Relevance and Quality in Higher Education Programmes

Erasmus+ Project "Programme Evaluation for Transparency and Recognition of Skills and Qualifications" (TLQAA+) Experience and Outcomes

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Introduction

When enrolling in a higher education (HE) programme, a learner usually seeks quality education and relevant learning outcomes. Among all facets of a complex object which is a higher education programme, two are the most visible; its quality and its relevance to the societal needs. Quality and relevance are tightly related. The relevance of a higher education programme is certainly a sign of quality. In parallel, a quality programme may lose the public interest if it is not relevant. However, quality and relevance are of different nature.

The relevance of a programme is the extent to which it prepares its graduates to respond to the societal needs. Thus, relevance is a major characteristic of the learning objectives of a programme, whether highly achieved through the learning process or not. In parallel, quality is the extent by which the achieved learning outcomes are close to the preset learning objectives. It also measures the care and efforts spent in order to continuously improve its efficiency and productivity and to assure the fitness of the achieved outcomes with the set objectives.

Managing the relevance of higher education programmes has always been a concern. However this concern has increased recently to face pressing challenges that are facing higher education and its programmes. The advent of knowledge based society pushes higher education to the centre of societal developments increasing the expectations and by the same fact the pressure and accountability. In parallel, the fast pace at which the global knowledge is progressing shortens the time constants by which institutions shall revisit their programmes' learning objectives in order to maintain their relevance. The massification of higher education and the broadening of accesses increase the load in classrooms while request for personalised education is augmenting. Financing higher education and the diversification of sources add to the previous challenges. Each higher education system adds to the global challenges some specific ones. For example, the high diversity and fractioning is a supplementary challenge for the sector in Lebanon, to which adds the financing model and the lack of resources dedicated to research.

Aware of the importance of the quality and relevance dimensions and the impact of all the challenges that face higher education, a consortium of twenty three partners has been formed and was supported by the European Union Erasmus+ Capacity Building Programme in order to conduct a project entitled "*Programme Evaluation for Transparency and Recognition of Skills and Qualifications*" (TLQAA+). This booklet describes the achievements of the project and provides, based on the lessons learned, a model and guidance to establishing processes and procedures in order to assure the quality and the relevance of programmes and the transparency and recognition of the resulting qualifications.

Relevance, Quality and other Dimensions

Complex relationships connect quality, relevance and other dimensions in higher education programmes. In the first part of the project, the partners spent significant efforts trying to understand those relationships in order to build appropriate quality assurance (QA) processes. Consensuses have been reached about many elements of response to several questions in this direction. In the following some of the main findings are provided and may serve as a basis for developing or updating similar processes in the future.

Relevance and quality assurance

Several international agencies dealing with higher education programmes integrate relevance as a component of the quality assurance process. This is typically the case of ABET[1] in the USA and CTI[2] in France. ABET and CTI define the competences expected at the output of an engineering programme. In order to define the required competences for a qualification, the agencies often rely on recognised professional associations in the domain of interest. For example, at the Masters level, ABET in joint cooperation with international reputed engineering associations in each field define and update the competences expected from a graduate in the corresponding engineering field. In such cases, the professional bodies work closely with quality assurance agencies to define the relevant competences required from a graduate of a higher education programme.

Integrating relevance as part of the quality assurance process has several advantages. The created synergies encourage the higher education institutions to regularly update their programmes in order to meet the defined learning objectives. In order to have this approach succeeding, the process needs highly experienced and reputed professional and scientific associations that are disposed to cooperate and possessing the necessary resources to. However, the integration of relevance and QA must be performed with care in order not reduce the margins allowing distinctive positive features of the designed programmes in different institutions. Moreover, the approach has the disadvantage of tending to partition the disciplines of study or even sub-disciplines.

An alternative to the integration consists in separating the management of relevance from the processes of quality assurance, while keeping them connected. In this context, qualifications frameworks (QFs) can be defined, maintained and used to provide transparent reading of qualifications in terms of required knowledge, skills and personal competences like ethics and responsibility. This is achieved by defining a grid in which the rows correspond to the level of qualifications, and where columns use descriptors and indicators in order to define the required knowledge, skills and personal competences at each level. Aligning its learning objectives on the defined descriptors assure the relevance of a higher education programme. A QF can be generic across disciplines or specific per domain. In the later case they are often called sectoral QFs. Dialogue with socio-economic partners including scientific

[1] Accreditation Board of Engineering and Technology (ABET): an engineering professional body responsible of the education, accreditation, regulation and professional development of engineering in the United States.

[2] "Commission des Titres d'Ingénieurs" (CTI): a national agency for the evaluation of engineering programmes in France.

and professional associations when available is necessary in the definition of the QFs. Thus, QFs clearly identify what is expected from a holder of a qualification to know, to achieve and/or to behave. A process to assure the alignment of degrees and qualifications against the QF yields a measurement of their relevance.

The adoption of QFs presents an alternative model to the definition of the required competences as an integrated part of the standards and criteria. Having the two competing models opens the door for few questions; what approach shall be adopted? shall a national qualifications framework (NQF) be constructed?

What model to adopt in order to connect relevance to quality?

It is not straightforward to decide on the model to adopt in order to define the relevance of a programme in a given domain in a particular system and, to connect this relevance to the quality assurance process. The choice of the model depends on a set of factors including:

