

Evaluation Report and Certification Decision

Certification procedure at the

Academy of Health Sciences, Idlib (Syria)

“Nursing” (B.A.), “Physical Therapy” (B.A.) and “Paramedics” (B.A.)

I Procedure

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Standing Expert Committee and academic supervision: Standing Expert Committee “Medicine and Health Sciences” under the supervision of Professor Dr. Christoff Zalpour

Attendance by the ACQUIN office: Dr. Stefan Handke

Certification decision of the Accreditation Commission: 25 June 2019, 24 March 2020

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The **Evaluation Report** of the peer group is based on the self-evaluation report of the HEI and an online discussion with the management, students and the heads of programmes at the Academy of Health Sciences (AHS).

Evaluation Criteria have been the “Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area” (ESG) in the latest official version, insofar as applicable.

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1. Initial position

The reviewers would like to thank the organizers and the participating teachers of online conference, that they have made themselves available for the discussions and gave their information willingly. The participation is seen as very valuable not only for the assessment of the courses, but also for the better understanding of the legal and sociocultural background of the Syrian education system, in particular the Academy of Health Sciences. **Valuation basis of the evaluation group** is the self-documentation of the Academy of Health Sciences, as well as the intensive discussions with program managers. The certification process in Syria has the general objective of checking the quality of the courses and compliance with European standards. For international procedures in the European Higher Education Area, the "Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area" (ESG), as amended from time to time, are the **central assessment criteria**. In addition, the respective country-specific legal requirements must be taken into account in the certification procedure. For this purpose, a group of experts was set up, which ensured that all areas relevant to the assessment procedure (e.g. technical aspects, study-structural and formal aspects, social aspects) were taken into account. A certificate with the ACQUIN seal is awarded for the certification of courses in Idlib, Syria.

2. Short portrait of the Academy of Health Sciences

The Academy of Health Sciences (in the following text referred to as “AHS”) was founded as an academic centre in 2011. Since then it has developed into a university that combines both metropolitan and cosmopolitan dimensions, and which is closely involved in healthcare, professional and academic life within Syria, as well as overseas. According to its vision, the academy has always been, and continues to be, imaginative in recognising new needs and developing appropriate offerings for its many target markets. The academy also has a strong and historic commitment to promoting equality and embracing diversity.

The academy is a non-profit, private university pioneering in health sciences based education. AHS has its own constitution passed by the Ministry of High Education in Syria, under the name Academy of Health Sciences. AHS is located in Atima, Countryside of Idlib, Syria.

The academy is structured in the three schools for paramedics, physical therapy and nursing. At these three administrative units the study programmes “Nursing” (B.A.), “Physical Therapy” (B.A.) and “Paramedics” (B.A.) are conceptualised and implemented.

Due to the war, which is still ongoing on the Syrian territory and the battle between rebels and Syrian government troops, AHS works under very special and challenging conditions. As many as three million people live in Idlib province, including many refugees who have been transferred to the region after the fall of other rebel enclaves, such as Homs and Aleppo.

Despite of the difficult context, AHS is very active to keep in touch with academics and other partners abroad. Besides the initiative to receive some international recognition with a successful certification of study programmes, the academy co-operates – mainly via modern communication – with various partners, such as The Consortium of Universities for Global Health (CUGH).

The review team got the impression that AHS has great developmental changes since the beginning, and stood up the highly serious situations during the conflict. Management and lecturers are ambitious and eager to learn, since staff is the key element in AHS core programmes. For example, the goal to promote English as the main language at AHS shall make sure that staff members are able to follow the international discourse in the academic disciplines and to run state of the art degree programmes. English skills are still a challenge, since there was a great constraints in Syria before the conflict, and Syrian Higher Academic institutions feel proud to teach all their curriculum in Arabic as a unique feature in all Arabic countries.

Besides language competences, academic research is still a challenge in its optimal form in these highly disastrous situations, but it has more simple attempts in AHS according to available resources.

3. General information on the assessed study programmes

AHS runs its study programmes in an extremely uncertain and dangerous environment in the city of Idlib, that is besieged by hostile military forces resulting in shortages in every day needs and in a high risk for injuries and death among the civil population. AHS graduates in paramedics immediately work in rescue teams and risk their lives every day.

While writing this report, Idlib suffers severe military attacks with an increase in casualties. Paramedics in Idlib try their best to alleviate sufferings and save lives. Thus, every comments in this report will respect the current situation, and the author expresses his deepest respect to all people teaching and learning at the AHS in Idlib.

Location	Idlib, Syria
date of introduction	Physical Therapy: 2015 Paramedics: 2015 Nursing: 2016
faculty/ department	AHS schools
number of terms prescribed for the completion of a course	4 semesters / 2 years
number of ECTS-Credits	Physical Therapy: 90 Paramedics: 90 Nursing: 96
number of study places	Physical Therapy: 44 Paramedics: 50 Nursing: 40
target group(s)	Students who want to specialise in one of the disciplines in order to apply their knowledge and competences in order to work in Syria
entry requirements	Secondary Education Test and entry exam
study form	campus studies – full time
tuition fee	<i>None</i>

II Description of facts and evaluation (according to ESG)

The quality of the courses and the compliance with European standards („Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area“ (ESG)) are assessed by the expert group. General statements express findings for all programmes. Specific issues for individual programmes are only mentioned in case of deviations from general findings.

