

Evaluation Report and Accreditation Recommendation

Institutional Accreditation at the

University of Balamand

Lebanon

I Procedure

Date of contract: June 12th, 2013

Receipt of self-evaluation report: December 19th, 2014

Date of the on-site-visit: April 28th - 30th, 2015

Standing Expert Committee and lead management: "System Accreditation" Standing Expert Committee under the lead management of Professor Dr. Beate Finis Siegler

Attendance by ACQUIN office: Marion Moser

Accreditation scheduled: September 29th, 2015

Members of the peer group:

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- **Professor Dr. Johann Schneider**, Professor of Sociology, formerly University of Applied Sciences Frankfurt, formerly rector of University of Applied Sciences Frankfurt
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The evaluation report of the peer group is based on the self-evaluation report of the university and extensive discussions with the head of the study programs, staff representatives and students.

Evaluation criteria have been the "Rules for the Institutional Accreditation" of ACQUIN which are based on the rules of the German Scientific Council and the European Standards and Guidelines.

The applicant will initially receive the report in parts I-III to comment on it. Part IV entitled "Recommendations for the Accreditation Commission" will be received by the relevant and responsible Standing Expert Committee and Accreditation Commission only.

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II Introduction

1 The Higher Education System in Lebanon

Lebanon currently has 48 higher education institutions: one public university (University of Lebanon), 32 private universities, eight university colleges, three university institutes of technology and four religious higher education institutions. The only public university, the University of Lebanon, is governed by its own law, whereas private higher education institutions are regulated by a separate law which was introduced in 1961. In 2002, a Directorate General for Higher Education was established to regulate the private higher education sector and supervise and coordinate all actions related to it. All private higher education institutions have to be licensed by the Council for Higher Education. Higher education in Lebanon is governed by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE). The freedom and independence of Lebanese higher education institutions are protected under the constitution.

Universities in Lebanon are obliged to start with at least three faculties, one of which should be for human sciences and another should be for sciences. Universities can award all degrees, from Bachelor to PhD degrees. A university institute of technology or a university college starts at least with one faculty. Most of these higher education institutions offer Bachelor programs.

University of Lebanon is the only university funded by the government and offers free-tuition education. Private universities do not obtain any public subsidy for education and research and must therefore cover their expenses through tuition fees.

The first higher education degree is a Bachelor degree obtained after three years. For a Master's, degree two additional years are required. In addition, there is a teaching diploma, which is a four-year program. PhD programs last three years. Medicine programs have different durations of study: students need seven years to get a medicine degree, five years to get a degree in pharmacy or dentistry and four years to get a degree in physiotherapy.

There are about 192,000 students enrolled at Lebanese universities, around 38% at University of Lebanon and 62% at private higher education institutions.

2 Short Profile of the University

The University of Balamand (UOB) is a relatively young university. Established in 1988, it was the first university in the world founded by an Orthodox Church. The UOB is a non-profit and independent higher education institution which was established in the northern part of Lebanon in order to contribute to the socio-economic development of this particular region. The university consists of the following faculties: Académie Libanaise des Beaux Arts (ALBA), Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Faculty of Business and Management, Faculty of Sciences, Faculty of Engineering, Faculty of Health Sciences, Faculty of Medicine and Medical Sciences, Faculty of Postgraduate

Medical Education, Faculty of Library and Information Studies, and the Issam M. Fares Faculty of Technology. In addition, there is the Saint John of Damascus Institute of Theology and seven research and special studies centers. The biggest faculties are the Faculty of Engineering (1,206 students) and the ALBA Sin El Fil (1,021 students).

The faculties are spread over five campuses. The main campus is in Al-Kurah in the north of Lebanon. Other campuses are in Achrafieh, Sin el Fil (Beirut), Beino (Akkar) and in the Souk el Garb region, about 20 minutes away from Beirut.

During the 2014/2015 academic year at UOB, a total of 5,600 students were trained in 158 officially recognized degrees: 43 diploma degrees, 57 Bachelor's programs and 56 Master's programs, one Medical Doctor and one PhD program. Graduates from UOB also have the possibility to achieve a doctorate in other scientific disciplines through joint PhD programs. The university offers a wide portfolio of study programs ranging from architecture, engineering, medical sciences, humanities, fine arts and natural sciences to computer science. The tuition is mainly in French and English with one study program offered in Arabic. A peculiarity of the ALBA faculty is that students can choose between English or French as their language of tuition.

Enrolled students have to pay fees for all programs. In Bachelor programs, fees range from 229 US dollars per credit hour up to 405 US dollars (USD) per credit hour, depending on the chosen study program. Fees in Master's programs range from 431 to 607 USD per credit hour. The tuition fees in medicine amount to 92,250 USD in total.

According to the UOB's mission statement, the university is committed to tolerance, compassion and openness and to understanding between Christians and Muslims. The university aims to serve society without discrimination and it is committed to high quality in education and research as well as service to the wider community. UOB admits students not only from Lebanon but also from the broader region.

