TLQAA Project

Prelaunching Meeting Report

Persons Present:

> *From France*:
>> Prof. Alain Coulon (DGESIP)
>> Prof. MD. Didier Houssin (AERES)
>> Mme Anne Picard (AERES)
>> Prof. Patricia Pol (AERES)
>> Prof. Jean-Pierre Gesson (CPU et Univ. De Poitiers)
>> Mr. Harald Schraeder (CPU)
>> Mr. Bruno Curvale (CIEP)
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> *From Lebanon*:
>> Dr. Ahmad Jammal (DGHE)
>> Prof. Zuheir Chokr (UL)
>> Prof. Elie A. Salem (UOB)
>> Prof. Michel Najjar (UOB)
>> Mr. Georges Dahdah (UOB)
>> Dr. Chafic Mokbel (UOB)

I. Introduction

The prelaunching meeting in Paris was planned to be the first activity in the "Toward the Lebanese Quality Assurance Agency" (TLQAA) Tempus project. It aims at setting the strategic bases of the project. This meeting day was planned to provide an opportunity for discussion with the main stakeholders involved in the development of a national quality assurance system. Representatives of the different stakeholders were involved; the institutions through a meeting with the Universities Presidents at CPU, the French Quality Assurance Agency (AERES) and, the Directorate General of Higher Education. Inline with those objectives three meetings were conducted and a final steering committee meeting was held to set the ground for the next steps. This document reports briefly on those meetings and their outcomes.

II. "Conférence des Présidents d'Université" (CPU)

The Lebanese Delegation and Mr. Curvale was first received at the CPU by President Gesson and . After a brief introduction by Mr. Curvale and Mr. Mokbel, Mr. Jammal presented the situation in Lebanon stressing on the fact that QA process is not new and providing few examples about project and activities conducted in this direction. Mr. Gesson then explained the situation in France regarding the quality assurance and the external evaluation. He stressed on the fact that the independence of the QA agency and

the fact that its reports are public help the adhesion to the process. He mentioned that the evaluation results have minimal effects on the finance of the institutions. He explained that with the reform of higher education toward the contractual mechanism and with the arrival of the QA agency AERES there has been a convergence toward a University/Institution project compared to the previous situation where the units have their objectives independently from each other. Mr. Chokr has then provided a brief presentation of the Lebanese system and the different stakeholders. He inquired on the possibility of going from a state controlled system to a total independency of a QA agency and whether it is better to have an intermediate phase. Mr. Gesson explained that the evaluation is generally organized around the indicators and that the state usually expresses to the agency its needs in term of assessment. Mr. Mokbel asked what are the positive impacts on the universities of the QA process in France that would help motivating the Lebanese universities to undergo such a process? Mr. Gesson mentioned two advantages: the improvement of the quality and the reinforcement of the governance. Mr. Curvale indicated the fact that experts are always lacking for the process. Mr,. Gesson clarified that this is even more visible for the evaluation of the educational activities than for the research activities. Mr. Chokr stressed the need of the Lebanese QA to call for international experts in addition to the local experts. Mr. Salem mentioned that Quality is not a choice in higher education and it is in the core of the university activities in general. He called for spending efforts to reach the best process possible. Mr. Najjar mentioned that the Lebanese Higher Education Institutions are getting accredited today by international agencies and he inquires what guarantee that the targeted national agency get recognized and how transparent and independent the agency will be when publishing the reports. Mr. Gesson explained that the result of the evaluation in France is not a Yes/No decision but rather a full report showing politely the strength and weaknesses of the evaluated institution. Mr. Mokbel inquired about the relation between the Agency and the CPU. Mr. Gesson asserted that a dialog exists between the CPU and the Agency and that regular discussions are held and that observations are exchanged in both directions.

> **Key ideas:**
> - Independent agency
> - Public reports
> - Dialogue with stakeholders
> - Improving the quality
> - Reinforcing the governance

III. "Agence d'Evaluation de la Recherche et de l'Enseignement Supérieur" (AERES)

The second meeting was held in the premises of the AERES where the Lebanese delegation has been received by President Houssin, Ms. Picard and Ms. Pol. Mr. Houssin started by presenting the basic principles that should govern any evaluation agency. These principles are:
- Consistency (i.e. homogeneity in the terminology and procedures and homogeneity in the results whoever the experts are)

- Independence
- Informed peers with international experts if possible
- Evaluation and not control
- Transparency and especially the clarity of objectives, standards and procedures.

