



Ministry of Education  
and Higher Education



## Towards the Lebanese Quality Assurance Agency— A Tempus Project



**Web:** <http://www.tlqaa.org>

**Email:** [admin@tlqaa.org](mailto:admin@tlqaa.org)

## TLQAA Launching Ceremony

READER

University of Balamand  
26 January 2012



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## Chapter 1. Message from the Organizers

The knowledge-based economy and his quest to competences and innovation placed higher education in the centre of socio-economic development and at the core of national policies. This has been accompanied with a set of challenges that the higher education has to face. To these challenges other challenges were added and are related to the rapid technological changes and evolutions. In order to face such challenges more autonomy and financial independence are to be provided to the higher education institutions which will have to continuously adapt and update their programmes to satisfy the changing needs. At the same time, the growing needs in terms of financing, the recognition of the link between higher education and the development of society and the issue of social cohesion reinforce the needs for State policies. In consequence, the growing autonomy of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) develops in parallel with national policies aiming at protecting citizens from bogus HEIs, developing quality and helping the best use of national resources devoted to higher education. Focus on research with a special attention to innovation has to be enhanced to respond to the creativity needs. Employability continues to be an issue. Lifelong learning has become essential in modern societies. Mobility and internationalization are real facts due to the global labour market.

## Chapter 7. Background Documents

TLQAA project website

<http://www.tlqaa.org>

Bologna process

“Focus on Higher Education in Europe 2010: The Impact of the Bologna Process” Eurydice, Feb. 2010. ISBN 978-92-9201-086-7

Quality Assurance

“Quality Assurance in Tertiary Education: Current Practices in OECD Countries and a Literature Review on Potential Effects,” V. Kis, Tertiary Review, 2005.

“Quality Procedures in the European Higher Education Area and Beyond – Second ENQA Survey,” N. Costes and al., ENQA Occasional Papers, 2008, ISBN 978-952-5539-31-8

“Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area,” European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, 2005.

<http://www.enqa.eu/files/procedures.pdf>

## Chapter 6. Concluding Remarks

The Lebanese Higher Education sector is aware of the need for a clear quality assurance system that incorporates both internal and external quality assurance. A draft law is being discussed at the Council of Ministers aiming at the creation of a Lebanese Quality Assurance Agency. Several Lebanese Higher Education Institutions have undergone an external evaluation with international agencies. These facts provide legitimacy to the establishment of a Lebanese Quality Assurance Agency. In this context, the TLQAA project aims to prepare some essential elements for any external quality assurance to be rigorously and broadly applied within the Lebanese Higher Education. The precise objectives are i) the definition of a quality assurance system for Lebanon, ii) the proposal of standards and procedures, iii) the training of Lebanese experts capable to participate in external evaluations and, iv) the pilot evaluation of few institutions.

The competences that exist in the consortium are extremely precious. The European experts involved have large experiences that cover the different facets of a quality assurance system. The diversity in the Lebanese higher education is reflected in the composition of the consortium. The external quality assurance system targeted should therefore respect the diversity and the autonomy of the Lebanese institutions with a limited burden on those institutions and should consider the interests of the students and society and should be in line with the international standards.

Besides the previous global challenges, specific challenges are facing the Lebanese higher education and are related to the increasing demand on higher education due to the young population growth and to the increasing demand for qualifications in the labour market. This increases the teaching load within our institutions that have also to maintain their competitiveness both at the national and international levels. This competitive environment makes the pace of development of new programmes and modules even faster in our institutions.

In this evolving environment ensuring and improving quality and establishing quality assurance systems become a high priority in modern general education and higher education. While there is no strict definition of Quality Assurance, it can be understood as policies, procedures and practices that are designed to achieve, maintain or enhance quality as it is understood in a specific context. It should focus on<sup>1</sup>:

1. the interest of students as well as employers and the society more generally in good quality higher education;
2. the central importance of institutional autonomy, tempered by a recognition that this brings with it heavy responsibilities;
3. the need for external quality assurance to be fit for its purpose and to place only an appropriate and necessary burden on institutions for the achievement of its objectives.