- *Existence of recognized and competent professional and scientific associations*: The existence of professional and scientific associations, their sizes, and the level of their professional and scientific activities is a key element for the choice of the model. Such associations shall be capable to provide and maintain for most of the fields a list of competences and knowledge required from a graduate, in order to have it viable to integrate quality assurance and relevance. In small systems where professional activities are less structured and where expertise is lacking in a significant number of fields, it is preferable to make use of a qualifications framework. QFs offer the flexibility to assess the relevance per field, per domain or globally at a certain level, i.e. the descriptors can be defined for an education level to all fields, or per domain (e.g. engineering in general) or per sector (e.g. for a particular engineering field) depending on the available expertise to do so. For the case of Lebanon, it has been decided to adopt the QF model to assess the relevance of the programmes.
- *Diversity*: The diversity of the system calls for a generic model for assessing the relevance of a programme. QFs respond to this criterion. Actually, the HE programmes in the diverse[3] set of institutions are inspired from a broad set of existing programmes in other systems. This makes it complex to adopt one set of criteria integrated in the QA standards for assessing the relevance. Moreover, the process of definition and adoption of QF fosters the cohesion within the system diversity.
- *Cohesion across disciplines*: The expansion of sciences and technologies does not happen at the same pace across all disciplines. The nature of the disciplines varies. Different challenges result from this variability. Traditionally, the levels of studies have been often related to the number of years, semesters or credit-hours. This does not take into account variations that exist across disciplines. Depending on the discipline, one shall need more or less learning efforts to reach a level of maturation and expertise. Again depending on the disciplines, the scientific and technological

[3] Diversity can be observed at linguistic level, system of education level, credit system level, curriculum organization level, etc.

development might imply modifications to curricula, which can be performed vertically by increasing the number of credits or horizontally by splitting in options or subdisciplines. The choice is related to the nature of the discipline itself. QF offers an advantage and an explanation of the levels of qualifications expressed by descriptors far from quantitative numbers of years and credits. Actually, maintaining quantitative number of years and credits of study is from one side inaccurate and from the other side may create for the learners a feeling of non equity across the disciplines. By clarifying using descriptors the levels of study QFs permit to overcome this issue. In addition, they offer a forum to discuss the qualifications and their levels across disciplines and within each discipline maintaining thereby consistency and coherence.

- *Recognition and mobility*: Besides the advantage of using NQF for relevance of the programmes, NQF offers a better readability of degrees which facilitates the processes and procedures of recognition and mobility. This is an important advantage for systems where such processes are to be developed of updated.

Considering the previous factors, and based on the Lebanese context, it has been decided to adopt the qualifications framework as a reference tool specifying the required competences at a certain level of education and allowing to assess the level of a qualification/degree by aligning it against these requirements.

Choosing to manage relevance by QFs does not dispense from connecting the built NQF with the QA process. Actually, QF and QA are strongly interrelated and are not just complementary. This shall be considered when defining the programme evaluation process. In one direction, the capability of a QA process to evaluate the level of attainment of outcomes corresponding to the descriptors of a level shall constrain the definition of the descriptors or at least the mapping against the NQF. In the other direction, the QA standards and procedures must take into account the alignment against the NQF since relevance is to be set as a quality criterion.

How to build a qualifications framework?

The model adopted consists in defining and using a national qualifications framework (NQF) for the relevance of a programme and the readability of the qualifications. Two approaches are generally distinguished in building a NQF; i/ a bottom-up approach starting from a map of the existing qualifications in order to define a grid that faithfully describe the existing levels and, ii/ a top-down approach starting by setting the NQF grid respecting global standards and matching qualifications against it.

The first approach offers the advantage of providing the possibility to genuinely describe the existing set of qualifications in a system while introducing the NQF tool. This supposes a

freedom in the choice of the grid size and levels. Once such an authentic NQF is defined complexity might appears in aligning it to other QFs or to an overarching one like the EQF[4].

In the top-down approach, a NQF grid model is first defined respecting the international standards. Afterwards the qualifications are aligned on it in order to validate their relevance. This supposes a strong cooperation with the institutions and their readiness to apply necessary updates in order to satisfy the requirements. This consensus is not always available and must be assured before starting the process.

A first draft of a Lebanese qualifications framework (LQF) has been constructed in a previous project[5]. This has been adopted and experimented in the present project. As a result, small modifications have been applied to the descriptors. It is worth noting that the first version of the LQF has been built using a hybrid approach. A map of the Lebanese qualifications has been established and was checked against an eight level grid inspired from the EQF. Then the descriptors of those levels have been adjusted to better consider the local context.

Relation to Recognition

Recognition of qualifications is a complex and wide process. Different types of recognition exist; i/ recognition of a national qualification, ii/ recognition of a foreign qualification, iii/ recognition of credits, iv/ recognition of prior learning, v/ recognition of informal learning, etc. In addition to the official recognition by the authorities, complementary processes exist, e.g. admission in a programme based on a recognised qualification of a lower degree or, recognition of a qualification in the labour market especially for regulated professions.

Regulations and tools have been widely developed in order to organise the recognition processes. International conventions[6] have been signed for the recognition of foreign qualifications and to facilitate the mobility. Information centres have also been built to offer a transparent readability of degrees and qualifications. One can cite the ENIC-NARIC[7] network which offers transparently information about qualifications issued in different systems.

QFs offer transparent readability of qualifications and can be considered as an additional tool that facilitates the recognition and mobility. This formed an additional argument supporting the choice of relevance through QFs.

QA starts to be used intensively in recognition. Some systems and in specific domains will soon require a valid QA certificate or accreditation as a condition for the recognition of the held qualification. This has an impact on the development of the QA process which has to be recognised. At the European level a register of recognised QA agencies has been developed

[4] European Qualifications Framework
[5] "European Training Foundation"(ETF) project co-financed by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and with the support of the European Tempus HERE team in Lebanon. Project executed during the period 2010-2013.
[6] E.g. Lisbon convention. It is worth noting that an new international and global convention is being presently prepared.
[7] ENIC: European Network of Information Centres in the European Region
NARIC: National Academic Recognition Information Centres in the European Union

and is called EQAR[8]. It is therefore recommended when developing a QA process to respect the international standards in order to have it recognised and have its decisions accepted.

Finally, it is also important to have the QA processes evaluating the recognition and admission procedures applied at the entry of a programme. This was a recommendation in the EAR[9] manual, a declaration in the Bucharest Communiqué in 2012 and, one of the standards of the ESG[10] 2015.

