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Standards for the Evaluation of Programmes

Erasmus+ TLQAA+ WP5: Core Standards and Procedures

Table of Contents

| | |
|---|---|
| Introduction | 1 |
| Core Standards for the Evaluation of Programmes | 2 |
| Introduction..... | 2 |
| Programme Review Framework, Guiding Principles, Purposes, and Processes | 2 |
| Programme Review Definition..... | 2 |
| Framework and Guiding Principles | 2 |
| Purposes of Programme Review | 3 |
| Programme Review Process | 4 |
| Standards for Programme Review | 5 |
| Domains and Scope | 5 |
| Proposed Lebanese Standards for Programme Review | 5 |
| Standard 1. Mission, Goals and Governance..... | 6 |
| Standard 2. Curriculum..... | 6 |
| Standard 3. Student Academic and Support Services..... | 7 |
| Standard 4. Assessment and Student Success | 7 |
| Standard 5. Faculty..... | 8 |
| Standard 6. Budget, Resources, and Facilities | 8 |
| Standard 7. Continuous Improvement..... | 8 |

Introduction

The objective of the workpackage 5 of the Erasmus+ Project “Programme Evaluation for Transparency and Recognition of Skills and Qualifications” is to define a set of standards and procedures for the evaluation of programmes in the Lebanese Higher Education. The present document summarises the set of standards adopted in the project. More details about the standards can be found in the TLQAA+ document “Core Standards for the Evaluation of Programmes”.

Core Standards for the Evaluation of Programmes

Introduction

In the following sections the set of standards proposed in the Erasmus+ project TLQAA+ for the review of programmes in Lebanon are enumerated. The project converged to these standards based on an analysis of both the Lebanese and international contexts in higher education.

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

Programme Review Framework, Guiding Principles, Purposes, and Processes

Programme Review Definition

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

Framework and Guiding Principles

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

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

- *Outcomes-based assessment* of student learning and development, as this will heighten the attention to improving the quality of student learning
- *Evidence-based claims and decision-making*, all claims within a self-study report about a programme's strengths, weaknesses, and proposed improvement plans are to be supported by relevant qualitative and/or quantitative evidence

- *Use of program review results to inform planning and budgeting.* The results of programme review are to be used for follow-up planning and budgeting at various decision-making levels within the organization (programme, department, college and institution). This will help shift the focus from *conducting* an effective programme review to *using the results effectively*, and facilitate integrating the results of programme-level evaluations into larger institutional processes, and also in external evaluation conducted by agencies or the system.

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

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

Purposes of Programme Review

A programme review process shall provide the specific purposes for which it is being conducted and these purposes should be articulated to everyone involved. The principal purposes of the review process are to recognize and acknowledge good performance, to enhance satisfactory performance and help programmes which are performing satisfactorily further their own growth, and to identify weak performance and assist

programmes in achieving needed improvement. It is directed toward improving teaching and learning, producing a foundation for action, and based upon well-considered academic values and effective practices.

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

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

Programme Review Process

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

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

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

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

Standards for Programme Review

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

Domains and Scope

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

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

*Note: This is mainly required for new programmes

Proposed Lebanese Standards for Programme Review

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

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

The adopted standards for programme review are listed below. Programmes must show documented evidence of compliance with each of the standards:

- i. Mission, Goals and Governance
- ii. Curriculum
- iii. Student Services
- iv. Assessment and Student Success
- v. Faculty
- vi. Budget, Resources, and Facilities
- vii. Continuous Improvement

Standard 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.

Standard 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.

Standard 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:
 - i. Advising and assessment as needed
 - ii. Advising and assessment for credit transfer and recognition of prior learning
 - iii. Academic support for students with disabilities and other learning needs
 - iv. Physical or mental health counselling
 - v. Orientation services
 - vi. Career services.
- d. The programme has in place remedies, where necessary, to ensure student progression and completion.
- e. The programme routinely evaluates the effectiveness of its support services including advising.
- f. Based on the evaluation results, the Programme makes appropriate adjustments necessary to support student achievement.

Standard 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.

Standard 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.

Standard 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.

Standard 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