1. ESG Part 1, 1.1 Policy for quality assurance

Standard: Institutions should have a policy for quality assurance that is made public and forms part of their strategic management. Internal stakeholders should develop and implement this policy through appropriate structures and processes, while involving external stakeholders.

Findings and Evaluation

AHS was very active in implementing general quality assurance tools, mainly concerning gender equality and respecting different subpopulations in Idlib. The quality assurance was assessed external supervision and evaluation. AHS follows the guidelines of the Syrian Expatriate Medical Association (SEMA), especially the MEAL programme (monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning) and subsequent recommendations.

AHS's engagement in international collaborations as well as its links to regional and national health institutions are very well established – especially in the current situation. The existing co-operations provide, for instance, access to online resources, since AHS has only limited access to libraries and other learning resources. Co-operations allow AHS to use e-learning resources from partner institutions, e.g. from Turkey, South Africa or Armenia.

External assistance in the sense of a remote management of a collaborative project with German partners and in partnership with SEMA is recommended.

Conclusion

The efforts of AHS to co-operate with external partners, to use state of the art resources from other providers through co-operation agreements and bilateral partnerships, are highly appreciated. Further, AHS has a policy to provide good educational programmes, which is also guaranteed by learning from external stakeholders, partner institutions and the peer-discussion on content and methodologies of teaching in the assessed programme. **The standard is substantially fulfilled.**

2. ESG Part 1, 1.2 Design and approval of programmes

Standard: Institutions should have processes for the design and approval of their programmes. The programmes should be designed so that they meet the objectives set for them, including the intended learning outcomes. The qualification resulting from a programme should be clearly specified and communicated, and refer to the correct level of the national qualifications framework for higher education and, consequently, to the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area.

Findings and Evaluation

The degree programmes provided by the AHS are developed and implemented in a very similar way. Therefore, the structural and organizational features of each programme show similarities, which are mainly found in the concepts and didactical approaches. Further, content and objectives are partly overlapping, since the target groups of the programmes are similar as well. The following description and evaluation of each programme highlights specific objectives and structural characteristics.

AHS made great attempts to integrate all the graduates in the community and their curricula were designed to align that purpose, and all revisions consider the highly changing community needs during the severe conflict. An important challenge is the short course of programmes as a result of deficiency in resources and time, which need future extension of the programmes with the improvement of security and engagement in developmental and durable stage.

Students wish to have the possibility to decide for postgraduate study programmes, which should be developed in a long-term perspective. Furthermore, students wish to have practical training in private settings (outpatient or physical therapy centre). The evaluation of this aspect is not easy to fulfil as there is a lack of information about the clinical education approach.

General objectives

AHS seeks to provide an infrastructure for medical education and training in the region of Idlib and beyond. The academy strives for providing education and having a positive impact on the local society. Therefore, graduates are trained for the regional labour market and they are not in the first place prepared for jobs abroad.

For each programme, AHS has a “programme curriculum board”, which decides on structure, competences and content being part of a programme. AHS adapts the curricula to general developments in the discipline (e.g. paramedics) and aligns them to specific (regional) requirements. The focus is on the needs of students, but at the same time on guidelines and international references.

The responsible coordinators of the programmes communicate the claim to offer a research-based qualification. Due to the accessibility of literature as well as the language competencies of students and teachers and the time resources in a four semester programme, the review team believes that this does not have to be the aim at the moment. As soon as AHS has the opportunity to conduct more research and to interlink teaching and research, these aspects might be added to the programme documents, since the necessary competencies (research and methodological competencies) are not transparent in the module handbooks.

General structural features

Each of the programmes is designed and implemented in a similar way. Due to the context of implementing the programmes in Syria, AHS is currently not able to run Bachelor programmes with a full duration of 6 to 8 semesters. Rather, AHS had to shorten programmes, which had been originally designed as Bologna conform Bachelor programmes and therefore offers programmes with a duration of 4 semesters, which are equivalent with associate degrees or short cycle programmes. According to the Bologna cycles, an associate degree refers to the qualification awarded after successful completion of the so-called short cycle in the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area. The short cycle fits within or is linked to the first cycle (or Bachelor's level). The degree requires approximately 120 ECTS credits; this concept can be found in the assessed three programmes at AHS, which are thoroughly described in the following sections. With regard to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), the assessed programmes might be mainly allocated on level 6, but some practical elements might still meet the indicators of level 5. Since these characteristics of the programmes are not yet visible on the website of AHS, the academy has to make sure that the programmes are designed as short cycle programmes and portrayed as this kind of degree.

Due to the war situation, there is currently no mobility window and no scope of elective modules in the three assessed programmes.

a. Physical Therapy (B.A.)

AHS offers a 4 semester full-time physical therapy programme plus a three month interim course, which is comparable to short cycle programmes. The workload encompasses 676 theoretical hours, 988 practical hours, 110 laboratory and hospital hours. The teaching and learning methods encompass self-directed learning (e.g. power point, video, illustration, and laboratory) as well as directed (face-to-face) learning activities. Self-learning is integrated in a relation of 2:6 hours each day. Based on the programme description, the physical therapy programme is taught 50% in English and 50% in Arabic. Since AHS did not cover times of self-studies, preparation times and

testing in the workload calculation, the workload just amounts to 90 ECTS credits. The academy has to revise the workload calculation according to the ECTS user's guide; like that the overall workload of four semesters is equivalent to 120 ECTS credits.

