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Core Standards for the Evaluation of Programmes

Erasmus+ TLQAA+ WP5: Core Standards and Procedures

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Introduction

The objective of the workpackage 5 of the Erasmus+ Project “Programme Evaluation for Transparency and Recognition of Skills and Qualifications” is to define a set of standards and procedures for the evaluation of programmes in the Lebanese Higher Education. The present document suggests a set of standards and procedures for the evaluation of programmes. It is intended to be discussed within the Lebanese higher education (LHE) in the national roundtable to be organised during the autumn of 2017.

The adopted approach to define the standards and procedures is based on two studies. In the first one, a bibliographical review of the existing standards in several countries and regions is performed and lessons are depicted. The second one, reviews the existing efforts and needs within the Lebanese Higher Education (LHE).

Bibliographic Review of Resources and References on Programme Evaluation

This section reports the result of the bibliographical study conducted on standards and criteria adopted in different countries and regions. The following section simply reports those standards and criteria with few comments while the next section presents a comparative analysis of those standards with the LHE context in perspective.

Programme external review: a bibliographical study

The bibliographical study provides a snapshot of the existing standards and practices in different countries and regions.

Europe

Few decades ago, the need for a European set of standards for the evaluation of higher education programmes has been felt. In 2003, (Hamalainen, 2003) calls for the development of common standards for the evaluation of programmes across Europe. In this paper, the author presents the outcomes of an overview of the programme evaluations standards in several European countries. He suggests a classification of the different areas found in different European countries into the following clusters:

1. Objectives

2. Resources

- a. Staff
- b. Students
- c. Management
- d. Facilities
- e. Financing

3. Programme

- a. Content of the Curriculum
- b. Curriculum Design
- c. Teaching and Learning
- d. Linking with Research

The call for common standards has become official in the Berlin Communiqué (September 2003) resulting from the ministerial conference¹ where ENQA², EUA³, EURASHE⁴ and ESIB⁵ have been invited to develop an 'agreed set of standards, procedures and guidelines on quality assurance' and 'to report back through the Bologna Follow-Up Group to Ministers in 2005'. In 2005, ENQA in collaboration with its partners developed the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) which defines a common set of standards and guidelines for the evaluation of programmes and institutions in higher education. The ESG was updated in 2009 and 2015. In its latest edition (ESG, 2015) the ESG is divided into three main sections. The first section provides the general scope, purposes and principles. The second section defines the European standards and guidelines grouped in three parts:

- Standards and guidelines for internal quality assurance
- Standards and guidelines for external quality assurance
- Standards and guidelines for quality assurance agencies

The third section provides the list of standards.

The ESG sets a common framework for quality assurance (QA) systems at European, national, and institutional levels. It enables the assurance and continuous improvement of quality of higher education in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and supports mutual trust. Several guiding principles characterise QA in the EHEA. First the

¹ <https://www.ehea.info/cid100938/ministerial-conference-berlin-2003.html>

² ENQA: European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education. ENQA is member of the Erasmus+ TLQAA+ project.

³ EUA: European University Association

⁴ EURASHE: European Association of Institutions in Higher Education

⁵ ESIB: European Student Information Bureau. In 2007 ESIB became ESU: European Students' Union

higher education institutions (HEIs) have the primary responsibility for the quality of their provision and its assurance. QA must respond to the diversity in European higher education. This constraint imposes to have broad definition of standards but precise enough to meet their objectives. QA must nurture the development of a quality culture and take into account the expectations of all stakeholders: students, society....

The modifications introduced in the latest edition of the ESG indicate the trend in the development of QA in Europe. The general scope has been slightly modified. While keeping the focus on teaching and learning, the ESG considers more the learning environment as well as links between learning, research and innovation. The ESG 2015 apply to all programmes whichever mode or place of delivery, including cross-border education. The request for the development of quality culture became more visible. The latest ESG focuses more on the shift towards student-centred learning.

Some quality standards of ESG more specific to programmes are enumerated hereafter:

Standard 1.2: Design and approval of programmes

Standard 1.3: Student-centered learning, teaching and assessment

Standard 1.4: Student admission, progression, recognition and certification

Standard 1.5: Teaching Staff

Standard 1.6: Learning Resources and Student Support

Standard 1.7: Information management

Standard 1.8: Public information

Standard 1.9: On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes

Standard 2.1: Consideration of internal quality assurance

Comments

- ESG define a common set of standards that harmonise the quality assurance processes across the EHEA
- The updated version of the ESG considers the recent developments in higher education
- The ESG aim at developing quality culture
- The ESG form a model at the international level

France

In France, the HCERES⁶ evaluates the academic programmes of all higher education institutions with the exception of engineering degrees. The engineering degrees are evaluated by the CTI⁷.

HCERES

HCERES evaluates four domains of quality management of a programme (HCERES, 2016):

- Its objectives
 - Explicit knowledge and competences acquisition objectives
 - Explicit job opportunities or entries to higher degrees at the output of the programme
- Its contextual positioning
 - Positioning of the programme at local, regional, national and international levels
 - The link with research is clearly established
 - The relations with industrial and cultural partners, companies and associations are explicitly described
 - The added value of the existing partnerships with international HEIs is explicitly described
- Its pedagogical organization
 - The programme structure is adapted to the different learning paths of the students
 - The programme content is coherent with the national framework of higher education programmes
 - Projects and internships form an essential pedagogical modality
 - The programme offers the student additional skills that are useful for her/his professional integration or her/his pursuit of studies
 - The programme makes specific use of digital tools in learning or other pedagogical innovation
 - The programme has specific support mechanisms to support the success of the students
 - The programme prepares the students for international activities
 - The programme recognises the total or partial prior learning

⁶ HCERES: Haut Conseil de l'Évaluation de la Recherche et de l'Enseignement Supérieur. HCERES is a member of the Erasmus+ TLQAA+ project.

