Rules and Procedures for Academic Programme Evaluation

Programme Evaluation for Transparency and Recognition of Skills and Qualitfications

TLQAA+

March 2018

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Scope

This document describes the rules and procedures suggested by the Erasmus+ TLQAA+ project to be applied for external evaluation of academic programmes for quality assurance in the Lebanese Higher Education. This covers all levels programmes excluding PhD level.

Guiding principles and concepts

The rules and procedures defined in this document take into account the standards defined in the ESG (ESG, 2015), the principles from different international agencies (HCERES, 2017), (ANECA, 2016). It is also based on a similar deliverable produced within the Tempus TLQAA project. Based on the previous documents the following guiding principles have been adopted:

- Considering the IQA

- Independence[1]

- Transparency[2,3]

- Fit for purpose[4]

- Process including:

  o Self assessment

  o External assessment including site visit

  o Reporting

  o Consistent followup

- Review committee carefully constituted

  o No conflict of interest

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[1] At least at the operational level

[2] Process based on publicly available standards and criteria

[3] All the procedures shall be published and accessible.

[4] Limited overload on institutions and programmes and beneficial for the improvement of the quality

- o Good coverage of the different aspects to evaluate

- o Include student member

- Confidentiality[5]

- Public reporting that includes:

  - o Context description

  - o Evidence based analysis of findings

  - o Recommendations and follow-up actions

- Appeal[6]

In the previous principles, the fitting for purpose principle invites to carefully considering the local context whose characteristics are described in the WP5 deliverable on standards. These characteristics are enumerated briefly hereafter:

- A very diverse system

- Existing experience in QA in some institutions and pogrammes with international agencies[7]

- Huge number of small private institutions with different histories while only one public large institution exists

- Lacking of a large number of experts to form the review committees

- Mostly teaching institutions with limited research activities

- Financing of private higher education institutions is mainly based on tuition fees

The local characteristics invite to develop non demanding evaluation processes that evaluate domains rather than single programmes. Typically, the evaluation shall be conducted on a faculty or a large department than a single programme in a department or a faculty. However, if the conditions would allow it the experimentation part of the project might include different cases that would be assessed later on.

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[5] The information provided for the evaluation purposes shall be treated as strictly confidential

[6] Appeal procedure shall not be included within the TLQAA+ project for the lack of time

[7] Another dimension of diversity

Finally the following key concepts are adopted.

- 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[8]

  - 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 in this document;

- 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[9].

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[8] Refer to the deliverables of WP1

Review Rules and Procedures

Bases

The rules and procedures are based on the two documents deliverables of the TLQAA+ project:

- Standards

- Rules for the selection of review committees' members

The following table recalls the standards proposed in the project (TLQAA+, 2018):

#	CORE STANDARD
Elements	
1.	Mission, Goals and Governance
2.	Curriculum
3.	Student Services
4.	Assessment and Student Success
5.	Faculty
6.	Budget, Resources and Facilities

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[9] The last two points will not be implemented within the TLQAA+ project

7.	Continuous Improvement

Table 1. Standards as suggested in the Erasmus+ TLQAA+ project (TLQAA+, 2018).

The review committee and the selection of experts shall be defined in a deliverable of TLQAA+ WP9. The following table summarizes the tasks related to the review committee.

#	WORK OF THE REVIEW COMMITTEES, DECISION-MAKING PROCESS, REPORTING
a.	Review committees' members must be committed to treat all materials and exchanges as strictly confidential
b.	The outcome of each review will be a report to the Agency setting out the committee's findings, decisions and any recommendations made
c.	The review process shall be of four phases: • Alignment of the curricula with the Lebanese QF • Study of the self-assessment report • Study visit • Reporting
c.	The findings, decisions and any recommendations made during a review will be evidence-based and will be the collective decisions of the review committee. The chair of the review committee is in charge of facilitating

the dialogue within the committee
d. The chair of the review committee and the Agency representative should act as facilitators to ensure consistency in the judgment making process
e. The chair of the review committee will oversee the production of the review report. Each reviewer will be allocated responsibility for writing a specific report section according to their individual background and experience. A member of the agency permanent staff should support the review committees during the writing process.