The study programme considers the specific needs of the society and individual people in Syria, by focusing e.g. on improvement of movement function especially after injuries resulting from war. The assessment tasks are mainly quizzes and case studies as well as theoretical tests and tests applying practical skills. Physical therapy graduates are of high importance for the society due to high numbers of injured and disabled people resulting from war.

Objectives

The general aim of the physical therapy programme at AHS is to ease pain and help function, move and live better. The learning outcomes are described for each module. There is no transparency about the numbers of self-directed learning and face-to-face learning as well as the number of credits for each module. That makes it hard to assess the feasibility of the methods and contents, based on module descriptions. It sometimes seems to be too much content for the number of hours (e.g. Principles of Physical Therapy).

There is a strong focus on teaching practical aspects like techniques and interventions, which is comprehensible in the current situation of a four semester programme. Despite this, the objectives should be referred to the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) to ensure connectivity to the global physiotherapy community. The programme objectives focus on structural and functional aspects of physical therapy, bio-psychosocial aspects of health services (as considered and described in the ICF) are not sufficiently included.

The practical training is organised in local hospitals which gives the students the opportunity to gain experiences and to get into contact to the local labour market. The responsible persons confirm a high acceptance of the graduates in the labour market.

The review team was interested in the change of the study programme in accordance to the extent (4 semester versus 8 semester). The responsible persons emphasised that there is no lack of contents in the 4 semester cycle. This was not comprehensible as there naturally has to be a difference between the two models. This difference could be the focus on research or clinical reasoning aspects, which need time to develop. There should be transparency about the aims of the programme when realising an 8 semester programme.

A lot of effort is put into technical supported treatment procedures, like hydro and balneotherapy and electrotherapeutic agents. Due to the availability of these technical equipment as well as the

partly lacking evidence a more active approach should be focused whenever possible. This also refers to the modern approach of pain management.

Concept

The study programme seems to offer a solid qualification in physical therapy, by learning a wide range of treatment techniques and the necessary background knowledge for the application. In the first semesters, student get familiar with basics in modules like "Principles of Physical Therapy", "Physiology", "Descriptive Anatomy I", "Medical English", "First Aids", "The Science of Massage" and "Moving an Actor and Principles of Movement". The second semesters continues with "Biomechanics", "Descriptive Anatomy II", "Sports Injuries", "Pharmacology", "Rehabilitation and Peripheral Neurotoxicity", "Processing Equipment's" and "Rehabilitation Science".

In the second year of education, students acquire advanced knowledge. This takes place in the third semester in the modules "Electrical Movement", "Movement of Muscles", "Rehabilitation of Children Diseases", "Rehabilitation of Diseases Joints I", "Field Exercises I", "Rehabilitation of Neurological and Muscular Diseases" and "Medical Terminology". The last semester covers "Rehabilitation of Diseases Joints II", "Water Therapy Hydrotherapy", "Field Exercises II", "Ethics and Profession", "Rehabilitation after General Surgery and Manufacturing" and "Rehabilitation of Amputees".

Evaluating the module handbooks, it appears that there is a focus on musculoskeletal injuries or diseases. It is recommended to focus also on neurophysiological treatment approaches as well as on counselling and communication aspects with physiotherapy. Furthermore, it is described that treating patients in pain is an important aspect of physiotherapy in Syria. Therefore, pain management and pain science should be emphasized. An addition, reflective skills that enable students to work as autonomous professionals should be integrated in the study programme to a larger extent.

It is not clear how the teaching and learning in the clinical setting is organised. In general, there is a gap between the overall description of the aim of the study programme (e.g. effectively determine clients need based on elements of client management, participate in research activities) and the contents and objectives in the module handbook. This gap can possibly be explained by the short circle of the programme and should be explained or considered in the revision. In some of the module description the nursing process is mentioned (Medical English, Descriptive Anatomy). This should be corrected or explained in the sense of constructing inter-professional modules, which can be a good chance for using synergies. As mentioned above, the workload of the modules is not fully transparent. Furthermore, the modules lack of competency orientation in a

sense that they take into account the increasing complexity of tasks and contents throughout the study programme. This also refers to the alignment of content, objectives and assessment forms.

Conclusion

The standard is partially fulfilled, because the programme structure does not refer to the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area with regard to modularisation and workload as well as some aspects regarding content of the study programme as described for example in the WCPT guideline for physical therapist professional entry level education. Apart from that, the programme adapts to the local context and circumstances in an understandable way. For the future process, the peer review team recommends to include more research based aspects as well as to give some information about the organization and learning in the clinical setting.

b. Nursing (B.A.)

According to a short definition of the WHO, nursing encompasses autonomous and collaborative care of individuals of all ages, families, groups and communities, sick or well and in all settings. It includes the promotion of health, the prevention of illness, and the care of ill, disabled and dying people. With its degree programme “Nursing”, AHS has a tradition in training students for these purposes.

The programme covers four semesters of full-time studies, where students acquire 96 ECTS credits. Since AHS did not cover times of self-studies, preparation times and testing in the workload calculation, the workload just amounts to 90 ECTS credits. The academy has to revise the workload calculation according to the ECTS user’s guide; like that the overall workload of four semesters is equivalent to 120 ECTS credits.

As mentioned in the programme description, the nursing study programme is taught 50% in English and 50% in Arabic.