⁷ CTI: Commission des Titres d'Ingénieur

- Its management
 - A formally identified pedagogical team exists
 - The management of the programme is carried according to a planned organisation with contribution of students and the different actors
 - The evaluation is conducted according to precisely defined methods known by the students
 - There is a monitoring of competences acquisition
 - The number of students and the modes of enrolment are clearly identified
 - There exists sufficient information about the future of the graduates
 - The quality of the professional insertion and the future of the graduates is well analysed
 - Quality and ethics

CTI

For the engineering programmes, the CTI verifies that verifies the good fitting between the socioeconomic needs, the profiles of the graduating engineers, and the processes, tools and resources devoted by the schools. The criteria are regularly updated based on the national and international evolutions in engineering practices and education. The quality criteria can be grouped in six domains (CTI, 2015):

- Mission and organization
- Openness and partnership
- Engineering Education
- Enrolment of engineering students
- Employment of graduates
- Internal quality and continuous improvement

Comments

- Having one national agency evaluating all programmes and one agency for the evaluation of engineering reflects the specificity of engineering education in France
- Both sets of standards stress very specific aspects, e.g. international dimension, openness, partnership with socio-economic tissue, link to research and employability. This shows a trust in the quality control conducted by the authorities upon licensing the programme
- Quality and ethics is a distinctive criterion
- Recognition of prior learning is a distinctive feature

Germany

Several QA agencies operate in Germany. The whole system is coordinated by the Accreditation Council that sets the rules and criteria for the assessment of higher education programmes. For example, ACQUIN⁸ uses those criteria when evaluating programmes in Germany and at the international level. The criteria set by the Accreditation Council are (Accreditation Council, 2013):

1. Qualification Objectives and the Study Programme Concept
2. Conceptual Integration of the Study Programme in the System of Studies
3. Study Programme Concept
4. Academic Feasibility
5. Examination System
6. Programme-related Co-operations
7. Facilities
8. Transparency and Documentation
9. Quality Assurance and Further Development
10. Study Programmes with a Special Profile Demand
11. Gender Justice and Equal Opportunities

Comments

- Several agencies operating in Germany with one authority, the Accreditation Council, that sets the rules and criteria
- The examination system is singled out as a standalone criterion
- (internal) Quality assurance is tightly connected to further development
- Gender justice is a distinctive criterion

Spain

Several agencies operate in different geographical zones in Spain. In this report ANECA⁹ is considered as it is a national agency with international activities.

In Spain the accreditation by ANECA of a degree is the result of three procedures (ANECA, 2016); (ANECA, 2017) “Verifica”, “Monitor” and “Acredita”. The Verifica procedures act at the starting point of the life cycle of a degree and permits to verify that all necessary components are available to start a quality programme. The Monitor procedure takes information from the indicators to follow-up the development of the programme. Finally, the Acredita procedure offers the accreditation of the programme

⁸ ACQUIN: Accreditation, Certification and Quality assurance Institute.

⁹ ANECA: Agencia Nacional de Evaluación de la Calidad y Acreditación. ANECA is a member of the Erasmus+ TLQAA+ project.

once the target in terms of quality is reached. The Monitor follow-up procedure is based on seven criteria:

- Criterion 1: Organisation and delivery
- Criterion 2. Information and transparency
- Criterion 3. Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) System
- Criterion 4. Academic staff
- Criterion 5. Material resources and services
- Criterion 6. Performance indicators
- Criterion 7. Recommendations, observations and commitments

The Accredita process is based on seven criteria too grouped upon three dimensions:

- Dimension 1: Programme management
 - Criterion 1: Organisation and delivery
 - Criterion 2: Information and transparency
 - Criterion 3: Internal quality assurance system
- Dimension 2: Resources
 - Criterion 4: Academic staff
 - Criterion 5: Supporting staff, resources and services
- Dimension 3: Results
 - Criterion 6: Learning outcomes
 - Criterion 7: Satisfaction and performance indicators

The dimensions and criteria are shown in Figure 1.

Comments

- The three phases system is an original model compared to the classical one where the authorities perform the quality control upon licensing the programme and the QA system ensures the continuous improvement. The addition of the “Monitor” phase is very beneficial and the fact that all three processes are managed by the same agency might offer some coherence in the process, while splitting quality control from quality assurance may offer generalization since projecting on two different bodies
- The Spanish system relies more on the internal QA system and assures its efficiency and quality

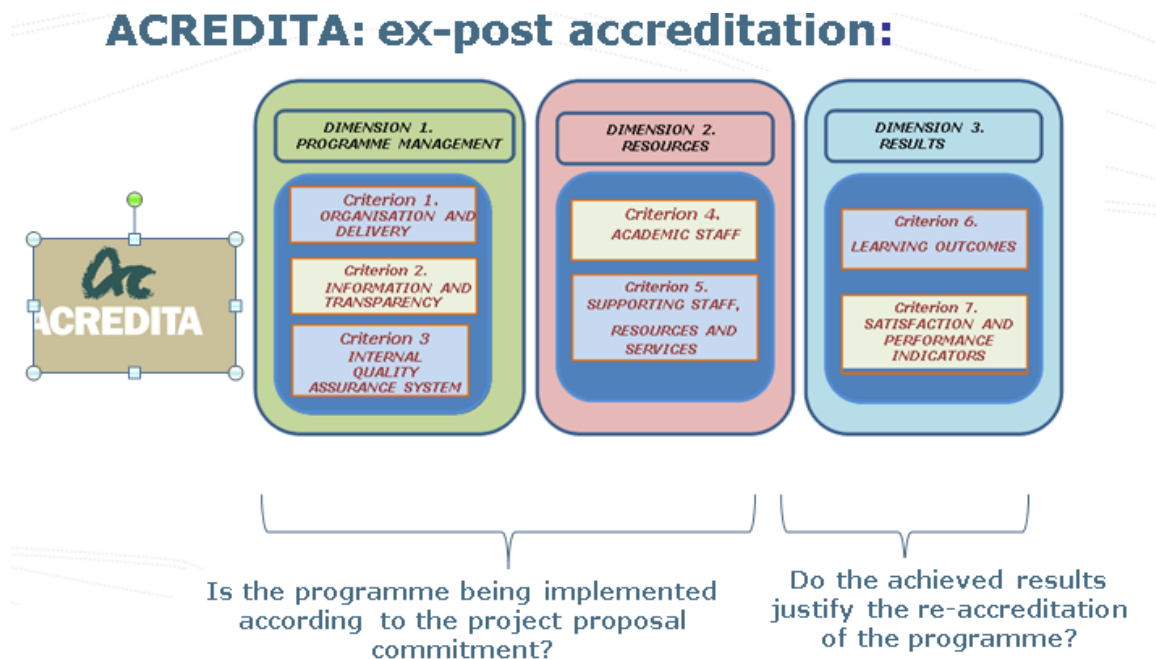


Figure 1. The criteria used in the “Acredita” process in ANECA. Reprinted from (ANECA, 2017)

Ireland

QQI¹⁰ is responsible for the external quality assurance of further and higher education and training in Ireland. It also validates programmes and makes awards for certain providers in these sectors. QQI is also responsible for the development of the National Qualifications Framework and the associated standards.