Quality Assurance and New Delivery Modes

Presently online learning, blended/hybrid learning and other forms of learning are being developed. The project consortium has normally validated the need for the evaluation and assurance of the quality in these cases as globally called for. Some elements of the corresponding QA model have been identified and are:

- Student success rates: retention versus dropout rates
- Assessment of teaching staff and quality of teaching by the students
- Evaluation by instructors of online courses
- Having a system for collecting feedbacks

[8] EQAR: The European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education
[9] EAR: The European Area for Recognition
[10] ESG: European Standards and Guidelines. Standard 1.4: Student admission, progression, recognition and certification

Building Internal Quality Assurance

A higher education institution is the main responsible of the programmes delivered and their quality. This key principle motivates the development of internal quality assurance (IQA) system and in particular for a continuous improvement of the delivered programmes. External evaluation has evolved in the direction of assuring that the internal quality processes are performing correctly. Such processes shall also be fostering the culture of quality within the institution that shall reflect on the performance achieved. In this context, internal and external evaluations appear to be complementary. What boundaries separate the two?

Historically, in systems where quality assurance mechanisms are enrooted, it is often noticed that external evaluation has initiated and fostered the development of internal structures. Progressively the internal quality structures have developed which then relieved external evaluation from going into details while stressing more on evaluating the performance of internal processes. In countries like Lebanon where external evaluation is performed by international agencies sought by private HE institutions to accredit them at institutional or programmatic levels, internal QA systems have been developed either to better respond to the requirements of these agencies or, by the support of European projects on QA like TLQAA and TLQAA+. This being said, an important role of external evaluation remains in regulating the system and maintaining its coherence.

In the project, principles and guidelines for the establishment and development of internal quality assurance (IQA) have been proposed. Consensus has been reached on the general principles that underpin all aspects of quality assurance in higher education. These state that quality assurance should:

- be an integral part of the internal management of the institution, whether directed specifically at teaching, learning and research, or at the support and other functions the HE institution operates
- be relevant, valid and proportionate to its specific aims and the risks it seeks to cover, and be applied consistently
- reflect the interests of students, employers and society more generally
- recognise the central importance of institutional autonomy, and the HEI's primary responsibility for the quality of education its provides
- be aligned with the legal, pedagogical and social contexts in which the HEI operates
- include a focus on improvement / enhancement, in addition to monitoring whether necessary standards and expectations are being met
- lead to reports that are easily accessible and comprehensible to the general public

While admitting that the better structure for IQA remains the one chosen within an institution and respecting the defined principle, a general structure[11] for IQA has been suggested as a reference and is formed of:

- A strategic committee
- An operational team
- Projects teams

The proposed structure offers the advantage of a clear separation of the roles and possibly better interaction and involvement of all the internal stakeholders.

IQA has to define its own standards, regulations and tools for assessment. These shall take into consideration the standards set at the system level and extend them. They must also take into consideration the relevance of programmes as defined at the system level, e.g. in a NQF. Assessment shall always include direct and indirect measurements. Direct assessment is tangible and measurable. It tends to be more compelling evidence of the students learning. In comparison, indirect assessment often refers to proxy signs of what students have achieved in their learning process.

In definitive, IQA is a core element of a QA system. While focusing on developing models and tools to assure quality and relevance of HE programmes at the system level, a particular attention must be reserved to building IQA. General principles and guidelines have to be developed at the system level for this purpose. Such guidelines have been proposed in the project.

[11] For more details please refer to TLQAA+ outcome document "*Guidelines for Internal Quality Assurance Systems within Lebanese Universities*" June 2018. http://plus.tlqaa.org/files/TLQAAp_WP4_IQA_Guidelines-v3.pdf

Programme Evaluation and Alignment

Goals of Programme Evaluation

The principal purposes of the review and evaluation process are to recognize and acknowledge good performance and high relevance, to enhance satisfactory performance and help programmes which are performing satisfactorily further their own growth, to identify weak performance and assist programmes in achieving needed improvement, and to validate that required competences for a graduate are planned and attended. It is directed toward improving teaching and learning, producing a foundation for action, and is based upon well-considered academic values and effective practices.

The goals of academic programme review and evaluation can be identified as:

- Maintaining high-quality programmes that are competitive, sought by students, relevant according to the society expectations, 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 scrutiny
- Encouraging and supporting programme self-improvement by:
  - highlighting strengths of programmes
  - identifying opportunities for strategic change
  - validating that programmes are meeting the changing needs of stakeholders
  - identifying areas for improvement and supporting improvement changes
  - 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

Guiding Principles

It is important to define underlying guiding principles to the development, implementation, and periodic revision of a programme evaluation process. The following three features should govern any effective programme review process:

- ***Transparent and independent*** evaluation is a key for a significant evaluation yielding usable and useful outcomes
- ***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. 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 is often designated as continuous improvement

Besides the main features of an evaluation and alignment processes, consensus has been reached on the guiding principles. These are:

- The environment in which evaluation is conducted encourages and values honest, critical, and productive analysis among all participants in the process at all levels
- The evaluation process shall carefully consider the alignment of the programme's learning objectives against what is considered as relevant, e.g. in a national qualifications framework
- The programme evaluation process is faculty-driven; Goals and quality measures appropriate for guiding improvements to an academic program are established by programme faculty. All faculty members involved in the programme are provided meaningful opportunities to participate in the self-study process. Engaging the faculty in this assessment process inherently facilitates continuous improvement
- Collaboration and involvement of administration in various steps of the programme evaluation process (e.g., meeting with the external team of evaluators) helps to secure support for change and improvement, and 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
- Respect of international standards guarantees that both the programme objectives and evaluation remain at the state of the art

Scope

The definition of standards and procedures and, descriptors of a Lebanese qualifications framework is at the core of a quality assurance system. Ideally, a set of standards should be identified by programme or discipline and, sectoral QFs should be adopted and related to each discipline. In order to achieve such goals, significant time and efforts must be spent and large amount of resources need to be available. This is not often the case.

In the model adopted and presented previously a progressive approach can be used. Actually, by separating quality assurance from relevance it is easier to define a tree-based set of standards for quality and descriptors for QFs. The idea is to start with a set of core standards for all programmes in all disciplines and a generic LQF for all qualifications as a root basis for quality assurance and relevance. Afterwards, it is possible to provide more specific standards and QFs, first for big domains of study and later on per discipline. Three big domains of study have been adopted:

- Engineering and hard sciences
- Health, medical and life sciences
- Human and social sciences

For the evaluation of a programme, if discipline-based standards and descriptors are available they shall be used. If not, domain-based standards and descriptors can be used.