The previous principles guided the development of the draft law on the creation of the Lebanese Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education as well as the project subject of this meeting entitled “Toward the Lebanese Quality Assurance Agency” (TLQAA). The TLQAA project has several objectives:

1. Define a Quality Assurance System for the Lebanese context taking into account the views of the different stakeholders;
2. Set the standards for the external quality assurance in Lebanon that would be used as a reference to measure up the quality and the quality progress of the evaluated institutions;
3. Train Lebanese experts to conduct institutional evaluation;
4. Conduct pilot evaluation of some Lebanese higher education institutions.

<sup>1</sup>“Focus on Higher Education in Europe 2010: the Impact of the Bologna Process”

During the kick-off meeting the first elements of the Lebanese Quality Assurance System will be discussed. The launching ceremony will be a precious occasion to gather the views of several stakeholders and to announce the project plans and objectives to the Lebanese community.

## Chapter 2. Purpose of Quality Assurance

Quality assurance procedures most of the time serve two major purposes: improvement and accountability. Accountability often takes the form of “rendering an account” of what is being done in relation to goals that have been set and to the general expectation of the society from a higher education institution. Therefore, accountability is often linked to public information about the fitness and soundness of the outcomes of Higher Education. Quality assurance for accountability purposes generally makes use of summative approaches where explicit statement on outcomes are reported and published. Undertaking corrective action when necessary might be envisaged. The publication of the reports aim at informing the public about the performance of the higher education institution evaluated.

Quality assurance for improvement purposes usually promotes future performance rather than making judgments on what is being achieved. The procedures and criteria used define a formative approach aiming at the improvement of the quality. The central question relates to the capacity of the HEI to detect its problems and difficulties and to remediate to them. That being said it is important to bring forward that besides the ultimate purposes of accountability and quality improvement, quality assurance in general is first a key factor of decision making.

The question about the compatibility of serving the two purposes of accountability and quality improvement is often raised. This comes mainly from the different attitudes that higher education institutions may have toward accountability oriented quality assurance versus improvement oriented quality assurance.

Quality Assurance Agency. Most of the aspects described in chapters 3 and 4 have been debated within this project after reviewing the European and American quality assurance systems which has led to making the necessary choices and setting the ground for the Lebanese Quality Assurance Agency in Higher Education. The draft law on the establishing of a quality assurance agency has been recently submitted by his Excellency Minister Dr. Diab to the Council of Ministers. The quality assurance system and the establishing of quality assurance agencies have also been recommended at the regional level in the latest Meetings of the Arab Ministers Responsible of Higher Education. Lebanon has considered the establishing of a quality assurance system as a priority on his modernization agenda.

Presently, the “Towards the Lebanese Quality Assurance Agency” (TLQAA) project is being supported by the European programme Tempus. This reader has been written at the occasion of the launching of TLQAA. A consortium is formed of twelve Lebanese universities and institutions and, eight European institutions and universities. Among the European partners two European quality assurance agencies are participating to the project. The TLQAA partners are working to prepare the components of any possible external quality assurance system in the country. First, a quality assurance system will be defined with clear choices regarding the different aspects pointed in the previous chapters. The standards and criteria will be set and proposed to be used in any future external evaluation. Lebanese experts will be trained to conduct such evaluation. Finally, some pilot evaluation will be run.

Finally, resistance is often noticed to the implementation of quality procedures. These procedures are perceived as affecting the academic autonomy and as introducing an excessive workload.

## Chapter 5. Quality Assurance and Higher Education in Lebanon

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

In this context the need for a clear quality assurance system appeared. Several institutions have already undergone an external evaluation with international European and American agencies. This clearly stresses the explicit needs in this domain. Several projects on quality assurance in higher education have been conducted. We report on few of them in this document. Tempus has supported two major projects in this direction. In 2005, Tempus granted a project entitled “Quality Assurance for Higher Education in Lebanon” (QAHEL). It focused on the definition of internal quality assurance systems. In 2006, another project has been supported by Tempus and is entitled “Creation of the Lebanese Engineering Programs Accreditation Commission” (LEPAC). LEPAC has succeeded to define some documents describing standards, procedures and regulations for the external evaluation of the engineering programmes in Lebanon. Lebanese universities have also participated to the UNDP project “Enhancement of Quality Assurance and Institutional Planning” from 2002 till 2007. In 2009, USAID financed a project led by the “Lebanese Association for Educational Studies” (LAES) and in which the Tempus-HERE (“Higher Education Reform Experts”) actively participated. This project drafted the first version of a law aiming at the creation of the Lebanese

A quality assurance system may seek the complementarities between the two approaches. This is mainly driven by the fact that both goals should be reached. There is there a tension in quality assurance approaches that has to be recognized and made acceptable. In addition, the design of the national quality assurance system should take into account the costs and resources needed to its functioning. Being cost effective is important for the sustainability of the quality assurance system. Minimizing the burden on HEIs should be considered in general as a principle. These two aspects are even more crucial in the Lebanese case where the number of higher education institutions is relatively high and the resources are relatively limited.