QQI defines eleven main areas to be addressed in provider quality assurance procedures. These are (QQI, 2016):

- 1) Governance and Management of Quality
- 2) Documented Approach to Quality Assurance
- 3) Programmes of Education and Training
- 4) Staff Recruitment, Management and Development
- 5) Teaching and Learning
- 6) Assessment of Learners
- 7) Supports for Learners
- 8) Information and Data Management
- 9) Public Information and Communication

¹⁰ QQI: Quality and Qualifications Ireland

10) Other Parties involved in Education and Training

11) Self-Evaluation, Monitoring and Review

Comments

- The same agency manages the external assessment of the programmes and the national qualifications framework
- There is a focus on internal QA system and information system
- Supports for learners is a distinctive feature

Belgium

Two agencies operate in Belgium; AEQES¹¹ and NVAO¹². While AEQES covers the French speaking parts of the country, NVAO covers the Dutch speaking parts in Belgium as well as the Netherlands.

AEQES

The quality assurance practiced by the AEQES makes use of five criteria as shown in Figure 2. These criteria are (AEQES, 2015):

- Criterion 1. Governance and Quality Policy
 - Dimension 1.1. Governance
 - Dimension 1.2. Quality management at institution, entity and programme levels
 - Dimension 1.3. Development, management and periodic review of programmes
 - Dimension 1.4. Information and internal communication
- Criterion 2. Relevance
 - Dimension 2.1. Appreciation of the programme relevance
 - Dimension 2.2. Information and external communication
- Criterion 3. Internal Coherence
 - Dimension 3.1. Programme learning outcomes
 - Dimension 3.2. Programme content and learning context and activities
 - Dimension 3.3. Programme layout, sequencing and time allocated
 - Dimension 3.4. Evaluation of the level of achievement of the learning outcomes

¹¹ AEQES: Agence pour l'Évaluation de la Qualité de l'Enseignement Supérieur

¹² NVAO: Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders

- Criterion 4. Efficiency and Equity
 - Dimension 4.1. Human resources
 - Dimension 4.2. Physical resources
 - Dimension 4.3. Equity in the integration, follow-up and support of the students
 - Dimension 4.4. Analysis of data to serve the programme management
- Criterion 5. Follow up and Continuous Improvement
 - Dimension 5.1. Self study methodology
 - Dimension 5.2. SWOT analysis
 - Dimension 5.3. Action plan and follow up

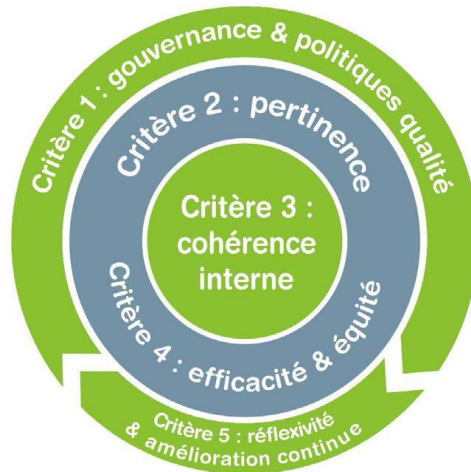


Figure 2. The criteria used by the AEQES in Belgium (in French). Reprinted from (AEQES, 2015)

NVAO

NVAO¹² has defined two sets of standards and procedures; one for the Flanders region in Belgium and the other for the Netherlands. The set of standards developed for the Flanders are considered here. The assessment framework is based on four standards (NVAO, 2015):

- Standard 1. Intended exit level

The determination of the intended exit level of the programme is based on the manner in which the level descriptors have been translated into programme-specific learning outcomes that meet the international requirements with respect to content, level and orientation.
- Standard 2. Teaching-learning environment

The teaching-learning environment enables the students to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

- Standard 3. Exit level to be achieved

The programme has an adequate assessment, testing and examination system in place and demonstrates that the intended learning outcomes are being achieved.

- Standard 4. Set-up and organisation of the internal quality assurance

The set-up and the organisation of the internal quality assurance are aimed at systematically improving the programme with the involvement of the relevant stakeholders.

Comments

- Two agencies depending on the community
- Limited number of standards in the case of NVAO, while detailed dimensions in the case of AEQES
- Programme layout and sequencing and, SWOT analysis are two distinctive dimensions in the case of AEQES

UK

In the UK, QAA¹³ has defined the standards as parts of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education. In this code, the standards are named as expectations from the institutions and programmes operating and running in the UK. The Quality Code is defined in 3 parts that group nineteen expectations. These parts and expectations are (QAA, 2017):

- Part A: Setting and maintaining academic standards
 - Expectation A1. Ensure requirements of qualifications framework¹⁴ and QAA guidance
 - Expectation A2.1. Transparent and comprehensive academic frameworks and regulations
 - Expectation A2.2. Maintain a record of each qualification and programme
 - Expectation A3.1. Process for approval of the taught programmes
 - Expectation A3.2. Assure the achievement of relevant learning outcomes as precondition to awarding a qualification
 - Expectation A3.3. Monitor and review of programmes

¹³ QAA: The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education

¹⁴ The framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland or, the Framework for Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions in Scotland

- Expectation A3.4. Use external and independent expertise and seek advice
- Part B: Assuring and enhancing academic quality
 - Expectation B1. Programme design, development and approval
 - Expectation B2. Recruitment, selection and admission
 - Expectation B3. Learning and teaching
 - Expectation B4. Enabling student development and achievement
 - Expectation B5. Student engagement
 - Expectation B6. Assessment and the recognition of prior learning
 - Expectation B7. External examining
 - Expectation B8. Programme monitoring and review
 - Expectation B9. Academic appeals and students complaints
 - Expectation B10. Managing higher education provision with others
 - Expectation B11. Research degrees
- Part C: Information about Higher Education provision
 - Expectation C: Higher education providers produce information for their intended audiences about the learning opportunities they offer that is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy.