Within the limited resources in the project, the objective set was to define core standards, standards per domain and possibly for few disciplines. In the following both LQF and core standards are provided.

The Lebanese Qualifications Framework

For relevance purposes a first version of a LQF has been adopted. It is provided in the following table for the levels 5 to 8 that correspond to the higher education qualifications.

Level	Knowledge	Know how	Social skills
level 5	Has detailed and specialised theoretical, methodological, technological and multidisciplinary knowledge linked to a particular area of work in various contexts, or to a sphere of study.	Can organise, plan, conduct activities and assess their performance, applying adapted methods and instruments. Can devise/create operational solutions adapted to conceptual, methodological and/or technical problems in a specialist field. Can identify and mobilise the technological, material and human resources necessary to carry out the activities.	Can manage, organise and supervise a team. Can consider, assess and develop one's performances and those of others in the context of professional activities or studies where changes are unpredictable.
level 6	Has in-depth knowledge in a sphere of work or study requiring a critical understanding of theories and principles applicable to a range of professional situations and diverse studies.	Can devise technical, methodological and conceptual solutions and demonstrate expertise and innovative ability to resolve complex and unpredictable problems in a specialist sphere of work or study, using advanced skills.	Can implement unpredictable complex technical or professional activities or projects, including responsibilities in terms of taking decisions in professional or study contexts requiring one to adapt/adaptation to new technologies and methods and to new forms of organisation. Can take on responsibilities in connection with individual and collective professional development.
level 7	Has highly specialised knowledge, some of which are in the vanguard of knowledge in a sphere of work or study, based on original ideas and/or research. Has critical awareness of knowledge in a certain field and at the interface of several fields.	Can solve problems relating to research and innovation, to develop new knowledge and new procedures by mobilising highly-specialised skills. Can integrate knowledge from different areas and communicate the knowledge and the results of activities with specialists and non-specialists.	Can act on complex, unpredictable professional or study contexts that require new strategic approaches. Can make judgements and exercise responsibilities, considering the social and ethical aspects associated with the decisions. Can take on responsibilities to contribute to knowledge and professional practices and/or to revise the strategic performance of teams.
level 8	Has knowledge at the most advanced frontier of a sphere of work or study and at the interface of several fields.	Can deal with critical problems of research and/or innovation and explore new spheres, extend and redefine existing knowledge or professional practices by mobilising the most advanced and most specialised skills and techniques, including in relation to synthesis and evaluation.	Can demonstrate a high level of authority, innovation, autonomy, scientific or professional integrity and a sustained commitment to the production of new ideas or new processes in a sphere in the vanguard of work or study, including in relation to research.

The LQF has been made specific for domains of study or disciplines. These specific LQF are provided hereafter.

LQF for Engineering Programmes

The following table provides the sectoral LQF for engineering.

	Knowledge	Know-how	Social skills
Level 6	Has in-depth knowledge in a sphere of work or study requiring a critical understanding of theories and principles applicable to a range of professional situations and diverse studies.	Can devise technical, methodological and conceptual solutions and demonstrate expertise and innovative ability to resolve complex and unpredictable problems in a specialist sphere of work or study, using advanced skills.	Can implement unpredictable complex technical or professional activities or projects, including responsibilities in terms of taking decisions in professional or study contexts requiring one to adapt/adaptation to new technologies and methods and to new forms of organisation. Can take on responsibilities in connection with individual and collective professional development.
	Assimilate and use scientific and technical engineering resources	Solve engineering problems by applying principles of engineering, science and mathematics Design, implement and test engineering solutions, systems and services	Communicate clearly and effectively Work in a team and lead the development of engineering practices and processes
level 7	Has highly specialised knowledge, some of which are in the vanguard of knowledge in a sphere of work or study, based on original ideas and/or research. Has critical awareness of knowledge in a certain field and at the interface of several fields.	Can solve problems relating to research and innovation, to develop new knowledge and new procedures by mobilising highly specialised skills. Can integrate knowledge from different areas and communicate the knowledge and the results of activities with specialists and non-specialists.	Can act on complex, unpredictable professional or study contexts that require new strategic approaches. Can make judgements and exercise responsibilities, considering the social and ethical aspects associated with the decisions. Can take on responsibilities to contribute to knowledge and professional practices and/or to revise the strategic performance of team.
	Respect economic/ commercial dimension, quality, competitiveness, productivity, safety, and sustainability in the design and implementation of an engineering solution	Advance engineering knowledge, practices, processes and systems Apply enquiry competences and search for new engineering solutions and systems	Apply professional codes and respect ethical and professional values while exercising engineering Adapt to new working contexts Work in an international context showing good linguistic skills and cultural knowledge

LQF for nursing programmes

The following table provides the sectoral LQF for nursing.