Objectives

According to the self-evaluation report, AHS characterises nursing is a highly civilised and humanitarian profession, which aims to provide society with medical service personalities to maintain and improve the health and life of the individuals. Therefore, as general objectives AHS describes to prepare graduates to provide safe, evidence-based, patient-centred care that reflects ethical clinical judgment and professional collaboration. Further, the education has currently a focus on ceasing the pains of injured people and focus upon the ethical principle of the profession in Syria.

Students at AHS are first familiarised with theoretical knowledge, which should provide them with the skill set being necessary for nursing. Based on theoretical knowledge, students shall acquire practical competences, which are trained in courses and projects of applied nursing.

Concept

In the first semester AHS offers the modules "Microbiology and Parasites", "Descriptive Anatomy I", "Communication Skills", "Nursing (History, Etiquette, Issues)", "Fundamentals of Nursing", "Physiology I" and "Introduction to Medical English". The second semester continues with the modules "Clinical Assessment", "Internal Diseases", "Descriptive Anatomy II", "Adult Nursing I", "Medical Terminology", "Physiology II" and "Pharmacology I".

The second year provides in the third semester competences in the modules "Therapeutic Feeding", "Surgical Diseases", "Pharmacology II", "Nursing of Women and Childbirth", "Adult Nursing II" and "Medical Language". The modules "Critical Nursing Cases", "Community Health Nursing", "First Aids", "Psychiatric Nursing" and "Computer" are located in the fourth semester.

Programme managers and lecturers at AHS are facing the situation of being able to teach nursing only with a short curriculum. For the future development and the implementation of a full Bachelor programme with three or four year, programme managers state that it should also comprise psychological medicine and biostatistics.

At the moment, the programme meets well the specific regional requirements. At the same time, content and competences are provided, which can be expected from a degree programme in nursing.

Conclusion

The standard is partially fulfilled, because the programme structure does not refer to the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area with regard to modularisation and workload.

c. Paramedics (B.A.)

AHS offers a 4 semester full-time paramedics study programme free of charge or tuition fees. The workload equals 90 ECTS credits. The teaching and learning methods encompass self-directed learning (e.g. power point, video, illustration, laboratory work) as well as directed (face-to-face) learning activities. Self-learning is integrated in a relation of 2:6 hours each day. Based on the programme description, the paramedics study programme is taught 50% in English and 50% in Arabic, which is dependent on the participants.

Since AHS did not cover times of self-studies, preparation times and testing in the workload calculation, the workload just amounts to 90 ECTS credits. The academy has to revise the workload calculation according to the ECTS user's guide; like that the overall workload of four semesters is equivalent to 120 ECTS credits.

The study programme considers the specific needs of the society and individual people in Idlib, by focusing on rapid interventions upon military attacks as well as basic medical support for the civil population. The graduates in paramedics are of high importance for the Idlib population due to high numbers of injured and disabled people resulting from war impact on Idlib.

Objectives

The general aim of the paramedics study programme at the AHS is to generate professionals in rescuing people and provide medical support where needed, mainly in acute settings and often with mass casualties. The learning outcomes are described for each module. It is a bit unclear how self-directed learning and face-to-face learning fit together and how credits for each module are attributed to both. That makes it hard to assess the feasibility of the methods and contents. At the same time, the workload for some subjects seems to be very ambitious and challenging.

There is a strong focus on teaching practical aspects of paramedic interventions. This is a reasonable approach and should be kept. Later, in peace times, the whole programme might be revised according to international guidelines for the education of paramedics. However, so far the basic content of the Idlib study programme meets all international criteria.

The qualification of lecturers was stated as research-based. However, due to the current situation, this might be difficult to be fulfilled. In addition, it was difficult to assess how the students are trained in scientific methodological competencies. At the same time, it was obvious that paramedic students wish to have the opportunity to get further qualifications in postgraduate study programmes, which should be developed in a long-term perspective after war.

Concept

The study programme offers a substantial and solid qualification in paramedics, by learning a wide range of intervention procedures and the necessary background knowledge for the application. In this programme, the first semester is devoted to basic education in the modules "Anatomy of the Human Body I", "Physiology of the Human Body I", "Civil Defence", "Introduction to Emergency Medical Services", "Computer Studies", "Medical Terms" and "Introduction to Medical English". The second semester covers the modules "Anatomy of the Human Body II", "Clinical Assessment", "Biochemistry", "Physiology of the Human Body II", "Biology", "Fundamentals of Emergency Medicine" and "Medical Language I".

The second year provides skills in advanced parts of paramedics. The third semesters comprises the modules "Physiology of Diseases", "General Pharmacology", "Emergency Medical Care I", "Emergency Trauma Cases I", "Fundamentals in Micro Surgery" and "Medical Language II". The last semesters covers "Medication of Emergency Medicines", "Mental Health in Emergencies", "Radiology", "Ethics and Laws of Medical Practice", "Emergency Medical Care II" and "Emergency Trauma Cases II".

Evaluating the module handbook, it seems clear that a special focus is on mediating practical competencies for the daily work in Idlib. Due to the current situation there is no mobility window and no scope of elective modules; however, via SEMA, planning and projecting both might be an objective for the future German-Syrian collaborative work.