Comments

- The naming Quality Code reflects a step towards quality culture
- Stress on the link to qualifications framework
- Recognition of prior learning and student engagement are two distinctive expectations

USA

CHEA

In the USA, the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) oversees the different accrediting agencies. CHEA publishes several studies in the domain of quality assurance in general and the QA of programmes in particular. We report here the general international quality principles set by the CHEA international quality group (CHEA, 2015). CHEA considers that those principles are consistent with other existing ones such as; the 2005 UNESCO-OECD Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-Border Higher Education, the European Standards and Guidelines 2015, the 2007 INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practices for Quality Assurance, the 2008 CHIBA

Principles: Higher Education Quality Assurance for the Asia Pacific Region. The CHEA seven principles are:

1. *Quality and higher education providers*: Assuring and achieving quality in higher education is the primary responsibility of higher education providers and their staff.
2. *Quality and students*: The education provided to students must always be of high quality whatever the learning outcomes pursued.
3. *Quality and society*: The quality of higher education provision is judged by how well it meets the needs of society, engenders public confidence and sustains public trust.
4. *Quality and government*: Governments have a role in encouraging and supporting quality higher education.
5. *Quality and accountability*: It is the responsibility of higher education providers and quality assurance and accreditation bodies to sustain a strong commitment to accountability and provide regular evidence of quality.
6. *Quality and the role of quality assurance and accreditation bodies*: Quality assurance and accreditation bodies, working with higher education providers and their leadership, staff and students, are responsible for the implementation of processes, tools, benchmarks and measures of learning outcomes that help to create a shared understanding of quality.
7. *Quality and change*: Quality higher education needs to be flexible, creative and innovative; developing and evolving to meet students' needs, to justify the confidence of society and to maintain diversity.

Several accreditation agencies exist in the USA. Some of them assess the institutions. Other assess programmes in specific sectors. The accrediting agencies in the USA often operate at the international level. In the present report, two cases are considered; ABET and AACSB.

ABET

ABET¹⁵ was founded in 1932 as ECPD¹⁶. The name changes to ABET in 1980. ABET accredits programmes in engineering, applied science, computing and engineering technology. Accreditation process is in two phases. First the eligibility of the programme is checked, then the assessment for accreditation is performed. The criteria adopted by ABET are separated according to the level and degrees. General criteria which are applied at the Bachelor level and programme specific criteria applied at the specialization level (MSc). Large professional associations are involved in the definition

¹⁵ ABET: Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology

¹⁶ ECPD: Engineers' Council for Professional Development

of the standards at the MSc level depending on the sector. ABET frequently updates the different criteria. At the BSc level, eight criteria has been defined in (ABET, 2016) for the accreditation of engineering programmes. These are:

- Criterion 1. Students
- Criterion 2. Program Education Objectives
- Criterion 3. Student Outcomes
- Criterion 4. Continuous Improvement
- Criterion 5. Curriculum
- Criterion 6. Faculty
- Criterion 7. Facilities
- Criterion 8. Institutional Support

ABET is very specific regarding the student outcomes (criterion3) which are defined by the (a) through (k) outcomes considered minimal for any graduating engineering student (ABET, 2016). These outcomes are:

- (a) an ability to apply knowledge of mathematics, science, and engineering
- (b) an ability to design and conduct experiments, as well as to analyze and interpret data
- (c) an ability to design a system, component, or process to meet desired needs within realistic constraints such as economic, environmental, social, political, ethical, health and safety, manufacturability, and sustainability
- (d) an ability to function on multidisciplinary teams
- (e) an ability to identify, formulate, and solve engineering problems
- (f) an understanding of professional and ethical responsibility
- (g) an ability to communicate effectively
- (h) the broad education necessary to understand the impact of engineering solutions in a global, economic, environmental, and societal context
- (i) a recognition of the need for, and an ability to engage in life-long learning
- (j) a knowledge of contemporary issues
- (k) an ability to use the techniques, skills, and modern engineering tools necessary for engineering practice.

AACSB

AACSB¹⁷ accredits business schools and programmes worldwide (more 785 accredited schools). Like ABET, the accreditation process is performed in two phases: eligibility checking first and then assessment for accreditation. AACSB accredits business and accounting schools and programmes. In this report, the Business Accreditation is considered. Standards are being used for this purpose and are frequently updated. In the latest update of standards for business accreditation fifteen standards are defined and grouped in four domains. These are reproduced hereafter (AACSB, 2017).

- Strategic Management and Innovation
 - Standard 1. Mission, Impact, Innovation
 - Standard 2. Intellectual Contributions, Impact, and Alignment with Mission
 - Standard 3. Financial Strategies and Allocation of Resources
- Students, Faculty and Professional Staff
 - Standard 4. Student Admissions, Progression and Career Development
 - Standard 5. Faculty Sufficiency and Deployment
 - Standard 6. Faculty Management and Support
 - Standard 7. Professional Staff Sufficiency and Deployment
- Learning and Teaching
 - Standard 8. Curricula Management and Assurance of Learning
 - Standard 9. Curriculum Content
 - Standard 10. Student-Faculty Interactions
 - Standard 11. Degree Program Educational Level, Structure and Equivalence
 - Standard 12. Teaching Effectiveness
- Academic and Professional Engagement
 - Standard 13. Student Academic and Professional Engagement
 - Standard 14. Executive Education
 - Standard 15. Faculty Qualifications and Engagement

¹⁷ AACSB: Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business

Comments

- The seven principles set by CHEA are generic
- Two classes of agencies: institution assessment and programme assessment
- Programme specific standards defines the generic competences required in a graduate
- Involving professional association in defining the standards

Asia-Pacific region

APQN¹⁸ has defined in 2009 a set of principles for the quality assurance in higher education in the Asia-Pacific region. These principles are similar to the ESG and are divided into three parts: Internal QA, External QA and quality assurance of the agencies. More details can be found in (APQN, 2009).