Table 2. Review committee, decision making and reporting.

Major Review Phases

The review process is formed of several phases and leads to the review report that summarizes the strengths and weaknesses of the higher education programmes in a specific domain in terms of quality. The phases of the review process are enumerated hereafter.

Self Assessment Phase

This phase is conducted by the faculty/department in charge of the programmes in a specific domain. It aims at producing a self assessment report. In this report the programmes managers compare their programmes against the different standards used in the review. They need to provide sufficient indicators and evidences showing the achievements in each of the standards dimensions. At the end of this phase the self assessment report shall be submitted to the evaluating agency.

Committee Designation Phase

The agency designates an officer to be in charge of the review process. The review officer (RO) supports and oversees the review process without participating in the judgment making process.

A set of experts is selected from the pool of experts by a special committee from the agency to form the review committee[10]. The Agency chooses among the experts, a member to chair the review committee.

The chairperson should have a good experience in external evaluation and should have good mediation skills. It is encouraged to have as chairpersons academicians or practitioners with known expertise in the domain of the evaluation.

The composition of the review committee is communicated to the faculty/department in order to check for possible conflict of interest that should be proven in case.

Alignment on the Lebanese Qualifications Framework

The first phase of the evaluation consists on the alignment against the Lebanese Qualifications Framework[11]. A subcommittee from the review committee together with the officer from the agency shall conduct this alignment. The alignment is based on information provided within the self assessment (Standard 2: Curriculum). A template has to be completed for each programme and based on the information provided the alignment is performed.

In some cases, additional information could be requested in order to complete the alignment. In such cases, the request shall be transmitted by the RO to Faculty/Department that must provide the requested information.

If the alignment concludes that one or more programmes are far from the requested levels, the evaluation process shall continue and this result must be clearly reported in the final report.

Details about the outcomes of the alignment shall be written in a preliminary internal report that serves as a basis for the next phases. A definitive version including the recommendations must be provided in the final report.

Visit Preparation Phase

Several documents will be handed to the review committee as a basis for the review preparation as well as the site visit. These documents are:

Agency documents

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[10] In the TLQAA+ pilot evaluation, HCERES as the leading partner for WP10 will play the role of the Review Officer.

[11] Refer to the deliverable of TLQAA+ WP1

- the standards and criteria;

- the present document;

- the description of the Lebanese Higher Education System.

Programmes documents

- the self assessment report;

- the intermediary report about the alignment on the qualifications framework;

- the indicators form filled up by the Faculty/Department.

In addition to the previous documents, the review committee shall be granted the access to the programmes information system that shall include the data relative to the programmes: syllabi, courses evaluation, minutes of meetings of different committees, CVs, recommendations, etc.

The reviewers shall examine carefully the self assessment report, the intermediary alignment report and the other documents and shall prepare a list of issues to further explore during the site visit. The list of issues defines the profile and the objective of the visit. It is worth noting that:

- the list of issues does not represent the list of weaknesses to be included in the final report but rather some points that need to be clarified during the visit;

- the list of issues is saved in a file and is only for internal usage and shall not be communicated out;

- the list of issues shall be the guiding document for the visit planning;

- the list of issues shall cover all the points not included in the self assessment report and that are useful for a precise evaluation of the institution against the standards.

In order to plan the review visit and to determine a final list of issues to explore during the visit the following procedure is applied:

1. the review committees get the set of documents including the self assessment report from the agency;

2. each reviewer examines the document and prepare a list of issues per standard/criterion;

3. the review committee chairperson coordinates email exchanges in order to reach a common list of issues per standard/criterion;

4. the review committee meets and finalizes the list of issues to be explored during the visit, who needs to be met (teaching staff, students, graduates, employers, technical and administrative staff, administrators, …) and sets the agenda for the visit.

The review committee shall be particularly careful about the following points:

- the good balance between direct and indirect assessments;

- the articulation between courses learning outcomes and programme learning outcomes and objectives;

- the indicators provided regarding the teaching and assessment.

Before the site visit a coordination meeting shall be organised in order to finalise the list of issues to be explored. This meeting also serves to set a first draft of the agenda of the visit and to define the list of additional inquiries to be submitted to the Faculty/Department. The RO attends the meeting and forwards the lists of inquiries and the draft agenda to the Faculty/Department. A final version of the agenda is agreed upon with the Faculty/Department.