The taught skills enable students to work as professionals in a demanding environment, and there are currently no recommendations to change focus or contents of the study programme. Just the modularisation could be further developed in the sense that a more independent offer and use of particular modules/courses could be combined according students' and population's needs. For the future, it is recommended to include more research-based aspects using international networking and bilateral collaborative research projects.

Conclusion

The standard is partially fulfilled, because the programme structure does not refer to the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area with regard to modularisation and workload. In the study programme "paramedics", all other formal requirements are met. The content complies with international standards for education and training for paramedics. Moreover, the programme also reflects the particular situation in Idlib and subsequently the practical approach.

3. ESG Part 1, Standard 1.3: Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment

Standard: Institutions should ensure that the programmes are delivered in a way that encourages students to take an active role in creating the learning process, and that the assessment of students reflects this approach

Findings and Evaluation

Student-centred learning and teaching

The workload of all three study programmes includes both faculty-related and self-studying components. Usually, one regular day during the semester consists of six hours of instruction and two hours of self-study. Furthermore, the lessons can be divided into practical and theoretical parts, whereby the needs of the students are addressed in both forms. Special consideration is given to the partially traumatic experiences of students due to the current situation in Syria. Teachers are sensitised in training for these special circumstances and take care of critical issues in the classroom. AHS offers students a safe learning environment and promotes independent work.

The content of teaching is taught through various methods and in various settings that are adapted to the content of courses. All teaching materials are available to the students online. Practical lesson content is used and practiced in clinical internships, for example in hospitals. Students are taught and encouraged to use self-learning strategies without a teacher and a positive and realistic attitude towards learning should be developed. In addition, students will be provided with new learning technologies, videos and links from the teachers to deepen the content of the lessons, and the opportunity to interact with other students. The teachers support both the teacher-bound and the independent learning.

The review team got the impression that AHS attaches great importance to a positive relationship between students and teachers based on understanding and respect. This factors are the base for creating an optimal learning situation. With a future perspective, the review team encourages AHS strengthening freedom of mind and democratic attitudes of students. These goals might be achieved with a higher degree of students' engagement in democratic process at AHS and raising awareness of civil society and community-based education.

Assessments

All kinds of assessment at AHS are clearly regulated and structured. A variety of different assessment methods are offered, such as quizzes, seminars, meetings, stage performance and practical tests. Failed exams must be repeated. If all examinations have been passed during the course of the studies, students can take the colloquium exam, which consists of a practical and a theoretical part and is necessary to obtain the Bachelor degree.

AHS tries to make study programmes suitable with regard to student workload and the study plan design even with a condensed curriculum. The study progress is well-developed and foresees feedback mechanisms.

Conclusion

AHS offers students the best possible learning and development environment, adapted to the current situation in Syria. The students are involved in the design of learning processes and consideration is given to the individual situation of the students. As part of a student union, they also have the opportunity to contribute to the development of AHS. The teaching and examination methods are adapted to the different programmes and include both practical and theoretical parts. **The standard is fulfilled.**

4. ESG Part 1, Standard 1.4: Student admission, progression, recognition and accreditation

Standard: Institutions should consistently apply pre-defined and published regulations covering all phases of the student “life cycle”, e.g. student admission, progression, recognition and accreditation.

Findings and Evaluation

It is possible to start studying at the beginning of an academic year. The admission of students follows a clearly structured process. In addition to the written application with pre-defined criteria, the admission procedure includes interviews and tests that query the theoretical and practical knowledge of the applicants. Due to the special situation in the country, the interview can also be conducted online. An admission committee is responsible for the viewing and assessment of the applications. The acceptance rate is around 60% and the number of students in all three programmes will be 129 together in 2019.

A large proportion of the student body consists of refugees from different parts of Syria. The information on the group of admitted candidates is published online. The study programmes are modularised. Various examinations take place over the course of study, the completion of the study ends with a colloquium exam with a theoretical and a practical portion. After successful examination, the academic bachelor degree is awarded.

Most of the regulations of admission, progression, and study programs are compatible with the suitable requirements for the European standards, especially for the equity issues and focusing on the experiences of the attendees.

The gap in this field is the need for more availability of accommodations and services because of financial deficits. Another gap is the ambiguity of future Syrian situation that leads to difficulty in fair recognition of higher education qualifications, periods of study and prior learning, including the recognition of non-formal and informal learning, for ensuring the students' progress in their studies, while promoting mobility.

Conclusion

AHS shows a clear application and study structure. The application process is adapted to the circumstances in the country and takes these into account. The high quality standard of the students is respected to ensure the high quality of the study programmes. **The standard is fulfilled.**

5. ESG Part 1, Standard 1.5: Teaching staff

Standard: Institutions should assure themselves of the competence of their teachers. They should apply fair and transparent processes for the recruitment and development of the staff

Findings and Evaluation

The AHS describes difficulties in attracting qualified staff due to the situation of a long-lasting war. The current staff members are described in the documents delivered to ACQUIN by the AHS (CVs) and on the AHS website. Concerning the scientific backgrounds, the CVs provide only limited information. However, the current situation in Idlib provides various input for practical application and intensive correlation of theoretical contents and the daily demand to apply them accordingly.

The CVs of lecturers, e.g. in the paramedics study programme, show a broad practical and theoretical background enabling them to provide well-applied education and training skills and contents. Considering the CVs for the physical therapy programme, two lecturers are qualified physiotherapists (one holding a diploma and one holding a bachelor degree). Further, on the website a larger number of physical therapy lecturers are named.