Other cases

ANQAHE¹⁹ is an Arab regional network for quality assurance in higher education. ANQAHE has been very active in raising the awareness and interconnecting the quality assurance systems throughout the Arab region. More recently ANQAHE is working on defining a regional qualifications framework for the region. Considerable efforts have been spent in this direction and the framework is to be considered as reference for the work in the project.

Other European (Tempus and Erasmus+) projects have been dealing with QA in higher education. In Lebanon one can the LEPAC²⁰, QAHEL²¹ and TLQAA projects. In Jordan, the EQUAM²² project has been dedicated to Internal Quality Assurance. These projects defined models for QA and some standards and policies. The EQUAM model stresses on building the IQA. Seven standards have been adopted from both the ESG and HEAC guidelines. These standards are:

- IQA Management
- Academic Programmes
- Students
- Faculty Members
- Resources

¹⁸ APQN: Asia-Pacific Quality Network

¹⁹ ANQAHE: Arab Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (<http://www.anqahe.org>)

²⁰ LEPAC: : Lebanese Engineering Programmes Accreditation Council (2006)

²¹ QAHEL: Quality Assurance in Higher Education in Lebanon

²² EQUAM: Enhancing Quality Assurance Management in Jordanian Universities

- Institutional Integrity
- Community Engagement

Comparative analysis of the standards and the Lebanese context

Independently of the higher education system of institution, the standards are being used as a reference of quality for the same object to be assessed, i.e. the academic programmes. Thus, these standards cover the different facets of this common object. They do share the necessity to cover all those facets. However, they differ in what they put forward, which depends largely on the developments occurring in a specific higher education system. The formulation of those standards (reference points) has a lot to say. In this section, a comparative analysis on several dimensions is performed while always having in perspective the Lebanese context.

Number of QA agencies

Depending on the countries more than one QA agency may evaluate the academic programmes. The agencies can be distinguished according to a thematic criterion like in USA or to lesser extent in France, to a regional criterion like in Spain, to a linguistic or community criterion like in Belgium. At a regional level, an effort has been done to harmonise the QA systems. The ESG defined in Europe is the most important example. The definition of those standards and guidelines needs to be broad enough to be inclusive and precise enough to maintain a strong meaning to the QA processes. Similarly to the ESG, CHEA and APQN suggest generic principles to frame the QA systems at the international level. These principles are more generic than the ESG and have much broader sense.

It is worth noting that diversifying the agencies operating in one system is a trend. At the European level, EQAR²³ has been created as a register of European agencies which would allow them to conduct evaluations in the different European countries. Similarly, APQN has also established a register called APQR²⁴ which is being developed²⁵.

Questions relative to the LHE:

The LHE is highly diverse, what lessons to take from the ESG? Can the ESG define an inspiring set of standards?

Shall the system include more than one agency? if yes on what basis?

What value to give to the accreditations delivered by international agencies?

²³ EQAR: European Quality Assurance Register

²⁴ APQR: Asia-Pacific Quality Register

²⁵ According to the APQR website there is only one agency in this register at the time of editing of this report

Quality Control and Quality Assurance

While going over the standards, one can distinguish different cases regarding the boundaries between the Quality Control as the definition of the minimal set of criteria to be respected in order to allow a programme to run and, the Quality Assurance which aims at continuous improvement. The standards for QA set by the HCERES reflect a clear understanding of the mutual roles between the two. The ANECA case offers another model of interest where three levels are precisely distinguished. The first two levels verify and monitor the minimal requirements for a quality programme while the third level accredits programmes that show continuous improvement. The boundary between quality control and quality assurance is less felt in the other cases.

Questions relative to the LHE:

Quality control is currently conducted in Lebanon by the technical committee. Is there a need to further develop this process?

How to draw the boundaries between quality control and quality assurance of the academic programmes in Lebanon?

Number of standards and their organisation

In the covered examples different cases have been distinguished. While NVAO defines only four standards, the other studied agencies define much more. When the number of standards is large, they are often grouped in domains. Small number of standards makes them broad and more inclusive. In opposite, when the number of standards increases, they become more precise and normative.

Questions relative to the LHE:

Which is more suitable for the evaluation of the Lebanese academic programmes: fewer and broader standards or numerous and precise ones?

Qualifications framework vs competences in the criteria

The links between relevance and quality assurance are very complex. Generally in Europe the existence of qualifications framework (QF) permits to better handle this complex problem. The competences required in a graduate of a given programme are defined in the QF. Many examples have shown that (QAA, HCERES, ...). The QQI example is even more evolved since the QF is maintained and developed by the same agency responsible of the QA. In comparison, the lack of QF pushes agencies like ABET

to include the competences required in a person graduating from engineering as part of the standards (the (a) to (k) requirements).

Questions relative to the LHE:

Shall the LQF be further developed and applied?

Shall the competences required in a graduate be defined in the QF or in the quality standards?

Other aspects

The standards cover several aspects relative to:

- Student centred learning
- Support to learners
- New pedagogical methods
- Recognition
- Employability
- Link with research
- Link with socio-economic partners

Several workpackages of the Erasmus+ TLQAA+ are dealing with some of those aspects. The standards need to cover all of them.

Draft Standards

Context of Lebanese higher education

Facts and Figures from Lebanese Higher Education

The evolution of the number of students in both the private and public sectors have been provided in (Tempus TLQAA, 2012). Table 1 updates the table provided in (Tempus TLQAA, 2012) by extending it till the academic year 2014-2015. The same information (with the exception of the gender balance that seems to be unchanging with the years) is also plotted in Figure 3. On this figure two estimated regressions are added to help measuring the average increase in the number of students. The first one is a regression on the whole data while the second is the concatenation of two regressions concatenated at the academic year 2010-2011. The data shows that there has been a

significant yearly increase in the total number of students by about 4.4% till the academic year 2010-2011. After that year, the total number of students tends to decrease by around 0.4% yearly till 2014-2015. It is also clear that the number of students at the Lebanese University has been nearly constant while a significant increase in the private higher education has taken place. It is worth noting that the increase in the number of students in the private sector was essentially concentrated in a few universities.

