Institutional Evaluation
Guide for Preparing a Self-Assessment Report
(TLQAA pilot evaluation)

Towards the Quality Assurance Agency

Lebanon
December 2012

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I. Introduction and Basic Concepts

This document defines a guide for the Lebanese higher education institutions to write their self-assessment report in accordance to the external quality assurance process as defined in the Tempus "Towards the Lebanese Quality Assurance Agency" (TLQAA) project. The document focuses on the pilot evaluation that will be done during the project. It prefigures more generic guidelines that will be design after debriefing the pilot evaluation.

The backdrop of the self-assessment exercise is twofold. On the one hand it is a mechanism that should be part of the normal management of every institution: self-evaluation is a capacity all institutions should develop and keep at its best level. On the other hand, self-assessment is an activity which outcomes, the self-assessment report, is at the starting point of the external review. The self-assessment report is a major piece of information for the review panel. It informs both about the outcomes and about the internal dynamic of the institution in terms of quality culture.

To prepare to the external review, the higher education institution has to prepare several documents. They are then provided to the review committee as part of the evaluation process. These documents are:

- Self-assessment report;
- List of indicators;
- Financial statements for the past three years[1];
- Administration structure.

Within this list, the self-assessment report appears to be the most critical element. It should be prepared with care.

The present document aims to be a support for the Lebanese higher education institutions participating to Tempus TLQAA while developing their self-assessment report. The processes and procedures suggested here are not mandatory but may be used as a source of inspiration by the higher education institutions when designing their self-assessment reporting processes.

I.1. Key Concepts

- Self-assessment is more than a report. It is a process that should commit the whole institution;
- As the self-assessment exercise requires significant investment from the institution at all levels it needs a strong support from the leadership. The involvement and support of the top administrators of the institution shall be secured at the beginning of the process;
- Self-assessment is an institution core capacity that should help the development of a relevant and well-developed quality culture;
- Integrity, honesty and openness are necessary for a successful self-assessment exercise. A climate of mutual respect and commitment should be established among all the units and persons involved in the self-assessment exercise;

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[1] Not required for the pilot evaluation conducted within the Tempus TLQAA project

- The self-assessment process should not be driven by the standards but shall describe and evaluate against the standards all the institution functionings and achievements: goals, strategies, policies, activities and outcomes...
- The self-assessment report shall reflect to what extent the higher education institution meets the quality standards and criteria set by the agency[2,3] and the ones the institution has chosen for itself;
- The self-assessment exercises should be organized in order it is beneficial for the organization and shall ultimately respond to the aims of the institution in terms of quality improvement;
- The self-assessment exercise should be evidence-based, analytical and self-critical and provide verifiable evidence;
- In case it is not the first self-assessment report, a differential analysis shall be done to analyze the developing improvement.

I.2. Standards

The following core standards have been defined in the TLQAA project. Each of them is gathering specific standards. The self-assessment report shall be connected to those standards showing evidence of quality in the institution when compared to each of the standards.

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

Table 1. Core standards as suggested in the TLQAA project.

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[2] The standards and criteria set in WP2 of the Tempus TLQAA project apply in the context of the project.

[3] Based on the decision taken during the consortium meeting of October 2012 the pilot evaluation will only focus on the teaching and learning aspects in all the standards.

II. Self-assessment Reporting Process

Normally the self-assessment and the external review should be done on the whole institution.

The following steps are being proposed for the preparation of a self-assessment report:

1. Forming a self-assessment steering committee;
2. Defining the elements/questions corresponding to each standard;
3. Collecting information relative to each standard;
4. Analyzing the achievements (self-assessment);
5. Reporting by synthesizing the information collected and the findings.