For the review team, the assessment of documents and the online interview with AHS were the only sources of information to get an impression of the competences of teaching staff at AHS; thus, a complete evaluation and assessment are not possible. Based on the given information it is hardly possible to evaluate reliably, whether the resources are sufficient for carrying out the degree programmes.

From the perspective of the review team it is expected, that some contents can be taught by lecturers, who are for instance not fully qualified as a physiotherapist; and looking at the modules, which prepare students for physiotherapy professional activities, the number of physiotherapy lecturers seems to be too small.

With regard to the general qualification of teaching staff at AHS there is only a very limited number of people holding a PhD, what should be realistically considered by HS when it comes to research activities in the long run. Also plans for continuous (theoretical and scientific) education of the lecturers (train-the-trainer concepts) are missing and should be taken into consideration.

Most of the important regulations for staff is compatible with moderate to high level of quality, except for their salaries that need more balanced with their efforts, and the lack of English language skills in conversations rather than reading and writing.

Conclusion

The standard is partially fulfilled, because AHS explained in a transparent manner that the current situation in Syria does not allow to improve the situation within a short term. AHS should reflect on that situation of staff training in relation to the aims of the study programmes (e.g. the importance of research and English teaching).

6. ESG Part 1, Standard 1.6: Learning resources and student support

Standard: Institutions should have appropriate funding for learning and teaching activities and ensure that adequate and readily accessible learning resources and student support are provided.

Findings and Evaluation

Learning resources

According to the standard, HEIs should have appropriate funding for learning and teaching activities and ensure that adequate and readily accessible learning resources and student support are provided. At least sufficient funding and adequate resources currently cannot be expected in the same way like at HEIs in the European Higher Education Area. AHS was funded by different partners from abroad, to a significant extend by institutions from Qatar; however, funding from Qatar and Saudi-Arabia became complicated due to political issues. Other developmental donors, or non-governmental institutions, such as the German GIZ, the International Red Crescent and others are funding the AHS now for intermittent periods. Part of financial resources, equipment and teaching resources are provided by UNICEF, WHO and similar organisations. Nowadays, SEMA proposed to receive private fund from Arabic donors especially in Kuwait, and the process is ongoing and has great chance to be finalised in few months.

AHS has cooperation agreements with foreign universities, because it has only limited access to libraries and other learning resources, and these agreements allow AHS to use e-learning resources from partner institutions, e.g. from Turkey, South Africa or Armenia. Further, teachers at AHS are receiving didactical trainings, which are mainly conducted as online-trainings from cooperation universities in other countries.

In relation to the sufficiency of rooms and equipment, AHS moved their site for many times because of direct bombing and severe destruction of the old building and the last place needs more preparation and accommodations for the high quality of beneficiary satisfaction and adequacy for optimal training. The same challenge is faced for renewing medical equipment and simulators, but according to the international standards, AHS has highly developed assisting equipment for advanced education especially basic and advanced life support. Many short courses are approached for partial-free students, and other training courses are aimed to target health staff from surgical hospitals and ambulatory systems working in the field of high risky situations.

Gaps in all resources are especially frequent in financial support of the academy, and great attempts were done from external parties to fulfil all the needs continuously for sustainability of the programmes. However, for CME (continuing medical education) guidelines, more efforts are needed to fulfil all the needs of sustainability and high-quality programmes that are consistent

with international standards, especially translating textbooks and publications in steadily manner and updating information in the highly developing health services in emergency and conflict situations.

The recruitment of teaching staff was a problem during the last years, since safety problems were pushing teachers away from Syria. Even if AHS tries to attract professionals from the region and from abroad – also Syrian expats – the opportunities to get enough qualified staff are limited in the current situation.

Student support

In accordance with the regulations of AHS, student support includes consultations for the admission, during the study period and post-course support from teachers and other staff members. While the usual student support of a HEI is in place at AHS, the review team learnt that additional issues are even more crucial for the academy. It has to be highlighted that AHS is not just an educational institution, but also a supporter and kind of caregiver for students. Some of the students at AHS lost their families during the war. Especially for them, the studies at AHS contribute to the normalisation of their lives and provide education, guidance, stability and security. Therefore, student support in the region of Idlib must be interpreted in a very specific way and the efforts of AHS are more than laudable.

Conclusion

This criterion is moderately fulfilled, because of all the positives and the less important mentioned gaps in all needed resources. Financing of AHS and learning resources cannot be on a sustainable level due to the political context; therefore, AHS must provide a risk-based strategy. AHS is **partially compliant** with the standard.

7. ESG Part 1, Standard 1.7: Information management

Standard: Institutions should ensure that they collect, analyse and use relevant information for the effective management of their programmes and other activities.

Findings and Evaluation

The review team had the opportunity to discuss with representatives of the academy the efforts being made to information management. AHS evaluates all collected data and information according to clear evaluation rules. This information and data are collected from observation of student's sessions, portfolio for assessment and reports for presentation assessment. In order to receive meaningful feedback, lessons and activities from different perspectives and from different groups are assessed as soon as possible after the courses. In general, the results of the evaluations are made available to teachers, students and experts and serve to continuously develop and improve the study programmes. AHS schools are required to produce an annual report of all activities presented in Academy Meetings.