| Year | Total Number of Students | Enrolled in the Lebanese University | Enrolled in the private universities | Number of Female Students | Number of Male Students |
|-----------|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|
| 2006-2007 | 160364 | 72961 (45.5%) | 87403 | 87126 (54.3%) | 73238 |
| 2007-2008 | 167165 | 74176 (44.4%) | 92989 | 91276 (54.6%) | 75889 |
| 2008-2009 | NA | NA | NA | NA | NA |
| 2009-2010 | 180850 | 72813 (40.4%) | 108037 | 96202 (53.2%) | 84648 |
| 2010-2011 | 192138 | 72507 (37.7%) | 119631 | 100682 (52.4%) | 91456 |
| 2011-2012 | 192522 | 73698 (38.3%) | 118824 | 103933 (54.0%) | 88589 |
| 2012-2013 | 191788 | 71440 (37.2%) | 120348 | 104213 (54.3%) | 87575 |
| 2013-2014 | NA | NA | NA | NA | NA |
| 2014-2015 | 190157 | 69994 (36.8%) | 120163 | 96239 (50.6%) | 93918 |

Table 1. Total number of students, their gender distribution and their distributions between the private and public higher education institutions by academic year since 2006-2007. (The numbers are obtained from the CRDP website)

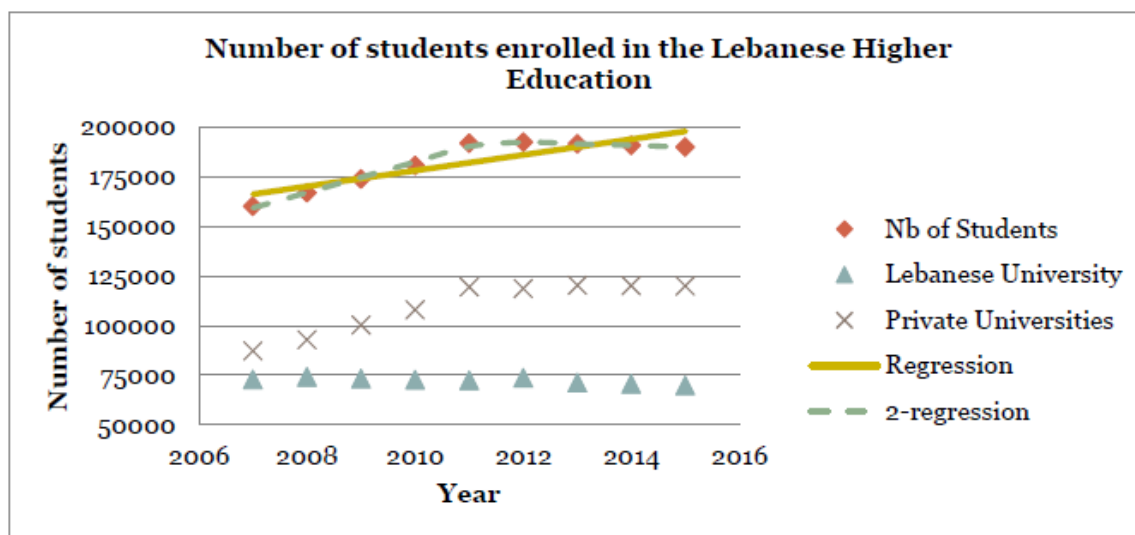


Figure 3. Total number of students and their distributions between the private and public higher education institutions by academic year since 2006-2007. (The numbers are obtained from the CRDP website)

The Current Quality Assurance in the Lebanese Higher Education

Quality in the Lebanese Higher Education system has been assured implicitly by the competitive nature of the Lebanese Higher Education. The diversity of the system and its autonomy guaranteed by the Lebanese Constitution form a particularity of the Lebanese Higher Education. However, the Lebanese Higher Education has suffered from the different problems that occurred in the country and is facing an increasing demand which made the number of institutions and offered programmes expand at a very high rate.

In this context the need for a clear quality assurance system appeared. Several institutions have already undergone an external evaluation with international European and American agencies. This clearly shows the explicit needs in this domain. In order to illustrate this we mention a list²⁶ of accredited programmes in Lebanon. ABET has accredited several BSC and BE engineering programmes in AUB, AUST, LAU, NDU and USEK. AACSB has accredited business programmes in AUB and LAU. FIBAA²⁷ accredited the business programme at BAU. CEPH²⁸ accredited the faculty of health science at AUB. ACPE²⁹ accredited the pharmacy programme at LAU. CCAPP³⁰ accredited the pharmacy programme at BAU. CCNE³¹ accredited both BSc and MSc programmes in Nursing at AUB. ADEE³² accredited the dentistry programme at BAU.

Several projects on quality assurance in the Lebanese Higher Education have been conducted. Tempus has supported two major projects in this direction. In 2005, Tempus granted a project entitled “Quality Assurance for Higher Education in Lebanon” (QAHEL). It focused on the definition of internal quality assurance systems and to train Lebanese experts in this field. In 2006, another project has been supported by Tempus and is entitled “Creation of the Lebanese Engineering Programs Accreditation Commission” (LEPAC). LEPAC has succeeded to define some documents describing standards, procedures and regulations for the external evaluation of the engineering programmes in Lebanon. Lebanese universities have also participated to the UNDP project “Enhancement of Quality Assurance and Institutional Planning” (EQAIP) from 2002 till 2007. This project has evaluated 73 programmes in Computer Sciences, Business Administration, Education and Engineering throughout the Arab region. In 2009, AMIDEAST financed a project led by the “Lebanese Association for Educational Studies” (LAES) and in which the Tempus-HERE (“Higher Education Reform Experts”) actively participated. This project drafted the first version of a law aiming at the creation

²⁶ The list is not exhaustive and is just given to illustrate the trend in this direction.