II.1. Self-assessment Steering Committee

The self-assessment steering committee would be formed respecting the following criteria:

1. The committee should include respected leaders who believe in the self-assessment process;
2. The committee should reflect the diversity on campus as well as the branches when they exist;
3. The committee should include resourceful members;
4. The committee should include members who have the institutional memory;
5. The committee should include one or more members from the administrative and technical staff;
6. The committee should include one or more students;
7. The committee members should be connected to what is going in the institution;
8. The committee members should have time and efforts to spend on the process;
9. The committee size should be enough to conduct the work;
10. Coherence and good communication should exist among the committee members.

In addition to the above the chairperson of the committee should be designated by the president of the institution. He has to have good mediation and communication skills and should be respected on campus. He must have good communication channels with the University board. The president of the institution may also designate co-chairs to the committee in order to better represent all the groups.

It would be a good practice to form subcommittees that takes in charge specific standards. Each subcommittee in this case would deliver a report on the standard it evaluated. The steering committee would then compile the final self-study report. *It is worth noting that in the case of the pilot evaluation conducted in the Tempus TLQAA project there is a focus on Teaching and Learning and therefore there would normally be no need for subcommittees.*

II.2. Defining the Self-Study Elements and Procedures

In order to define the elements to search for each standard, the following steps are suggested:

1. Understand the goals of the standards used for the evaluation;

2. Define the self-assessment report design;
3. Developing a series of questions and elements to search per standard and in accordance to the design defined.

II.2.1 Understanding the Standards

In general, evaluation (self-assessment) is performed against a set of standards provided by an external agency or developed internally by the institution. It is crucial that the self-assessment steering committee understands the goals of the standards and the criteria that aim at supporting the evaluation before proceeding in any further step of the self-assessment reporting process. It should notably decide what are the main information and evidences that should document the evaluation of the level of achievement of the standards. It is suggested that the steering committee meets and discusses in depth the standards. When subcommittees are formed[4] to deal with specific standards the steering committee should meet with each subcommittee to discuss and deepen the understanding of the standards in order to assure consistency in the evaluation process.

II.2.2 Designing the Self-Assessment Report

Once the standards are understood, a decision must be taken regarding the design of the self-assessment report. The design of the self-assessment report guides the self-assessment process and, therefore, is as important as the report itself. Special attention must be provided by the steering committee to the design of the self-assessment report.

There are at least three principal ways to organize the self-assessment report:
- To have one chapter or section for each of the nine core standards;
- To group standards together in sections corresponding to the structure of the institution;
- To organize the report thematically and to group standards according to themes.

The higher education institution is free to adopt any organization for the report as long as the information and the analyses regarding the different standards are explicitly present. In all cases the self-assessment report should reflect to what extent each quality standard is met.

While an organization by standard facilitates the external review process, a thematic organization might reflect better what matters in terms of management, policies or strategies in the institution. For the pilot evaluation within Tempus TLQAA, and since it is a thematic evaluation focusing on "*Teaching and Learning*", a thematic organization of the report is recommended. The thematic approach facilitates the link between the quality assessment and the policies of the institution.

The design of the core standards in nine sets of criteria is a convenient way to present them. However this should not hide the fact that the core standards are interconnected as being the different dimensions of the quality of an institution. In consequence when assessing "*Teaching and Learning*" the institutions are asked to consider criteria that belong to the others but are part of what should be taken into account with regard to the quality of teaching and learning. This document proposes (in Appendix A) a list of the criteria that should be assessed.

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[4] Not necessary for the pilot evaluation in Tempus TLQAA as stated earlier