According to the available information from AHS, most of the regulations are applied and used in a good manner to achieve their goals. Some exceptions include less incorporation in feedback programme mechanisms (especially of students' evaluation feedback) due to latency in response because of gap in resources, and insufficient self-satisfaction as a result of condensed programmes.

Conclusion

AHS describes a structured evaluation process designed to continuously improve the quality of study programmes and other activities. **The standard is fulfilled.**

8. ESG Part 1, Standard 1.8: Public information

Standard: Institutions should publish information about their activities, including programmes, which is clear, accurate, objective, up-to date and readily accessible.

Findings and Evaluation

AHS has an own website, Facebook, and other social media tools for continuous communication with host communities and to publish all the achievements and challenges, in addition to other service-related announcements.

Further, the academy seek to provide an infrastructure for medical education and training in the region of Idlib and beyond, and the students are affiliated to an alumni network, which focuses on concerns of student problems and protection against discrimination of any kind.

In general, the academy strives for providing education and having a positive impact on the local society. AHS conducts regularly surveys among students and asks for their feedback. One of the success stories is that AHS students requested some changes in the programmes, which were then implemented by AHS. In this particular case, students requested the issue of chemical weapons during the studies of paramedics; the topic was integrated into the curriculum and has great impact on alleviating disastrous situation when rural Idlib was targeted by chemical weapons in 2017.

Attempts were conducted from AHS side to have increased cooperation with many academic institutions in USA and Western Europe for building capacities of all staff in conducting academic research and becoming more compatible with CME guidelines.

Gaps in community-based communications include some deficiency in resources, and logistic and social challenges related to highly changing and sophisticated community. Another important aspect is English publications that are more sophisticated as a result of difficulties in translation that needs extra time and efforts.

In Syria, a major problem since long time before the conflict is so far evident about scientific research publications that were so rare and are confined only on some case reports and little cohort studies, with very rare evidence-based controlled studies or trials.

Conclusion

The standard is greatly fulfilled because of all mentioned positives and acceptable gaps as a result of big deficiency in availability of supportive infrastructure and requirements of IT technology needed for social media and academic publishing.

9. ESG Part 1, Standard 1.9: On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes

Standard: Institutions should monitor and periodically review their programmes to ensure that they achieve the objectives set for them and respond to the needs of students and society. These reviews should lead to continuous improvement of the programme. Any action planned or taken as a result should be communicated to all those concerned.

Findings and Evaluation

Ongoing monitoring, regular evaluation and revision of the study programmes allows the staff of AHS to adjust programmes in a timely manner, taking into account the achievements of modern science, the trends of change in the labour market and ensure the training of professionals, which are currently needed in Syria.

Great achievement is done in this field as there are surveys of students and graduates which are periodically carried out, and the student workload is checked in surveys. All changes in needs of society, workload, programme effectiveness, and student expectations and satisfaction are in place.

Conclusion

The special situation in Syria makes AHS to respond timely to needs of the society. At the same time, the academy shows a clear orientation towards international standards and developments in the assessed disciplines. **The standard is fulfilled.**

10. ESG Part 1, Standard 1.10: Cyclical external quality assurance

Standard: Institutions should undergo external quality assurance in line with the ESG on a cyclical basis

Findings and Evaluation

AHS conducts external quality assurance procedures in accordance with the internal quality assurance regulations. In fixed terms, assessments are conducted and certifications or evaluations are done by institutions such as U-Multirank. Since AHS is not obliged to go through external accreditation procedures, the current certification procedure by ACQUIN is done voluntarily. Both kinds of external evaluation are planned as ongoing routines.

Conclusion

The standard is substantially fulfilled and acceptable, but needs more standardisation in the near future.

III Recommendations to the accreditation commission of ACQUIN

1. Assessment of the compliance with the "Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area" (ESG, 2015)

The degree courses "Nursing" (B.A.), "Physical Therapy" (B.A.) and "Paramedics" (B.A.) were assessed on the basis of the "Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area" (ESG).

The group of evaluators arrives to the following conclusion concerning the compliance with the ESG:

Overview of judgments for all programmes	
ESG 1.1 Policy for quality assurance	Substantially compliant
ESG 2.2 Design and approval of programmes	Partially compliant
ESG 1.3 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment	Fully compliant
ESG 1.4 Student admission, progression, recognition and accreditation	Fully compliant
ESG 1.5 Teaching staff	Partially compliant
ESG 1.6 Learning resources and student support	Partially compliant
ESG 1.7 Information management	Fully compliant
ESG 1.8 Public information	Fully compliant
ESG 1.9 On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes	Fully compliant
ESG 1.10 Cyclical external quality assurance	Substantially compliant

2. Certification recommendation

In order to improve the compliance with the ESG, the expert group recommends the following **requirements and recommendations:**

General requirements for all programmes

1. The programmes have to be formally designed as shorty cycle programmes and portrayed as this kind of degree. (ESG 1.2)
2. The use of ECTS credits has to be revised, since self-study times are not yet part of workload calculations in modules and programme descriptions. (ESG 1.2)

3. Financing of AHS and learning resources cannot be on a sustainable level due to the political context; therefore, AHS must provide a risk-based strategy. (ESG 1.6)

General recommendations for all programmes

1. AHS should not try to focus much on research at the moment, but on applied trainings (level 5 EQF). (ESG 1.1)
2. Postgraduate study programmes should be developed in a long-term perspective. (ESG 1.1)
3. AHS should reflect on that situation of staff training in relation to the aims of the study programmes (e.g. the importance of research and English teaching). Teaching staff should be able to teach in English in the long run, but not immediately. (ESG 1.5)