Then Mr. Houssin in response to a question about the possible recognition of the targeted Lebanese agency explained the principle of EQAR in Europe. Mr. Jammal then presented briefly the draft law currently in the Lebanese Council of Ministers. He clearly showed that the adopted principles reflect independency and transparency. There has been an important discussion about who designate the board of the agency. Mr. Houssin and later on Ms. Picard explained that there should be a majority of political acceptance of the president of the agency. The board of AERES is mainly formed by scientific personalities. The situation is Lebanon was then described and the concerns of the Lebanese universities were reported. It has been suggested to start by programmes evaluation if the evaluation of the institutions is critical for finance and governance issues. Ms. Pol and Ms. Picard suggested the use of quality labels as an incentive for the Lebanese institutions to undergo the QA process. It has also been noted that the TLQAA project will be running in parallel with the amendment of the draft law in the chamber of deputies and that the project includes a pilot evaluation that would permit the stakeholders better understanding the QA process and its advantages. The AERES support, as a full member of the project, will be beneficial. Finally, Ms. Pol provided the Lebanese delegation with very useful documents from AERES.
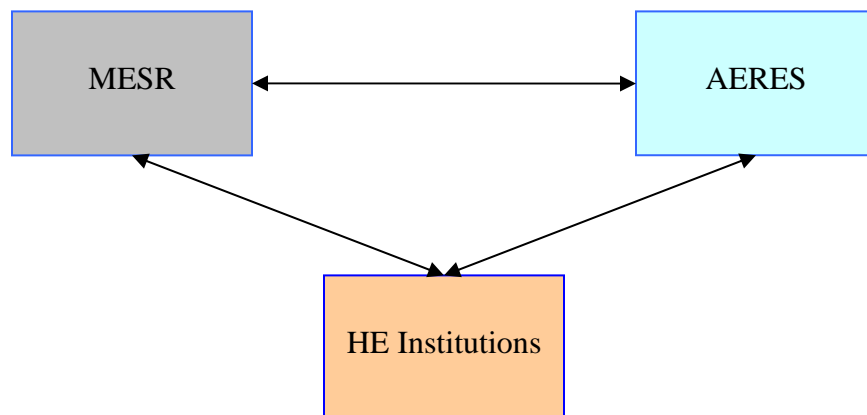
> **Key ideas:**
> - Homogeneous terminology and homogenous treatment of the different institutions
> - Independence
> - Transparency
> - Informed peers
> - Evaluation and not control
> - International experts
> - Quality labels
> - Programmes evaluation vs. Institution evaluation
> - Pilot evaluation

IV. "Direction Générale de l'Enseignement Supérieur et de l'Insertion Professionnel" (DGESIP)

The meeting was held with Mr. Coulon who explained the French system and the reform induced by the new laws especially the law of 2007. The director general of Higher Education, M. Patrick Hetzel passed by and welcomed the Lebanese delegation at the DGESIP. Mr. Coulan explained that with the new law of 2007 there is a major stress on the professional insertion of the graduates. Mr. Coulan considers that the stamp of the state in France is a sign of quality. The 2006 law introduced the AERES and organized

the research activities. In France the agency provides the report and the information and the state takes the corresponding measures. Mr. Coulon stresses on the necessity of being pedagogic in explaining the reform to the stakeholders. He said that a resistance was first perceived but when the reforms are executed the resisting stakeholders become satisfied. He also mentioned that in France currently the neighbor universities are being grouped to show a better critical mass. He also presented the new European ranking system U-Multirank and its advantages when compared to international ranking systems. He mentioned that there has been a recent interest in France for educational and pedagogical projects while such projects were reserved in the past for research which shows the weight and interest in pedagogical quality. He also stated that with the new law of 2007 the Minister is not anymore the president of the CPU. Mr. Coulon showed the delegation the triangle of relationship (see below) between the Ministry, the AERES and the institutions putting the Ministry and the AERES at the same level. He explained the types of relationships that exist among the different components of the diagram and stressed on the necessary dialogue that should be maintained between the different parties in this triangle without questioning the independency of each of the parties. Mr. Jammal explained the new draft law currently proposed in Lebanon describing its main features.

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Key ideas:
- Reform of higher education
- Dialogue
- Strategy
- Challenges
- Ranking
- Pedagogical quality
- Grouping institutions and critical mass
- Competences to complete knowledge
- Autonomy and responsibility

V. Steering committee meeting

The last meeting was dedicated to the steering committee. The meeting started with two short presentations. Mr. Curvale first showed the challenges facing higher education in general and pushing towards reforms. He indicated that quality assurance is an essential component in any reform project playing a role in the regulation of those reforms. Mr. Mokbel presented ideas relative to internationalization and quality proving the importance of two concepts: contextualization and confrontation of systems and views. At a more support level, the TLQAA logo candidates have been presented and discussed. The first draft of the TLQAA website has been also presented. The members also discussed the next action consisting of the launching ceremony. The week of 23 January 2012 was considered as a good candidate. The day depends on the availability of the officials; HE the Minister and TE the ambassadors. The steering committee agreed on a preference to have the ceremonial day at the end of the working days with the partners.

Key ideas:
- Modernization and quality
- Quality through internationalization
- Contextualization
- Learning through confrontation
- Constructive learning
- IT infrastructure
- Launching Ceremony