The general structure of a self-assessment report organized according to the standards is provided in the following figure. In the case of the TLQAA pilot evaluation the same structure shall be used but the core part of the report is formed of one section relative to the single theme of "*Teaching and Learning*". The Table 2 should be filled in to show the coverage of the standards and placed in Appendix A of the report.
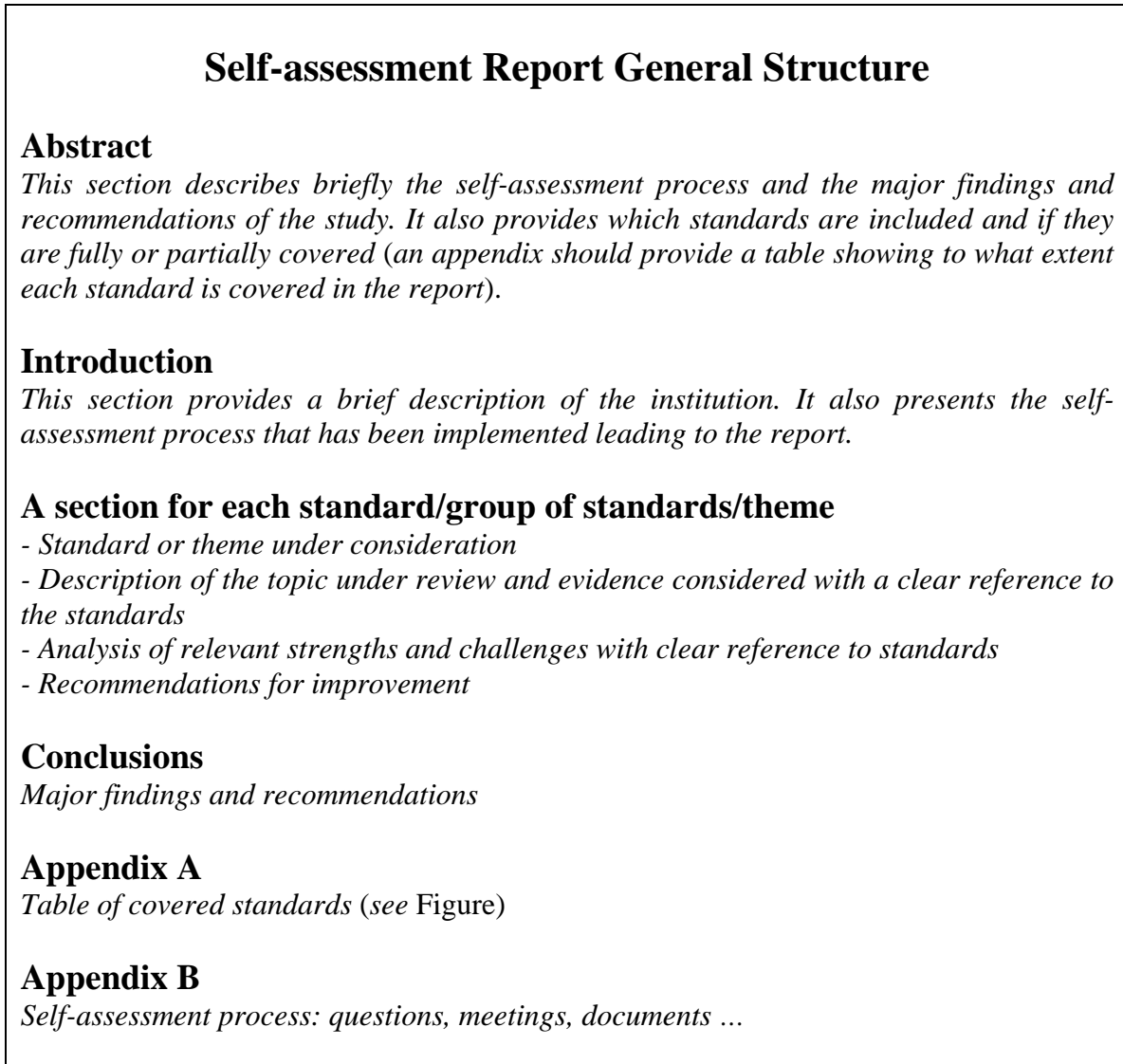

Self-assessment Report General Structure

Abstract
This section describes briefly the self-assessment process and the major findings and recommendations of the study. It also provides which standards are included and if they are fully or partially covered (an appendix should provide a table showing to what extent each standard is covered in the report).

Introduction
This section provides a brief description of the institution. It also presents the self-assessment process that has been implemented leading to the report.