	Knowledge	Know-how	Social skills
Level 6	Has in-depth knowledge in a sphere of work or study requiring a critical understanding of theories and principles applicable to a range of professional situations and diverse studies.	Can devise technical, methodological and conceptual solutions and demonstrate expertise and innovative ability to resolve complex and unpredictable problems in a specialist sphere of work or study, using advanced skills.	Can implement unpredictable complex technical or professional activities or projects, including responsibilities in terms of taking decisions in professional or study contexts requiring one to adapt/adaptation to new technologies and methods and to new forms of organisation. Can take on responsibilities in connection with individual and collective professional development.
	Has an understanding of relevant biological, social and related sciences as they apply to nursing practice. Integrate knowledge and has an understanding of a systematic approach to care and a specific range if nursing interventions and of the concepts and methods that pertain to clinical practice skills and that are essential for effective and safe nursing practice. Critically analyse and evaluate relevant knowledge in nursing sciences and health promotion.	Assist individual, families and groups in achieving optimum health, independence, recovery or a peaceful death in a professional caring manner. Provide and manage direct practical promotional, preventive, curative, rehabilitative or supportive nursing. Plan and initiate care and treatment modalities within agreed interdisciplinary protocols and evaluate their effectiveness. Identify and promote health promotion strategies and priorities.	Establish and maintain therapeutic interpersonal relationships with patients and communities. Effectively manage the nursing care of clients. Demonstrate the ability to team work. Educate individuals and groups to maintain and promote health care. Respect the codes and ethics of the nursing practices.
level 7	Has highly specialised knowledge, some of which are in the vanguard of knowledge in a sphere of work or study, based on original ideas and/or research. Has critical awareness of knowledge in a certain field and at the interface of several fields.	Can solve problems relating to research and innovation, to develop new knowledge and new procedures by mobilising highly specialised skills. Can integrate knowledge from different areas and communicate the knowledge and the results of activities with specialists and non-specialists.	Can act on complex, unpredictable professional or study contexts that require new strategic approaches. Can make judgements and exercise responsibilities, considering the social and ethical aspects associated with the decisions. Can take on responsibilities to contribute to knowledge and professional practices and/or to revise the strategic performance of team.
	Demonstrate the integration of knowledge from a broad range of disciplines and of major research methodologies relevant to and allowing the development of the nursing domain. Demonstrate a knowledge base necessary to exercise higher levels of judgement and decision making within nursing practices. Generate nursing knowledge and innovative clinical practices.	Demonstrate expert skills in providing care within practice framework and multidisciplinary team. Conduct a comprehensive health needs assessment as the basis of independent nursing practice within a specified area. Assess and critically evaluate the complex concepts underpinning professional nursing practices. Act as an educational resource for health care professionals. Master different approaches to research and justify their use in practice.	Demonstrate autonomy, accountability, authority, leadership and responsibility in nursing. Actively contribute to the nursing knowledge of the nursing team and generate and transmit innovative practices. Review critically the working of teams and demonstrate skills in management of conflict. Assure the respect of and develop the codes and ethics of nursing practices.

LQF for medical programmes

The following table provides the sectoral LQF for general medical education.

	Knowledge	Know-how	Social skills
Level 8	Has knowledge at the most advanced frontier of a sphere of work or study and at the interface of several fields.	Can deal with critical problems of research and/or innovation and explore new spheres, extend and redefine existing knowledge or professional practices by mobilising the most advanced and most specialised skills and techniques, including in relation to synthesis and evaluation.	Can demonstrate a high level of authority, innovation, autonomy, scientific or professional integrity and a sustained commitment to the production of new ideas or new processes in a sphere in the vanguard of work or study, including in relation to research.
	Demonstrate an understanding of the physical, psychological, pharmacological, and ethical matters that impact patient care and show the ability to discuss the structure and function of the human body at the whole body, organ system, organ, tissue, cellular and molecular levels. Demonstrate an understanding and the ability to use the most advanced knowledge in genetics, biochemical basis of cellular function, immunology, epidemiology, statistics. Recognise normal psychological development. Identify main pathological mechanisms. Analyse the principles of both curative and palliative therapeutics necessary to provide the best therapeutic options. Discuss the role of health care policies in improving patient care, including non-biological determinants of health, economic, psychological, social and cultural factors.	Perform a complete and focused physical exam taking into consideration the patient context by gathering and analysing the patient's information. Apply the most advanced clinical, laboratory, imaging, pathology and pathophysiological principles and exams to diseases. Develop differential diagnosis and design an optimal treatment in clinical medicine and patient care. Plan the patient's investigations and management needs, and use information technology and other advanced resources for this purpose. Demonstrate understanding of the need to collaborate with others in caring for patients and appraise the need for requesting consultation with other health care professionals for the well-being of the patient. Practice patient confidentiality.	Apply the medical profession ethical principles and discuss the role of medical jurisprudence in health care. Demonstrate honesty and integrity in all interactions with patients, families, colleagues, and the healthcare team. Demonstrate a commitment to scientific knowledge and improvement of care quality. Promote access to medical care. Interpret information about health indicators to identify needs of communities and plan appropriate interventions. Analyse the organisation, financing, and delivery of health care and apply the principles of cost-effectiveness. Determine personal and professional conflicts of interest.

LQF for Psychology programmes

The following table provides the sectoral LQF for psychology.

	Knowledge	Know-how	Social skills
Level 6	Has in-depth knowledge in a sphere of work or study requiring a critical understanding of theories and principles applicable to a range of professional situations and diverse studies.	Can devise technical, methodological and conceptual solutions and demonstrate expertise and innovative ability to resolve complex and unpredictable problems in a specialist sphere of work or study, using advanced skills.	Can implement unpredictable complex technical or professional activities or projects, including responsibilities in terms of taking decisions in professional or study contexts requiring one to adapt/adaptation to new technologies and methods and to new forms of organisation. Can take on responsibilities in connection with individual and collective professional development.
	-Define key concepts of the different domains of psychology. -Distinguish the different theoretical perspectives of social psychology, develop conceptual skills of communication and put into practice group functioning. -Recognize the foundations of the psychology of child, adolescent and adult development, and highlight the relative characteristics of each stage.	-Rigorously adopt a methodological and statistical analysis of the scientific approach in psychology, which combines the epistemological, ethical, technological and static principles. -Validate the clinical approach, maintenance procedures and clinical examination and the method of testing at the level of the child, adolescent and adult. -Adopt the models and methods of consulting advice and guidance toward education, training and careers. -Analyze through cognition, biology and neurobiology, thepsyche and human behavior, normal and pathological in its environment. -Put into practice the acquired knowledge and evaluate training. -Put into practice the fundamental concepts of ergonomics while placing them as priority work health and worktime relations and analyzing sociologically the institutional environment.	-Develop psychological management of management issues, developments of labor and their consequences. -Correlate the basic notions of psychoanalysis and target the relationship between theory and analytical practice in clinical settings. -Examine the personality across the different theoretical and psychometric perspectives of psychology. -Delineate psychopathology existent from early childhood to adulthood.
level 7	Has highly specialised knowledge, some of which are in the vanguard of knowledge in a sphere of work or study, based on original ideas and/or research. Has critical awareness of knowledge in a certain field and at the interface of several fields.	Can solve problems relating to research and innovation, to develop new knowledge and new procedures by mobilising highly specialised skills. Can integrate knowledge from different areas and communicate the knowledge and the results of activities with specialists and non-specialists.	Can act on complex, unpredictable professional or study contexts that require new strategic approaches. Can make judgements and exercise responsibilities, considering the social and ethical aspects associated with the decisions. Can take on responsibilities to contribute to knowledge and professional practices and/or to revise the strategic performance of team.
	-Recognize the key concepts, methods and models of psychology in the clinical, professional and familial practice. -Examine and define mental and addictive disorders through various psychopathological perspectives.	-Adopt an appropriate a methodological and statistical analysis of the scientific approach in psychology, which combines the epistemological, ethical, technological and static principles. -Put into practice the acquired learning and evaluate the training. -Analyze, starting from cognition and neuropsychology, the psyche and the behavior of the human, normal and pathological, in their stressful and traumatic environment.	-Put into practice the psychological assessments in a school setting. -Examine workplace productivity and management and employee working styles. -Solve problems in the workplace in order to improve the quality of life.