Additional recommendations for the degree programme "Physical Therapy"

1. The objectives of the programme should be referred to the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) to ensure connectivity to the global physiotherapy community. (ESG 1.2)
2. Competences in pain management and pain science should be stronger emphasized. (ESG 1.2)
3. Reflective skills enabling students to work as autonomous professionals should be integrated in the study programme to a larger extent. (ESG 1.2)

Additional recommendation for the degree programme "Paramedics"

1. The objectives of the programme should be referred to the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) to ensure connectivity to the global physiotherapy community. (ESG 1.2)

IV Decision of the accreditation commission of ACQUIN

Based on the evaluation report of the expert group, the statement of the Academy of Health Sciences (AHS), Idlib, Syria and the statement of the Standing Expert Committee, the Accreditation Commission of ACQUIN takes the following decisions during its meeting on 25th June 2019:

General requirements for all programmes

The following requirements are made:

- The programmes have to be formally designed as shorty cycle programmes and portrayed as this kind of degree. (ESG 1.2)
- The use of ECTS credits has to be revised, since self-study times are not yet part of workload calculations in modules and programme descriptions. (ESG 1.2)
- Financing of AHS and learning resources cannot be on a sustainable level due to the political context; therefore, AHS must provide a risk-based strategy. (ESG 1.6)

General Recommendations for all programmes

The following recommendations are given for the further development of the programmes:

- AHS should not try to focus much on research at the moment, but on applied trainings (level 5 EQF). (ESG 1.1)
- Postgraduate study programmes should be developed in a long-term perspective. (ESG 1.1)
- AHS should reflect on that situation of staff training in relation to the aims of the study programmes (e.g. the importance of research and English teaching). Teaching staff should be able to teach in English in the long run, but not immediately. (ESG 1.5)

Nursing (B.A.)

The study programme „Nursing“ (B.A.) is certified without any further requirements.

The certification is valid until 30th September 2020. The Higher Education Institution has to submit documents that proof the fulfilment of the requirements until 22nd July 2020. If the Accreditation Commission comes to the conclusion that the requirements are fulfilled, the certification will be extended until 30th September 2024. If the Higher Education Institution fails to prove the fulfilment of the requirement in due time the certification will not be extended.

The suspension of the certification procedure requires the statement of the Higher Education Institution and is possible for up to 18 months, if it can be expected that the

Higher Education Institution will remedy the defects within this period. This statement needs to be submitted until 22nd August 2019.

Physical Therapy (B.A.)

The study programme „Physical Therapy “ (B.A.) is certified without any further requirements. The certification is valid until 30th September 2020.

The Higher Education Institution has to submit documents that proof the fulfilment of the requirements until 22nd July 2020. If the Accreditation Commission comes to the conclusion that the requirements are fulfilled, the certification will be extended until 30th September 2024. If the Higher Education Institution fails to prove the fulfilment of the requirement in due time the certification will not be extended.

The suspension of the certification procedure requires the statement of the Higher Education Institution and is possible for up to 18 months, if it can be expected that the Higher Education Institution will remedy the defects within this period. This statement needs to be submitted until 22nd August 2019.

The following recommendations are given for the further development of the study programme:

- The objectives of the programme should be referred to the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) to ensure connectivity to the global physiotherapy community. (ESG 1.2)
- Competences in pain management and pain science should be stronger emphasized. (ESG 1.2)
- Reflective skills enabling students to work as autonomous professionals should be integrated in the study programme to a larger extent. (ESG 1.2)

Paramedics (B.A.)

The study programme „Paramedics“ (B.A.) is certified without any further requirements. The certification is valid until 30th September 2020. The Higher Education Institution has to submit documents that proof the fulfilment of the requirements until 22nd July 2020. If the Accreditation Commission comes to the conclusion that the requirements are fulfilled, the certification will be extended until 30th September 2024. If the Higher Education Institution fails to prove the fulfilment of the requirement in due time the certification will not be extended.

The suspension of the certification procedure requires the statement of the Higher Education Institution and is possible for up to 18 months, if it can be expected that the

Higher Education Institution will remedy the defects within this period. This statement needs to be submitted until 22nd August 2019.

The following recommendation is given for the further development of the study programme:

- The objectives of the programme should be referred to the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) to ensure connectivity to the global physiotherapy community. (ESG 1.2)

The Higher Education Institution has submitted the documents that prove the fulfilment of the conditions in due time. These documents have been forwarded to the Standing Expert Committee in the field of medicine and health sciences with request for examination. The Standing Expert Committee comes to the conclusion that the conditions are fulfilled.

Based on the statement of the Standing Expert Committee, the Accreditation Commission of ACQUIN takes the following decisions during its meeting on 24th March 2020:

Nursing (B.A.)

The conditions of the study programme „Nursing“ (B.A.) are fulfilled. The certification period is extended until 30 September 2024.

Physical Therapy (B.A.)

The conditions of the study programme „Physical Therapy“ (B.A.) are fulfilled. The certification period is extended until 30 September 2024.

Paramedics (B.A.)

The conditions of the study programme „Paramedics“ (B.A.) are fulfilled. The certification period is extended until 30 September 2024.