It is recommended to fill in a set of forms one per issue to review during the site visit. The agency shall provide those forms.

Site Visit Phase

The site visit will be conducted as planned. It shall start, if possible, with a meeting with the dean of the Faculty. During this meeting no information shall be provided to the dean regarding the review process and outcomes.

The site visit shall also include a tour of the premises allocated to the programmes under review.

The Faculty/Department shall allocate a meeting room to the review committee during the whole duration of the site visit. Additional evidence and samples can be placed in

this room. This room is reserved solely to the review committee and shall not be used to conduct any interview.

The duration of the site visit depends largely on the scope and number of programmes to be reviewed.

A series of meeting of all kinds (plenary, roundtable, face to face, etc.) are conducted during the visit and as planned. Some rules shall be respected for the meetings:

- The reviewers shall be prepared for each meeting by reading the objectives of the meeting and reflecting upon the issues to be covered;

- Each meeting starts by a quick tour de table and a short recall of the objective of the meeting;

- The reviewers shall be neutral and shall not provide any information nor approve or disapprove the interviewed persons during the meeting;

- The reviewers shall try to validate any assertion made by the interviewees;

- The reviewers shall try to keep the meeting and interviews focused on their objectives;

- The meetings schedules shall be respected;

- The visit shall cover also any off-campus activities;

- A form shall be completed by the end of each meeting.

At the end of each visit day, the review committee will meet to debrief on what have been observed. This helps to converge in the process and to adjust the visit based on the collected information.

Drafting the Review Report Phase

At the end of the site visit a general meeting of the review committee shall be held. The reviewers will be assigned to write parts of the review report. The reviewers will then write those sections. The chairperson shall collect and compile the different parts. This yields to a first draft of the report that shall be handed to the RO. A general meeting with the RO shall then be held and the reviewers shall provide any evidence requested in this meeting. At the end of the meeting the RO and a specialized committee from the agency shall finalize the first draft and send it to the institution.

The review report shall have a formal structure and would respect the following rules:

- The aim of the report is to identify the level of compliance of the reviewed programmes with what is expected;

- The evaluation is conducted with reference to the defined standards and criteria and to the qualifications framework.

- The review report must be analytical, coherent, pertinent, precise, objective and useful.

- The review report shall provide sufficient evidence.

- The report is formed of four major parts: an introduction, a section relative to the alignment with the qualifications framework, one or multiple sections summarizing the evaluation outcomes and, conclusions and recommendations. All evidences and other collected raw information shall be placed in appendices;

- The introduction part shall include a brief description of the programmes and their context. It shall describe the main issues and themes identified and covered by the evaluation and review process;

- The alignment with the qualifications framework is a formal part and shall conclude with a decision to which level the provided degrees are aligned.

- The sections relative to the quality evaluation of the report shall be dedicated to the review results grouped by standard and criterion;

- The conclusions and recommendations part shall summarize the characteristics of the programmes and the major challenges they are facing. It shall present the strategies and approaches adopted to face those challenges. It shall clearly identify the major strengths and weaknesses detected. Some recommendations shall be proposed. The conclusions and recommendations part shall end with a small paragraph indicating to what extent the programmes are rightfully acting when evaluated against the different standards;

- The conclusions and recommendations part can be considered as an executive summary of the review process;

Finalizing the Review Report Phase

The first version of the report will be sent to the Faculty/Department without the conclusions and recommendations part. The programmes managers may send back some factual clarifications. Based on the provided facts and arguments, the agency might apply some modifications to the review report and then submit it to the Faculty/Department and to the Ministry/Directorate General of Higher Education. After three months of this submission an executive summary of the review report shall be made public on the agency web.