The Standards

For sake of transparency a set of standards are generally defined in order to evaluate the quality against. Similarly to QFs standards can be defined at different levels:

- Global for all programmes
- Per disciplinary domains
- Per discipline

Generic standards are defined at the overall level. They are more focused when defined per disciplinary domains and very specific when defined at each discipline level. In order to illustrate, a generic criterion like for example "*teaching and learning methodologies must be in line with the defined learning outcomes*" would be transformed into several criteria like for example "*include sufficient practical learning in order to acquire a specific competence related to the discipline*".

The three levels approach is flexible and allows overcoming the lack of resources and expertise necessary to define specific sets of standards for discipline, especially for smaller systems like in Lebanon. It also allows a progressive development of the standards and tools.

In order to determine the overall core standards, a literature review of existing standards has been performed and a draft of standards has been proposed and discussed within the consortium and in a national roundtable. This led to the adoption of seven 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

For each standard, a set of criteria has been defined. These are provided in the following table.

The core standards have been made more specific for the following disciplinary domains:

- Engineering and hard sciences[12]
- Health, medical and life sciences[13]
- Human and social sciences[14]

[12] Please refer to http://plus.tlqaa.org/node/292
[13] Please refer to http://plus.tlqaa.org/node/293
[14] Please refer to http://plus.tlqaa.org/node/294

Standard	Criteria
1. 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.
2. 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.
3. 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: ▪ Advising and assessment as needed ▪ Advising and assessment for credit transfer and recognition of prior learning ▪ Academic support for students with disabilities and other learning needs ▪ Physical or mental health counselling ▪ Orientation services ▪ 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.
4. 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.
5. 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.
6. 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.
7. 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

The Procedures

For sake of transparency and efficiency it is important to have a formal frame for the programme review/evaluation. The definition of the evaluation procedures for QA is guided by a set of principles that are:

- Considering the IQA
- Independence[15]
- Transparency[16,17]
- Fit for purpose[18]
- Process including:
    - Self assessment
    - External assessment including site visit
    - Reporting
    - Consistent follow-up
- Review committee carefully constituted
    - No conflict of interest
    - Good coverage of the different aspects to evaluate

[15] At least at the operational level
[16] Process based on publicly available standards and criteria
[17] All the procedures shall be published and accessible.
[18] Limited overload on institutions and programmes and beneficial for the improvement of the quality

    - Include student member

- Confidentiality[19]
- Public reporting that includes:
    - Context description
    - Evidence based analysis of findings
    - Recommendations and follow-up actions
- Appeal[20]

Based on the previous principles and after taking into consideration the local context, a set of key concepts has been adopted. These are:

- Reviews conducted are based on clear procedures and explicit standards and criteria;
- Reviews are evidence based. They bear on outcomes and not projects or persons;
- The review shall be in three phases:
    - A phase of alignment with the suggested Lebanese Qualifications Framework[21]
    - Study of the self assessment report
    - Site visit to collect additional evidences
- A review committee shall be formed for each review;
- The evaluation activities and reviews shall be protected against any possible conflict of interest between reviewers and the institutions or the programmes under scrutiny;
- The review committees shall include all necessary competences and at least one student;
- The reviewers are chosen according to clear processes and explicit criteria;
- Decisions within the review committees are collegiate;
- The reviewers should respect the confidentiality of the information collected;
- The reviewers should respect the rules and procedures defined;

[19] The information provided for the evaluation purposes shall be treated as strictly confidential
[20] Appeal procedure were not included within the TLQAA+ project for the lack of time
[21] Please refer to http://plus.tlqaa.org/node/237

- The reviewers should respect their peers from the institutions;
- The evaluation or review reports are public. They shall not contain any reference to the names of persons;
- The responsible of the programmes shall have the opportunity to appeal the first draft of the report by providing evidences supporting their arguments;
- A final report shall be published.

Based on the guiding principles the evaluation procedures must be defined. In the project, a programme evaluation/review process is proposed. It is characterised by the following phases:

- ***Self-assessment phase***: where the executives in charge of the programme under scrutiny designate a reporting team to conduct the self assessment based on the standards and LQF provided. Sufficient evidence and indicators shall be provided in order to validate the statements reported in the self-assessment report.
- ***Review Committee designation***: A set of experts shall be designated from a pool of experts maintained by the agency in charge of the programme review. An experimented chairperson with good mediation skills is nominated to lead the review committee. The review committee must have sufficient expertise in evaluation and in the domains covered by the evaluation and the names of its members shall be communicated to the executives in charge of the programme to check for conflict of interest. A review officer shall also be named to support and oversee the process without interfering in choices and decisions.
- ***Alignment on the National Qualifications Framework***: A subcommittee from the review committee shall align the programme against the LQF. Complementary information might be requested in order to complete the alignment. The results of the alignment shall be written in a preliminary internal report that serves as areference for the next phases.
- ***Visit preparation***: Several documents shall be handed to the review committee by the agency[22] and about the programme[23]. The review committee shall be granted access to the programme information system and shall prepare the list of issues[24] to explore further during the site visit. In this phase, the review committee shall be particularly careful about: i/ the balance between direct and indirect assessments, ii/ the articulation between programme learning outcomes/objectives and course learning outcomes, and iii/ the indicators provided. It is preferable to organise a coordination meeting for the review committee towards the end of this phase.