²⁷ FIBAA: Foundation for International Business Administration Accreditation

²⁸ CEPH: Council on Education for Public Health

²⁹ ACPE: Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education

³⁰ CCAPP: Canadian Council for Accreditation of Pharmacy Programs

³¹ CCNE: Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education

³² ADEE: Association for Dental Education in Europe

of the Lebanese Quality Assurance Agency. Developments in the QA at the institutional level to support the creation of a Lebanese QA Agency have been conducted within the European Tempus TLQAA project. In this project a system for QA in higher education Lebanon has been proposed and discussed in a national roundtable. Standards and procedures for institutional evaluation have been set and experimented in external evaluation of five Lebanese institutions. TLQAA has also built capacity by training about thirty Lebanese experts. The draft law on establishing the Lebanese QA agency has been in the parliament for several years. The quality assurance system and the establishing of quality assurance agencies have also been recommended at the regional level in the latest Meetings of the Arab Ministers Responsible of Higher Education. Finally, it is worth noting that Lebanon has considered in the past few years the establishing of a quality assurance system as a priority on its modernization agenda.

Core Standards for the Evaluation of Programmes

Introduction

Programme review is regarded within the larger context of the need for each institution to develop an ongoing, comprehensive quality assurance and improvement system, and it needs to fit organically within an institution's existing structural processes and values.

The following sections propose a set of standards for the review of programmes in Lebanon. These standards are based on an analysis of both the Lebanese and international context in higher education, presented in the previous sections, and on adopting a certain framework for programme review with its definitions, guiding principles, purposes, and processes.

Accordingly, the following sections outline the adopted definitions, guiding principles, purposes, and processes, and then present the proposed Standards for Programme Review with their domains and the rationale for including and adopting them.

Programme Review Framework, Guiding Principles, Purposes, and Processes

Programme Review Definition

A programme review is a cyclical process for evaluating and continuously enhancing the quality and currency of programmes. It is a comprehensive analysis of programme quality, analyzing a wide variety of data about the programme from the perspective of self-assessment, centrality to mission, viability, needs, student learning outcomes, cost effectiveness, and adequacy of resources (funding, personnel, facilities, etc.). The process is intended to identify opportunities, understand weaknesses, and set a path for future improvements. The results of this evaluation are then used to inform follow-up planning and budgeting processes at various levels in the institution—program, department, college, university—and incorporated into the institution’s overall quality assurance system.

Framework and Guiding Principles

Essential to the development, implementation, and periodic revision of a programme review process are the underlying guiding principles and assumptions upon which it is based. These should be identified and delineated in the programme review process itself.

The following three features should govern any effective programme review process to move it from a traditional input-based model to a modern outcomes-based forward-looking model:

- *Outcomes-based assessment* of student learning and development, as this will heighten the attention to improving the quality of student learning
- *Evidence-based claims and decision-making*, all claims within a self-study report about a programme’s strengths, weaknesses, and proposed improvement plans are to be supported by relevant qualitative and/or quantitative evidence
- *Use of program review results to inform planning and budgeting*. The results of programme review are to be used for follow-up planning and budgeting at various decision-making levels within the organization (programme, department, college and institution). This will help shift the focus from *conducting* an effective programme review to *using the results effectively*, and facilitate integrating the results of programme-level evaluations into larger institutional processes, and also in external evaluation conducted by agencies or the system.

Based on review of literature and practices, the following guiding principles were found to be useful in governing the process of programme review:

- Programme review occurs in an environment that encourages and values honest, critical, and productive analysis among all participants in the process at all levels.
- Academic programme review is a faculty-driven process; Goals and quality measures appropriate for guiding improvements to an academic program are established by programme faculty. All programme faculty members are provided meaningful opportunities to participate in the self-study process.
- Formative assessment “by faculty, for use by faculty” is preferable and more effective in improving student learning and other programme aspects than is assessment by administration. Moreover, engaging the faculty in this assessment process inherently facilitates continuous improvement.
- Collaborative involvement of administration in various steps of the programme review process (e.g., meeting with the external team of evaluators) helps to secure buy-in for change and improvement, as well as to ensure alignment with institutional goals and resources.
- Programme review involves input from multiple programme stakeholders, including, but not limited to, faculty, administrators, students, staff, alumni, accreditors, and prospective employers, but the program’s faculty shall play a central role in the program review process and, together with appropriate administrators, assume principal responsibility for the effectiveness of the process.
- In addition to self assessment and evaluation of weaknesses and strengths, academic units need to look nationally and internationally to identify inspirational institutions for each programme quality measure as a means of identifying ways to further improve the program.

Purposes of Programme Review

A programme review process shall provide the specific purposes for which it is being conducted and these purposes should be articulated to everyone involved. The principal purposes of the review process are to recognize and acknowledge good performance, to enhance satisfactory performance and help programmes which are performing satisfactorily further their own growth, and to identify weak performance and assist programmes in achieving needed improvement. It is directed toward improving teaching and learning, producing a foundation for action, and based upon well-considered academic values and effective practices.

Based on above, the goals of academic programme review can be identified as:

- Maintaining high-quality programmes that are competitive, sought by students, and consistent with a university’s mission.

- Monitoring and pursuing the effective congruence between the mission and priorities of the university and the actual practices in the programme under review.
- Encouraging and supporting programme self-improvement by:
 1. highlighting strengths of programmes,
 2. identifying opportunities for strategic change,
 3. validating that programmes are meeting the changing needs of stakeholders,
 4. identifying areas for improvement and supporting improvement changes, and
 5. providing data necessary to inform the allocation of resources.
- Advancing the strategic directions and institutional priorities of a university as defined in its strategic plan.

Programme Review Process

The programme review process shall promote professionalism, enhance performance, and be effective in yielding a genuinely useful and substantive process for determining programme effectiveness.

The evaluation is conducted through a combination of self-evaluation, followed by peer-evaluation by reviewers external to the programme or department and, usually, also external to the organization. An institution's programme review process typically occurs on a regular cycle of five to eight years, meaning that each programme/department is reviewed every five-eight years.

The programme review process will be both descriptive and evaluative, critical and constructive, and shall provide:

- an articulation of clear, relevant criteria upon which reviews will be based;
- the establishment of reasonable and timely intervals;
- the establishment of the specific purposes for which programme reviews are conducted.

Standards for Programme Review

The Oxford Dictionaries (2014) define a standard as a 'required or agreed level of attainment'. Standards for programme review describe quality practice, but they are not desirable or ambitious goals for colleges to hope to reach: they are the minimum level to assuring and enhancing quality practice. While developing adopting standards for programme review and selecting their domains, it is important to ensure responsiveness to the changing postsecondary environment and that they are aligned with the context of the institution, its educational philosophy, community expectations and student needs, and related professional expectations.