Timetable

When Duration	Phase	Task	Roles		
			Review Committee	**Faculty/ Department**	**Agency**
T0–5M 3 Months	**Self Assessment**	Conduct Self assessment		Designate a team and an officer and conduct the self assessment	Provide necessary documents
		Self assessment Reporting		Fill the QF alignment form and collect sufficient information Write the report and submit it with indicators form to agency	Collect the report and validate all necessary elements are included
		Set Preliminary Review Plan		Officer to contact the Agency	In accordance with Faculty/ Department
T0–8W 2 Weeks	**Committee Designation**	Designate Review Officer			Agency to designate a review officer to monitor and support the review process
		Form the			Review Officer

		Review Committee			to Form the Review Committee and to nominate its chairperson
		Check for Conflict of Interest		Argument about a possible conflict of interest	Check with Faculty/ Department for possible conflict of interest
T0–6W 3 Weeks	**Alignment with the Lebanese QF**	Designate the alignment subcommittee	Select subcommittee members		Acknowledge the formed subcommittee
		Alignment	Study and align the degrees corresponding to the reviewed programmes		The RO hands the self assessment report and forms of interest to the subcommittee
		Request additional information (optional)	Identify the requested information	Provide the requested information	The RO submits the demand to the Faculty/ Department
		Draft intermediary alignment report	Draft an intermediary report summarizing the findings of the alignment procedure		
	Visit Preparation	Review of the self assessment report	Reviewers will comment on the self assessment report and define the major issues to explore during the site		Hand the self assessment report, the intermediary alignment report and relevant documents to the

				visit		chairperson who will forward it to the reviewers
		Coordination meeting	Chairperson calls for a coordination meeting to harmonize the different interpretations of the self assessment report and to decide on the final list of issues to explore	Get the visit agenda and the list of persons to interview from the RO and perform the necessary reservations	The RO communicates the visit agenda to the Faculty
		Request and review of additional information (optional)	If additional information is necessary to conduct the review, those information are requested from the Faculty/ Department	Provide the requested information either before or during the visit	
T0 1 Week	**Visit**	Meetings	The reviewers conduct the meetings while showing a neutral position regarding the subjects covered. Chairperson to guarantee the good practices	Members of the institution to participate to the meetings and provide necessary information to the reviewers	The RO passively participates in some of the meetings
		Briefing/ Debriefing meetings	Chairperson conducts such meetings with reviewers on		The RO passively participates to the meetings

			daily basis in order to collect the comments, to maintain a coherent approach and to adjust the visit plans based on the observations		
T0+1W 2 Weeks	**Drafting Review Report**	Summary meeting	Review committee to meet and discuss the outcomes of the reviewing visit. The reviewers will be assigned tasks in the report edition		
		Review report compilation	Chairperson collects the different parts from reviewers and compiles a first version to be handed to the RO		
		Meeting with RO	Meet with RO and discuss the review report		Study the review report and discuss it with reviewers
T0+3W 4 Weeks	**Finalizing Review Report**	Collect feedback on report		Faculty/ Department studies the review report and sends back factual clarifications and augmented comments	RO sends the first draft of the report to the Faculty/ Department

		Final report			RO might apply some modifications to the review report based on the Faculty/ Department feedback. This version is submitted to the agency to be approved. When approved this version is submitted to the Ministry/ DGHE and to the Faculty/ Department (it will be published 3 months later)

Table 3. Timetable for a review process.

Bibliography

ANECA. (2016). ACREDITA Procedure. *Guide to external evaluation: ex post accreditation for official Bachelor's degrees, Master's degrees, and doctoral degrees.* Madrid, Spain: ANECA.

ESG. (2015). *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG).* Brussels, Belgium.

HCERES. (2017). *Principes de validation par le Hceres des procédures d'évaluation mises en oeuvre par d'autres instances* . Paris, France: HCERES.

Appendix A. Interview Form

Form Number: ……………

Institution/Faculty: ……………………………………………………………………………….

Standard: …………………………………………………………………………………………..

Theme: ………………………………………………………………………………………………

Questions to be explored:

- ……………………………………………………………………………………………………….

- ……………………………………………………………………………………………………….

- ……………………………………………………………………………………………………….

- ……………………………………………………………………………………………………….

Date/Time: ……………………………

Interviewed person(s): ………………………………………………………………………….

Expert(s): …………………………………………………………………………………………..

Prior the Interview

- **Available information:**

- **Lacking information:**

Posterior the Interview

- **Major points collected:**

- **Major points to deepen:**