[22] Standards and criteria, rules and procedures, guide for reviewer, …
[23] Self assessment report, intermediary report resulting from alignment against QF, indicators, …
[24] The issues are points to clarify and not weaknesses and they are for internal usage only.

- ***Site visit***: The site visit shall be organised as planned. It shall start preferably with a meeting with the dean of the faculty or the executive in charge of the programme. A room shall be allocated to the review committee during the duration of the visit. The site visit is formed of a series of meetings of all kinds with a broad set of stakeholders. Reviewers shall be prepared for each meeting and shall remain neutral during the meetings. Assertion made by interviewees need to be validated. Regularly during the visit the review committee shall meet to debrief on the developments and evidences acquired during the visit.
- ***Drafting the review report***: At the end of the site visit the review committee shall agree on the edition assignments of the parts of the review report to the members. The sections will then be written by the reviewers and the chairperson shall collect them on due date. The chairperson shall perform the final editing of the first draft to be discussed within the committee in a dedicated meeting. This report shall have a formal structure and respect several criteria[25] including: being analytical, evidence based, coherent, pertinent, precise, objective and useful. The alignment with the QF is a formal part of the report. The report must end with conclusions and recommendations. An editor from the agency shall edit the report in order to assure coherence among all programmes reports. The resulting report (excluding the conclusions and recommendations) shall be sent to the executives in charge of the programme.
- ***Finalizing the review report***: In response to the received report the executives in charge of the programme may send factual clarifications. Based on the provided fact the agency may apply some modifications to the review report and send the final version including conclusions and recommendations to the programme managers and to the directorate general of higher education. After three months, an executive summary of the report is made public.

Other Tools

In the previous sections the core tools necessary to conduct a useful evaluation/review of a HE programme have been presented and include:

- Qualifications Framework and its sectoral derived variants
- Core standards and domain specific standards
- Rules and regulations

Some other tools shall also be provided in order to support the process. Within the project the following tools have been developed:

[25] Please refer to the Erasmus+ TLQAA+ deliverable "Rules and Procedures for Academic Programme Evaluation" March 2018.
http://plus.tlqaa.org/sites/plus.tlqaa.org/files/TLQAAp_Rules_Procedures_v1_1.pdf

- Guide for building internal quality assurance units[26]. IQA is at the core of the quality assurance. It is important to provide the institutions in a system with a guide to support them in the construction of their internal QA system.
- Guide for the preparation of the self assessment[27]. This guide shall support the executives in charge of the programme under scrutiny to better organize the self assessment process and to prepare the self assessment report. It shall include guidelines and best practices for the organisation of self assessment in addition to the structure and content of the self-assessment report.
- List of key-performance indicators[28]. A list of key performance indicators must be made available to the executives in charge of the programme. Depending on the systems parts of the indicators might be obtained from the directorate in charge of higher education. The list of indicators is not restrictive and more or different set of indicators might be included in the self assessment report if they better serve as evidence to the declared statements.
- Guide for the selection of reviewers. This guide serves mainly the agency when forming a review committee. For the sake of transparency and in order to enhance the trust, it is advised to make this guide public.
- Tool for the alignment against the QF. It is preferable to have a tool that serves the alignment of a qualification against the QF. This guarantees a minimum of consistency among the different alignments and allows to train the reviewers to conduct such alignments.
- Guide for the reviewer[29]. A guide to the reviewer is a crucial tool that shall help the reviewer to study the self assessment report, determine the issues to explore during the site visit and prepare for the study visit as well as editing the final report. The guide shall include tools that could help the reviewers to better organise their activities, e.g. a table to insert the list of issues to explore per meeting and per standard and for the list of observations collected from a meeting per standard.
- Non-disclosure agreement and declaration of non conflict of interest. These are legally necessary elements but they also serves in enhancing the trust in the process.

A digital platform may also be developed to support both the HE institutions and the reviewers in the review/evaluation process. The institutions might introduce their self assessment reports and additional documents and evidences in this platform. The reviewers may access, comment, edit those data in private or share with the other members of the review committee.

[26] Refer to http://plus.tlqaa.org/sites/plus.tlqaa.org/files/TLQAAp_WP4_IQA_Guidelines-v3.pdf
[27] Refer to http://plus.tlqaa.org/sites/plus.tlqaa.org/files/TLQAAp_Guide_Self_Assessment_Report_v1_0.pdf
[28] Refer to http://plus.tlqaa.org/sites/plus.tlqaa.org/files/TLQAAp_Programme_Data_Forms.xlsx
[29] Refer to http://plus.tlqaa.org/sites/plus.tlqaa.org/files/TLQAAp_Guide_Reviewer_v1_0.pdf

The Reviewers

The review/evaluation process is mainly based on the peer review principle. Thus, reviewers play a central role in the process. The process and tools described in the previous section allow organising the process in order to maintain transparency and to maximise the usefulness. However, efforts must pursued in the selection and training of the reviewers. It is also important to have a clear description of the roles of each member in a review committee and to make sure that the reviewers are aware of these roles.

