, in particular Articles L. 114-3-1 to L. 114-3-6;

Considering the Board's deliberation of 29th September 2022 on the accreditation criteria for international study programmes (except doctorates/PhDs);

Considering the Decision No. 2023-9 of 16th March 2023 on the international accreditation procedure of the High Council for the Evaluation of Research and Higher Education;

Considering the agreement DEI_2023_26 of 2nd November 2023 for the evaluation/accreditation of the Master of Commercial Law delivered by Prince Sultan University, Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia;

Considering the opinion issued by the Accreditation Commission on 18th June 2024;

Decides:

Article 1

Noting that the Master of Commercial Law delivered by Prince Sultan University meets the four accreditation criteria, voted by the Board of the High Council on 29th September 2022, as follows:

ACCREDITATION CRITERION 1: TEACHING POLICY AND CHARACTERISATION

The training policy implemented in the Master of Commercial Law programme, along with its key characteristics, align perfectly with PSU's overarching strategy, the expectations of the national socio-economic sphere, and the Kingdom's vision. The programme's focus on commercial law, combined with Sustainable Development Goals and the predominant use of English as the language of instruction, reflects the realities of today's global economic and legal environment. The balance between research-based education and the acquisition of practical skills is satisfactory, the former based on a solid research environment and the latter on strong links with the socio-economic world. The programme is poised to welcome international students, pending relaxation of the national admission policy regarding students' visas.

ACCREDITATION CRITERION 2: THE PEDAGOGICAL ORGANISATION OF THE STUDY PROGRAMME

The MCL programme is tailored for students holding a bachelor's degree in law, typically with one or more years of experience in the job market, seeking for an upgrade in knowledge and skills for career advancement or job transition. The pedagogical organisation of the programme adheres to established standards, aligned with the objectives set by the College of Law and in coherence with the Kingdom's policies. Furthermore, it is designed to interact with and cater to the local socio-economic environment. The programme's efforts to foster its international dimension are particularly relevant in a socio-economic landscape marked by continuous internationalisation. These efforts are poised to yield significant results once the socio-political-context permits.

ACCREDITATION CRITERION 3: ATTRACTIVENESS, PERFORMANCE AND RELEVANCE OF THE STUDY PROGRAMME

The MCL is an attractive, high-performing, and relevant offering at Prince Sultan University. It benefits from effective instruments to monitor its attractiveness and appropriate infrastructures to measure student success. The programme offers numerous competitive advantages, such as: a good management system for evaluating the programme's results in terms of attractiveness, performance, and relevance; a strong employability rate; high rates of employer satisfaction; a comprehensive surveying policy involving various stakeholders; a digitalised and efficient monitoring policy to assess student success; an efficient communication strategy; structural links with socio-economic actors, facilitating an understanding of the market's needs. These competitive advantages should be preserved and further promoted to enhance



the programme's attractiveness. The programme's appeal to foreign students is bolstered by the fact that 80% of the courses are taught in English, providing a significant competitive edge in attracting international students.

ACCREDITATION CRITERION 4: MANAGEMENT AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT OF THE ACADEMIC PROGRAMME

The Master programme benefits from a highly structured and well-documented organisation, both internally and externally, at the College of law and University levels. Strong procedures are in place to ensure an efficient management and a high-quality teaching team dedicated to both to teaching and research, with ample opportunities for advancement. The resources available to the MCL, including faculty staff supported by cutting-edge equipment and digital resources, are significant. Continuous improvement and ethics are key features of the programme, contributing to its overall excellence.

Article 2

The Master of Commercial Law delivered by Prince Sultan University, Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, is accredited for a period of 5 years from the date of this decision.

Article 3

The decision is accompanied by the following recommendations and comments:

- Pursue efforts to internationalise the programme, notably through the marketing of the MCL abroad and the promotion of the scholarship programme for foreign students in order to encourage students' incoming mobility, and/or through the formalisation of a visiting professors programme.
- Regarding the content of the programme, broaden the range of optional courses to reinforce specialisation while making sure that elective courses are actually available to students (two objectives which, given the number of students, might not be compatible); and advertise more efficiently extracurricular activities to ensure a better visibility for students.
- Relax requirements for publication in SCOPUS indexed journals which, even if important from the perspective of international rankings, are not necessarily relevant to the legal field; and more generally relax the publication requirement as a condition for graduation, in order to increase the attractiveness of the thesis track.
- Pursue discussions on the relevance of creating a doctoral programme.

Article 4

This decision will be published on the Hcéres website.

Paris, 27th June 2024.

The acting President
signed
Stéphane Le Bouler



2 rue Albert Einstein
75013 Paris, France
T. 33 (0)1 55 55 60 10

hceres.fr

[@Hceres_](https://twitter.com/Hceres_)

[Hcéres](https://www.youtube.com/Hceres)