A section for each standard/group of standards/theme
- Standard or theme under consideration
- Description of the topic under review and evidence considered with a clear reference to the standards
- Analysis of relevant strengths and challenges with clear reference to standards
- Recommendations for improvement

Conclusions
Major findings and recommendations

Appendix A
Table of covered standards (*see* Figure)

Appendix B
Self-assessment process: questions, meetings, documents …

Figure 1. General Structure of the Self-assessment Report

Standards	Check Corresponding Column			Comments
	Fully Covered	Partially Covered	Not Covered	
1. Mission/Goals and Objectives				
2. Governance				
3. Teaching and Learning				
4. Academic Programmes				
5. General Resources				
6. Human Resources				
7. Students				
8. Public Disclosure				
9. Integrity				

Table 2. Self-assessment Report Standards Coverage Form.

II.2.3 Questions and Criteria to Search

The questions are related to the standards but should be dependent on the institution context. They should connect the standards to the different dimensions and components of the institution. They should stimulate thinking about important topics in the institution and should not have obvious or yes/no answers. They are the elements to be used in order to demonstrate the level of achievement of the standards. They should be relevant and convincing. The steering committee should pay special attention to collecting possible evidence (documents, results…) while drafting the questions.

The list of questions and the approach adopted to collect the responses (meeting, interviews, searching the internet…) should be provided in the appendix B of the self-assessment report (see proposes general structure of the self-assessment report). They reflect the extent to which the self-assessment evaluates against the standards, the strategies, activities and results of the institution.

In the TLQAA project a set of standards has been defined and is provided in Table 1. For each standard several criteria have been associated. The standards with their criteria are given in [1] . To illustrate the possible questions, the following table provides possible questions associated to the criteria of core standard 9 "*Integrity*".

Criteria	Possible Questions
9. Integrity **The institution commits to high ethical standards in dealing with its governing board, students, prospective students, faculty, staff, external agencies and organizations, and the general public. The institution promotes democratic values, sense of dialogue, communication, respect of diversity, sense of belonging and social integration.**	
9.1 The institution develops and publishes, through the consensus of its multiple constituencies a code of ethics that is official and adhered to	*Is there a code of ethics? What is its content? How has it been set and is it updated?*
9.2 The institution recognizes the participatory nature of learning process and respects a wide range of opinions and ideas	*Do the teaching methodologies encourage participatory learning? Are the different groups represented in the different committees?*
9.3 The institution upholds accountability at all levels	*How does the educational programme address plagiarism? How students' complaints are processed?*
9.4 The institution has active academic integrity assessment procedures	*How consistently does the institution follow through on its stated policies in communicating with students, faculty and staff, and students?*
9.5 The institution fosters to develop in all its educational programmes courses, modules or part of courses dedicated to democratic values, sense of dialogue, communication, respect of diversity, sense of belonging and social integration	*How curricula consider those values? What rules at the institution level guaranty the inclusion in the programmes of modules or courses dedicated to democratic values, sense of dialogue, communication, respect of diversity, social integration …?*
9.6 The institution demonstrates support for academic and intellectual freedom	*When academic freedom has been challenged, how has the institution reacted?*

In the TLQAA pilot evaluation the self-assessment report should focus on one theme: "*Teaching and Learning*". The Annex A provides the criteria for the different standards related to this core driving theme.

II.3. Collecting the Answers

Once the questions set, a plan for collecting the answers has to be defined. Meetings and visits within the institution have to be scheduled. Communication strategies must be set. During the meeting and communication the steering committee or the subcommittees must be keen to request and collect evidence. The interviewed persons should be provided with necessary time to analyze and discuss the questions. All the elements of information collected should be archived in order to prepare the editing of the self-assessment report.

II.4. Writing the Report

Subcommittees shall write reports summarizing their findings and recommendations. The self-assessment report is not the collection of the subcommittees' reports but rather an integration of those reports. The final report should be concise, consistent and coherent.