Domains and Scope

Various standards cover different domains depending on the above variables and the focus of the programme. Most commonly used domains are:

- Mission, Goals, and Governance
- Program Curriculum
- Academic Support
- Student Support Services
- Assessment of Student Achievement
- Faculty
- Budget, Resources and Facilities
- Workforce Relevance, Need and Student Interest*
- Comparator and inspirational programmes, how programme compares to similar and to model programmes

*Note: This is mainly required for new programmes

Proposed Lebanese Standards for Programme Review

Based on the framework adopted in this document of ensuring that the programme review is outcome-based, evidence-based, and centred on student learning and development a good number of the standards will be focused on the student holistic experience and learning. By recognizing the centrality of student learning and development as well as requiring assessment of learning outcomes, the proposed standards will provide a framework for self-review of student-oriented programmes and services and will affirm and reinforce expectations of leaders in higher education and accrediting associations. Accordingly, providing standards for curriculum and assessment, student academic and support services, faculty qualifications, and resources are essential for assessing and evaluating success of the programme in enhancing and assuring student learning and development.

Similarly, as this document emphasized the importance of effective use of results and the integration of the results of programme-level evaluations into the larger institutional processes, it is important to assess the extent that this is done through providing standards that ensure that the programme engages in continuous improvement.

The document proposes adopting the below standards for programme review, and programmes must show documented evidence of compliance with each of the standards:

- i. Mission, Goals and Governance
- ii. Curriculum

- iii. Student Services
 - iv. Assessment and Student Success
 - v. Faculty
 - vi. Budget, Resources, and Facilities
 - vii. Continuous Improvement
-
- i. Mission, Goals and Governance
 - a. The programme has clearly defined, comprehensive mission that include measurable programme goals.
 - b. The programme's mission and goals are consistent with mission of the faculty and the University including, where applicable, contribution to strategic initiatives.
 - c. The programme has an organizational structure that supports the achievement of its mission, and the success of its students, faculty and staff.
 - ii. Curriculum
 - a. Programme provides broad, well-integrated knowledge of the discipline, is responsive to changes in the field, and exhibits a curricular design that ensures graduates demonstrate disciplinary knowledge appropriate to their degree.
 - b. The academic programme has specific learning outcomes that are designed to meet the programme's intended purpose.
 - Learning outcomes are appropriate for the degree designation (i.e., associate degree vs. bachelor's degree vs. master's degree vs. doctoral degree or the level in the LQF when applicable).
 - Course requirements and delivery mechanisms provide sufficient opportunities for students to meet learning outcomes.
 - The programme learning outcomes address the major issues and concerns in the discipline or professional area.
 - c. The learning outcomes defined for the courses build together the programme learning outcomes.
 - d. The programme curriculum shall be aligned with the Lebanese Qualifications Framework when applicable.

- iii. Student Academic and Support Services
 - a. The institution provides student administrative services according to established and publicly declared policies in the following areas: Recruitment, Admission, Financial aid, Scholarship applications, Transfer credit and prior learning evaluation, and Student records management.
 - b. The process for the evaluation and recognition of prior learning shall be documented and public.
 - c. The institution provides student support services, including:
 - i. Advising and assessment as needed
 - ii. Advising and assessment for credit transfer and recognition of prior learning
 - iii. Academic support for students with disabilities and other learning needs
 - iv. Physical or mental health counselling
 - v. Orientation services
 - vi. Career services.
 - d. The programme has in place remedies, where necessary, to ensure student progression and completion.
 - e. The programme routinely evaluates the effectiveness of its support services including advising.
 - f. Based on the evaluation results, the Programme makes appropriate adjustments necessary to support student achievement.
- iv. Assessment and Student Success
 - a. The programme has an appropriate number of students to ensure viability.
 - b. The retention rate is sufficiently high to ensure viable completion numbers.
 - c. The programme assesses and evaluates student achievement of the Programme learning outcomes rigorously through direct and indirect methods.
 - d. Formative and summative assessments inform faculty members and students of student progress in the programme. Assessment results are communicated in ways that enable improvements.
- v. Faculty

- a. The number, qualifications, and credentials of faculty members are adequate.
 - b. Faculty resources are sufficient to meet the teaching, scholarship, service, and advising needs of the programme.
 - c. Faculty development is assured as appropriate to the teaching in the discipline and advancing disciplinary knowledge.
 - d. The programme regularly evaluates the effectiveness of faculty with respect to departmental, college, and institutional criteria. The evaluation includes teaching effectiveness, evidence of research, and service to the institution. The evaluation also includes scholarly activity, grants and awards.
- vi. Budget, Resources, and Facilities
- a. The programme's allocated resources are sufficient to support its goals and objectives. The resources include:
 - Financial resources
 - Human resources
 - Physical facilities (e.g., classrooms, laboratories) under the disposal of the student population and the programmes offered. Library resources and services support
 - Technology resources (e.g., hardware, software and professional development) to advance teaching and learning
 - b. Policies are in place to ensure the safety and security of students, faculty and staff.
- vii. Continuous Improvement
- a. The programme engages in periodic self-review, has established evaluation procedures, and shows evidence of improvements based on these processes.
 - b. Multiple direct and indirect assessments are used to inform continuous programme improvement.
 - Assessments are linked to the programme's mission and goals
 - Assessments include student performance in courses, labs and clinical experiences, and alumni performance in the workforce
 - Faculty members are involved in defining the expected outcomes and in determining whether these outcomes are achieved

- Assessments provide faculty with the opportunity to examine student performance in the context of progressively more challenging problems, projects, and standards for performance
- c. The programme engages in periodic self-evaluation, has established evaluation procedures, and shows evidence of improvements based on these processes
- d. Faculty and administrators regularly review the effectiveness of the assessment system
- e. Assessment results are available to stakeholders, including faculty members and students

Experimenting the suggested standards in the TLQAA+

During the next phase of the project, the suggested standards shall be experimented in programme evaluation. The resources allocated in the project being limited it is suggested to cover the following standards in the pilot evaluation.

- Curriculum
- Faculty
- Assessment and student success
- Continuous improvement

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