## Chapter 3. General Approaches to Quality Assurance

This chapter reviews very briefly the general approaches and methodologies and procedures related to quality assurance.

Four major approaches to quality assurance are generally enumerated: accreditation, assessment, audit and, audit of quality assurance systems. Accreditation is an evaluation process that ends with a decision stating if the evaluated institution or programme quality are above a predefined threshold. Depending on the country, obtaining accreditation may have implications for the higher education institution itself. Assessment is an evaluation that leads to a graded judgment about quality. Assessment is more frequent in improvement directed quality assurance. Quality audit checks the extent to which the institution is achieving its own defined objectives. Finally, in well functioning higher education systems, the quality audit of the internal quality assurance mechanisms aims at making sure that an institution has the capacity of managing its own quality.

Another distinction is generally done on the level of the quality review. Two levels are generally distinguished: institutional and programmatic. It is obvious that reviewing the details of the programmes requires more efforts and specialized experts.

The scope of evaluation is also a crucial aspect. One categorization is at the territorial level. This is often the case when higher education is the responsibility of the regional authorities. The other categorization is by the type of the institution. For example, one could distinguish between public and private higher education institutions or between higher education institutions and vocational education institutions.

The independence of the agency in charge of external evaluation defines a key issue in the quality assurance system. In some countries agencies are governmental bodies while in others they are fully independent autonomous entities. The funding of the agency is also an issue.

Once the previous elements defined, the evaluation and assessment are conducted comparing the outcomes of an institution to some reference criteria and standards. Being the reference for the whole quality process the criteria and standards should be carefully selected. They should consider the higher education context in which the evaluation is being conducted. There exist some global rules that should also be respected when defining the standards to be applied by an agency.

The methods used in reviewing an institution may also differ depending on the context but there is a general broad consensus about the main phases a well developed quality assurance system should be able to implement. In most countries quality assurance processes are organized over the following phases: a phase of internal evaluation and self-assessment; a phase of external review and assessment; and a phase of follow-up of the main decisions and recommendations about quality. There is a global consensus about the fact that the evaluators, experts and reviewers should be peers. Depending on the local situation and context the definition of who is a peer may be restricted to the members of the academic community or extended to stakeholders.

In all the cases above mentioned the review is based on collected data in an evidence-based evaluation approach. The data collection is done during the self-assessment (internal evaluation) or

during the external evaluation which often includes a site visit. As a result of self-evaluation, the institutions are requested to write a self-evaluation report that is used by the reviewers to know about the HEL, its results and its capacity to manage and protect its quality. In addition to self-reporting and site visits surveys may be used to collect some statistical data.

## Chapter 4. Impact on Higher Education of the Introduction of Quality Assurance

The impact of the introduction of quality assurance systems has been studied in the literature. Kis<sup>2</sup> (2005) presents a summary. She started by identifying the difficulties in measuring the impact of quality assurance which is mainly related to the difficult task of isolating the impact of quality assurance from other factors and to the general interest in creating a successful image of quality management. On the teaching and learning side, the introduction of quality systems has enhanced the quality of teaching by reserving more attention to teaching and by enhancing the teaching and learning aspect on institutions agendas. A shift of focus toward learning outcomes due to the quality assurance process has also a positive effect on the learning process itself.

At the institution level a clear impact was noticed on organisational and management aspects. External quality assurance clearly affects the governance of the institutions and the distribution of power. Centralization is reinforced which reinforces the coherence and the implementation of the strategic decisions. A drawback is noted and is related to the bureaucratization aspects related to quality assurance. Transparency is largely enhanced due to the introduction of the quality assurance process.

<sup>2</sup> "Quality Assurance in Tertiary Education: Current Practices in OECD Countries and a Literature Review on Potential Effects"