Once the first draft of the report produced, it is advised to send it to the interviewed persons in the institution requesting feedbacks. Collected feedbacks should be integrated in order to produce the final version of the report.

III.   References

[1] "Standards," Towards the Lebanese Quality Assurance Agency, TLQAA, WP2, November, 2012.
[2] "Self-assessment - Creating a Useful Process and Report," Middle States Commission on Higher Education, Second Edition, September 2007.
[3] "School Self-assessment Report," ISACS Accreditation Guide, 17th edition, 2010.

Annex A. The Standards and Criteria Connected to the "Teaching and Learning" Theme

Standard 1: Mission/Goals and Objectives

The institution publishes its educational mission, goals, and objectives reflecting its distinctive character and articulating institutional values. The institution describes its purpose and rationale in the context of Lebanese higher education

1.2 Goals and objectives guide the institution's over-all direction, the establishment of academic programs and curricula, and administrative practices. They are used to evaluate the overall institutional performance

Standard 2: Governance

The institution's system of governance promotes a climate of administrative effectiveness, teaching and learning excellence, and professional development including faculty research and creative activity. The governance structure establishes quality control measures and fosters continuous quality improvement

2.5 The institution, through its governing structure, undertakes strategic planning that involves analysis of constraints and opportunities, and implements plans of action with the aim of continuous improvement of its teaching and learning goals

2.6 The institution has a research strategy, described, justified, monitored, reviewed, and developed regularly. The institution allocates adequate resources to implement the strategy

2.8 The institution includes institutional assessment or institutional research or similar forms of auto-evaluation which assesses its resources, weaknesses and strengths, provides trustful information, and undertakes periodic review of its programmes, in light of its goals and objectives, and the quality of teaching and learning

2.9 The institution shall consolidate a quality culture based on a known and publicly available quality policy, and shall ensure a continuous improvement of the quality

2.10 The institution should have a policy and procedures for assurance of quality

2.11 The institution uses the results from quality assurance processes to revise and improve structures, processes, curricula

2.12 The institution takes deliberate steps to engage faculty and students as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience

2.13 The institution has fair, effective and timely procedures for handling faculty and students' complaints and academic appeals

Standard 3: Teaching and Learning

The institution promotes and offers adequate support for teaching and learning effectiveness. The institution promotes active learning, articulates goals, and evaluates student learning based on accepted practices

3.1 The institution provides evidence for effective teaching in line with academic requests and learning outcomes.

3.2 The institution ensures a climate conducive to teaching and learning

effectiveness through qualified faculty, facilities, support units, and administration of institutional affairs.

3.3 The institution develops procedures regulating academic decision-making affecting learning, including service learning, internships, and employment, so as to safeguard the centrality of learning to the institution.

3.4 The institution systematically evaluates student learning and provides evidence of success rates and weaknesses.

3.5 Assessment of student learning is continuous and embedded. Assessment provides evidence that students have met the knowledge, skills, and competencies consistent with institutional goals and program outcomes at the time of graduation.

3.6 The institution provides evidences on the impact of faculty staff research and their teaching content and methodology,

3.7 The institution provides evidence of student learning opportunities and demonstrates it is achieving its objectives and reaching a good quality of learning.

3.8 The institution shall have procedures whereby it can check that the purpose of any action that it undertakes, including outside work experience, community service, and mobility, is to encourage learning by the student,

3.9 The institution uses of the most appropriate assessment approach for each course and learning outcome

Standard 4: Academic Programmes

The institution's academic programs reflect institutional mission, goals, and objectives. Academic programs offer a course of study that address the broad knowledge base and accepted methods of inquiry of the relevant discipline or subject area

4.1 The institution's various programs display knowledge content, rigor methods, and coherence appropriate to good quality of effective teaching and learning.

4.2 The institution has in place effective processes for program administration, program design and approval of new programs. The institution works systematically and effectively to ensure the quality and integrity of its academic programs and the credits and degrees awarded.

