



Institutional Evaluation Rules and Procedures

Towards the Quality Assurance Agency

Lebanon
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I. Scope

This document describes the rules and procedures to be applied for institutional external evaluation for quality assurance in the Lebanese Higher Education.

II. Key Concepts

It is of interest to recall at the beginning of this document the key concepts of the quality assurance system as proposed by the Tempus – TLQAA project. These are:

- The quality assurance agency is an independent agency;
- Reviews conducted by the agency are based on clear procedures and explicit standards and criteria;
- Reviews are evidence based. They bear on outcomes and not projects or persons;
- The agency protects its evaluation activities and reviews against any possible conflict of interest between reviewers and the institutions under scrutiny;
- The review committees shall include all necessary competences to conduct the reviews;
- 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 of the agency;
- 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.

III. Review Rules and Procedures

III.1. 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 TLQAA project [1] :

| # | CORE STANDARD |
|-------------------|------------------------------|
| <i>Elements</i> | |
| 1. | Mission/Goals and Objectives |
| 2. | Governance |
| 3. | Teaching and Learning |
| 4. | Academic Programs |
| 5. | General Resources |
| 6. | Human Resources |
| 7. | Students |
| <i>Principles</i> | |
| 8. | Public Disclosure |
| 9. | Integrity |

Table 1. Standards as suggested in the TLQAA project [1] .

The review committee, the decision making process and reporting have been described in [2] . 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 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 review committee |
| d. | The chair of the review committee and the Agency representative |

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|--|
| should act as facilitators to ensure consistency in the judgment making process |
| <p>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. During the TLQAA Tempus project, the chair of the review committee will be in charge of preparing the report that will be finalized by the members of the consortium</p> |

Table 2. Review committee, decision making and reporting.

III.2. 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 institution in terms of quality. The phases of the review process are enumerated hereafter.

III.2.1 Pre-review Phase

This phase is conducted by the institution and aims at producing a self assessment report. In this report the higher education institution compares itself against the different standards used in the review. It is the responsibility of the institution to provide sufficient indicators and evidences showing its achievements in each of the standards dimensions. At the end of this phase the higher education institution provides the agency with the self assessment report.

III.2.2 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 committee¹. 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. The composition of the committee is communicated to the institution in order to check for possible conflict of interest that should be proven in case.

III.2.3 Visit Preparation Phase

The reviewers will be handed several documents in order to prepare the review as well as the visit. These documents are:

¹ In the TLQAA pilot evaluation, ANECA as the leading partner for WP4 will play the role of the Review Officer.

- the self assessment report;
- the indicators form filled up by the institution;
- the standards and criteria;
- the present document;
- the description of the Lebanese Higher Education System.

The reviewers shall examine carefully the self assessment report and the other documents and shall prepare a list of issues to further explore during the 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, and sets the agenda for the visit.

During the visit coordination meeting the review committee finalizes the list of issues to be explored during the visit and a first draft of the agenda of the visit. The review committee may decide in the visit coordination meeting to submit additional inquiries to the institution requesting detailed information. The drafted agenda of the visit will be the subject of discussion between the chairperson of the review committee and the RO. Once finalized the agenda of the visit shall be transmitted to the institution.

The review committee chairperson informs the review officer of the additional inquiries and of the detailed agenda of the visit and the review officer transmits the information to the institution.

A set of forms are defined one per issue to review during the visit.

III.2.4 Visit Phase

The visit will be conducted as planned. It shall start with a meeting with the president of the institution or its board and end by a similar meeting. During those two meetings no

information shall be provided to the president or the board regarding the outcomes of review.

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 thinking 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.

III.2.5 Drafting the Review Report Phase

After the 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 report is formed of three major parts: an introduction, a body 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 institution and its context. It shall describe the main issues and themes identified and covered by the evaluation and review process;
- The body 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 institution and the major challenges it is 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 institution is rightfully acting when evaluated against the different standards;

- The conclusions and recommendations part can be considered as an executive summary of the review process;
- The review report must be coherent, pertinent and useful.

III.2.6 Finalizing the Review Report Phase

The first version of the report will be sent to the institution without the conclusion and recommendation part that might send back some factual clarifications. Based on the facts and arguments provided by the institution, the agency might apply some modifications to the review report and then submit it to the institution and to the Ministry. After four months of this submission an executive summary of the review report shall be made public on the agency web.

III.3. Timetable

| When Duration | Phase | Task | Roles | | |
|-------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------|---|--|
| | | | Review Committee | Institution | Agency |
| T0–4M 3 Months | Pre-review | Conduct Self assessment | | Designate a team and an officer and conduct the self assessment | Provide necessary documents |
| | | Self assessment Reporting | | 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 Institution |
| T0–4W 2 Weeks | Committee Designation | Designate Review Officer | | | Agency to designate a review officer to monitor and support the review process |
| | | Form the Review Committee | | | Review Officer to Form the Review Committee and to nominate its chairperson |
| | | Check for Conflict of Interest | | Argument about a possible conflict of interest | Check with institution for possible conflict of interest |
| T0–2W | Visit | Review of | Reviewers will | | Hand the self |

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|------------------|-------------------------------|--|--|--|---|
| 2 Weeks | Preparation | the self assessment report | comment on the self assessment report and define the major issues to explore during the visit | | assessment report to the 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 from the RO and perform the necessary reservations | The RO communicates with the review committee chairperson to review the visit plan and issues to deepen during the visit. He communicates the visit agenda to the institution |
| | | Request and review of additional information | If additional information is necessary to conduct the review, those information are requested from the institution | 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 | |
| | | Briefing/ Debriefing meetings | Chairperson conducts such meetings with reviewers on 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 | | Institution studies the review report and sends back factual clarifications and augmented comments | RO sends the first draft of the report to the institution |
| | | Final report | | | RO might apply some modifications to the review report based on the institution feedback. This version is submitted to the agency to be approved. When approved this version is submitted to the Ministry and to the institution (it will be published 4 months later) |

Table 3. Timetable for a review process.

IV. References

- [1] “Standards,” Towards the Lebanese Quality Assurance Agency, TLQAA, WP2, November, 2012.
- [2] “Rules for the selection of review committees’ members”, TLQAA, WP3, December, 2012.

Appendix A. Interview Form

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|---|
| <p>Form Number:</p> <p>Institution:</p> <p>Standard:</p> <p>Theme:</p> <p>Questions to be explored:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">---- |
| <p>Date/Time:</p> <p>Interviewed person(s):</p> <p>Expert(s):</p> |
| <p><u>Prior the Interview</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Available information: • Lacking information: |
| <p><u>Posterior the Interview</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Major points collected: • Major points to deepen: |