Selection of the Reviewers

A clear set of criteria for the selection of the reviewers to be part of a pool of reviewers to be used in evaluation has to be defined and made public. Moreover, another set of criteria for the selection of the reviewers to form a specific review committee is to be defined and announced publically. The guiding principles for the selection process are:

- The agency shall maintain a list of potential reviewers
- Nomination to the pool of reviewers can be done by Lebanese Higher Education institutions, by the agency or following public calls for volunteers
- From the candidates the agency shall select who can join the pool of reviewers based on public criteria
- For each review committee, an agency shall select from the pool of reviewers its chair and members in conformance with set criteria[30]
- The pool of reviewers and each review committee will reflect equal opportunity dimensions to ensure, for example, gender balance, domain balance, etc.
- Review committees and individual reviewers will conduct all reviews in a collegiate and professional manner
- All reviewers will be required to undertake training organised by the Agency to ensure a full and consistent understanding of the review methodology, the systems and procedures of the programme being reviewed and the higher education system
- Faculty/Department under scrutiny are given the opportunity to comment on the the membership of each review committee to identify any potential conflict of interest

From her/his side, a reviewer must respect the following:

- The reviewer shall declare any element that can be considered as a conflict of interest for a programme evaluation
- The reviewer shall conduct an impartial, objective and independent evaluation of the programmes
- The reviewer must sign and respect the confidentiality agreement and will not communicate any information related to a programme evaluation

[30] The criteria must be in conformance with international standards, e.g. include student member and international member for the sake of balance and guarantee of operational independence

- The reviewer must provide and update her/his curriculum vitae that can be published by the agency for the sake of transparency

Roles of the reviewers

The reviewer

The reviewer shall:

a. be aware of all the documents relative to the programme evaluation

b. study the self assessment report as well as the evidences provided

c. request additional information if needed

d. participate to the alignment of the degree on the Lebanese qualification framework if selected as part of the alignment subcommittee

e. actively participate to all the meetings in preparation to the site visit as well as afterwards

f. edit her/his assigned part of the evaluation report, assignment being according to her/his individual background and experience

The chair

In addition to her/his role as reviewer the chair shall:

a. coordinate and facilitate the work conducted in the review committee and make sure that collegiate decisions are being taken

b. communicate with the agency (review officer) to make sure that all is conducted according to the rules of evaluation

c. compile the chapters edited by the reviewers to provide the evaluation report

d. chair the site visit and panel meetings

The review officer

The review officer designated by the agency shall:

a. facilitate the work of the review committee

b. communicate with the Faculty/Department

c. assure that the rules of the agency are well applied

d. not take place in judgment discussions or decision making

Training the reviewers

It is important to organise training sessions[31] to the reviewers that shall cover:

- the qualifications framework
- the standards and guidelines

[31] Refer to http://plus.tlqaa.org/node/302 for the training session organised within the project

- the rules and procedures
- the different tools
- best practices and pitfalls

A training session has been organised within the project[32].

[32] Refer to http://plus.tlqaa.org/node/302

Pilot evaluation and outcomes

The choices, models and tools described in the previous sections have been experimented in a pilot evaluation. It is important, when setting up the process to experiment its constituents in a pilot settings which permits to identify the points of improvement with a minimum dependence on the context.

Within the project and due to the limited resources and time fewer standards have been experimented. These are:

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

Twelve pilot self studies have been received from eleven Lebanese partner institutions. A set of criteria have been declared to select six among the received self-assessments to undergo a pilot evaluation. The six selected programmes are the following:

- Masters in computer and communication engineering
- Masters in mechanical engineering
- Bachelor in Nursing
- Bachelor in Nursing
- Bachelor in Psychology
- Bachelor in Translation

Six review committees have been formed and conducted the evaluations. These evaluations resulted in review reports that were delivered to the programmes.

Feedback

Following the pilot evaluation a survey has been conducted in order to collect the feedback of the participants. Based on the results of the survey the following observations can be made:

- Faculty members have been quite involved in the pilot evaluation which tends to indicate an interest in quality assurance across the system
- Standards, qualification frameworks and key performance indicators were perceived clear enough to conduct a self assessment and external evaluation.
- The respondents found the guide for self assessment and the guide for reviewer useful.
- The respondents found satisfactory the information and evidence provided in the self assessment but more evidence might be needed.

- The respondents found the evaluation report useful.
- Overall, the process appears to be beneficial, transparent, evidence based and can help improving the quality of HE programmes.
- The qualifications framework appears as a major tool to assess and guarantee the relevance of the HE programmes.

In the following some of the recommendations provided:

- Provide more examples on the calculation of key performance indicators
- Stress more the parts related to research
- There is a need for additional awareness and training campaigns in some Lebanese universities
- The qualifications framework should be further explained for all faculty members
- There is a need to have a formal definition of a Lebanese Qualifications Framework
- The language of the evaluation must be set and followed in all meetings

Several colleagues have mentioned the benefits of the project and of the process itself on matters related to:

- Cooperation
- Trust
- Independence
- Recognition
- Improvement

Conclusions

Quality assurance and relevance are important processes for higher education programmes. Based on the efforts conducted in the European Erasmus+ supported project entitled "*Programme Evaluation for Transparency and Recognition of Skills and Qualifications*" (TLQAA+) the following results have been achieved:

- The complex relationships between quality assurance, relevance, recognition and other dimensions of higher education have been studied.
- A model has been proposed where aligning against NQF is being used to assure the relevance of a programme's learning objectives and the quality assurance process considers the results of the alignment.
- Quality standards are defined in a hierarchical way and at three levels: overall standards for all programmes, disciplinary domain standards and very specific disciplinary standards. This allows a progressive development of the quality assurance processes and to maintain the coherence and consistency across all disciplines.
- The same hierarchical three levels approach has been defined for NQF going progressively from an overall qualifications framework towards sectoral qualifications frameworks while passing by domain specific QFs.
- The underlying key principles for the processes and procedures have been identified and used to define the necessary procedures for external evaluation and alignment against QF.
- Internal quality assurance has been identified as a core element in the quality assurance process. Guidelines for developing internal QA have been developed.
- A set of tools have been developed and can serve to conduct the whole process of quality assurance and relevance assessment.
- All have been experimented in a pilot evaluation where twelve programmes from the three disciplinary domains have been self assessed for four standards. Six out of the twelve have undergone pilot external evaluation and evaluation reports have been produced. An assessment of the pilot evaluation has shown the usefulness of the suggested model and the developed tools and procedures.