4.3 The institution has in place mechanisms to sustain, review and update its programs and to approve, manage, evaluate and periodically enhance their quality. These mechanisms include the participation of all concerned stakeholders.

4.4 Academic programs articulate student learning goals and objectives, including foundational knowledge, skills, and competencies. The institution evaluates the degree to which programs meet goals and objectives.

4.5 The institution identifies expected outcomes (of learning and employment), assesses the extent to which it achieves these outcomes, and provides evidence of improvement based on analysis of the results.

4.7 The institution ensures overall compatibility of the programme in terms of core knowledge, specialized knowledge and transferable personal skills.

4.8 The institution diversifies learning opportunities through non-traditional forms of learning such as certificate programs, blended programs, non-credit offerings, distance learning, and remedial courses, etc.

4.9 Graduate degrees are awarded in a research environment that provides secure academic standards for doing research and learning about research approaches, methods, procedures and protocols.

4.10 The institution practices similar procedures and equality of access to effective learning across different campuses and branches

Standard 5: General Resources

The institution sustains its operations and supports the achievement of its educational objectives through sufficient capacity in academic, fiscal, physical, technological and library and information resources

5.1 The academic, financial, technological, and physical infrastructure necessary to meet institutional goals are sufficient and accessible.

5.4 The institution's allocation of resources and its processes for evaluation and planning demonstrate its capacity to improve the quality of its education, and respond to future challenges and opportunities.

5.6 The institution makes available open library and information resources to support teaching and learning and demonstrates their effectiveness in fulfilling its goals.

Standard 6: Human Resources

Faculty and staff qualifications, numbers, and performance are sufficient to accomplish the institutional and program goals and objectives and ensure quality teaching and learning

6.3 The institution's instructional, research, and service support units are developed, implemented and monitored by qualified professionals.

6.4 The institution provides appropriate institutional support for the advancement and development of faculty, including support for teaching, research, creative scholarship, and professional service, as well as through faculty exchange programs.

6.7 The institution demonstrates provision of basic rights for faculty, including academic freedom and work conditions, within the context of sound teaching and learning.

Standard 7: Students

The institution recruits, admits, and enrolls students through common policies and procedures. The institution formulates policies to protect students and ensure their success. The institution provides sufficient resources and services to achieve student learning of academic programs

7.3 The institution provides sufficient student support services to enable students to achieve competitive results. The institution has effective arrangements in place

to support students in their learning.

7.4 The institution supports student life on campus, grants freedom of expression and association and participation in decision-making. The institution provides channels of information to students to help them better making their educational and professional strategies.

7.6 The institution publishes accurate and up-to-date information addressed to enrolled and prospective students to allow for informed decision-making about the institution and learning pathways.

7.7 Student assessment uses published criteria, regulations and procedures which are applied consistently.

7.8 The institution demonstrates an acceptable level of internal effectiveness regarding students' progress (recruitment, retention, promotion and graduation).

7.10 The institution provides structures of interaction between institutional offer and labor market demand, involving students.

7.13 The students provide input and participate to most of the institution committees including those in charge of the quality of education.

Standard 8: Public Disclosure
The institution documents and publishes data and information to ensure transparency

8.3 The institution documents all activities, programs, rules and regulations related to different institutional and program procedures, and preserves them systematically to ensure institutional memory.

8.4 The institution maintains an official website that is updated continually.

Standard 9: Integrity
The institution commits to high ethical standards in dealing with its governing board, students, prospective students, faculty, staff, external agencies and organizations, and the general public. The institution promotes democratic values, sense of dialogue, communication, respect of diversity, sense of belonging and social integration

9.2 The institution recognizes the participatory nature of learning process and respects a wide range of opinions and ideas.

9.3 The institution upholds accountability at all levels.

9.5 The institution fosters to develop in all its educational programmes courses, modules or part of courses dedicated to democratic values, sense of dialogue, communication, respect of diversity, sense of belonging and social integration.

9.6 The institution demonstrates support for academic and intellectual freedom.