III Institutional Evaluation

1 Institutional Profile and Strategy, Mission and Vision

UOB's mission, vision and the basics of its future planning and development are clearly formulated in the following three documents:

- The "Mission Statement" (updated March 2013 and available on the UOB homepage)
- The "Principles and Goals" (approved by the University Council in 1998)
- "Academic Freedoms at the University of Balamand" based on "The Amman Declaration" and approved by the University Council in 2005

Most of the faculties have developed their own mission statements in line with the above-mentioned documents. A summary of all these documents by the President can also be found as a preamble to the Strategic Academic Plan 2010-2020.

These documents, which overlap to some extent, are interrelated and constitute the basis for the future development of UOB in teaching, learning and research.

As an independent private institution of higher education the UOB "is dedicated to graduating professionals who are well-rounded, critical thinkers, life-long learners, and active citizens in their respective societies [...]. Through quality education, rigorous research, concern for the public good, and engagement with the community, the University seeks to contribute to nations building, ethical standards, intercultural dialog, environmental responsibility, and human development." (Mission Statement). The UOB's Basic Bylaws also stress the university's basic objective of providing state-of-the-art education of a high academic standard with the highest ethical values.

Also in fulfilment of its mission, the university builds relationships with neighboring countries and all over the world, in particular through scientific connections with centers of excellence in other countries.

Considering the history and tradition of the Middle East, the tradition of the Orthodox Church and the multiplicity of faiths in the region, UOB is dedicated to "limit the influence of dogmatism and fundamentalism in intellectual, social, political, religious and cultural fields" (ibid.). Special attention is given to the aim of bringing Christians and Muslims together. For that purpose, UOB has set up the Center for Christian-Muslim Studies (CCMS) and the Institute of History, Archeology and Near Eastern Studies (IOHANES). In a broader sense, the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences also contributes to that part of the mission with its Master's program in Christian-Muslim Studies and its Civilization Sequence Program, with its modules that are compulsory for almost all study programs at UOB. Through the latter program, UOB follows in general the liberal arts philosophy in teaching with an interdisciplinary approach for a well-rounded education, which is in

accordance with UOB's mission and its "Principles and Goals". The peer group got the impression that the modules of the Civilization Sequence Program did not seem very popular with the students and are mostly only routinely undertaken.

Aspects of environmental responsibility, which is also a part of the mission of UOB, are covered by the Center for Engineering and Environmental Studies (CEES) and the Institute of Environment which, for example, has launched programs on waste management, environmental communication and renewable energy.

In line with its mission and to serve the community and society, UOB offers an extra-curricular Service Experience Education program (SEED). Special projects with community partners and NGO initiatives for a supportive purpose give students the possibility to combine theoretical knowledge with practical work in the community sector. This promotes soft skills as well as engagement within society. These projects are mainly financed by the university and the number is limited, therefore only a few students can be involved. The Office of Student Affairs (OAS) also organizes projects focused on civic engagement and community involvement activities, aiming to realize the community orientation aspect of UOB's profile. The Geographical Information Systems Center (GISC) serves in addition as an active resource for the community by offering projects for different clients.

Despite UOB being founded by the Orthodox Church, students are not asked for their religious affiliation, and UOB accepts students and staff without discrimination on the basis of religion, gender or physical handicaps.

The university's mission and vision are reflected in its "Strategic Academic Plan 2010 – 2020", which considers UOB's analysis of the social, economic and political situation of Lebanon and the region. It defines the following five trends: values, science, service, quality and administration. Alongside these trends, ten strategic objectives have been formulated (academic development, academic modernization, academic research, academic qualitative, relation external, relational community oriented, administrative, logistic, constructional, financial) which are assigned to three axes (academic, administrative and constructional). According to the three axes and the strategic objectives, different projects have been designed and prioritized. For each project a timescale, responsibilities for planning and execution, decision and/or approval and the necessary prerequisites have been defined. To monitor its success and the achievement of its objectives, in particular in the areas of teaching, learning and research, UOB is currently developing a comprehensive quality assurance system.

Assessment and Recommendation

Already from its starting phase, UOB has developed a clear institutional profile and a corresponding strategy defined by the University Council and approved by the Board of Trustees. The university has a clearly defined mission and vision which is well reflected in its strategic planning as well as in all areas of its activity. During the discussions with the different status groups at UOB, it was evident that the mission of the university is shared by all its members and that they act accordingly. UOB's mission complies with international standards. The relevant documents are publicly available.

The study programs and research priorities fit the needs of Lebanon and the region. The establishment of UOB in North Lebanon supports the development of the northern part of the country and shows that UOB responds to societal and regional needs. This can also be seen in the establishment of a hospital on its grounds.

Curricula are in general promoting citizenship and leadership, however the liberal arts aspect in the study courses could be strengthened (see also chapter 3 Teaching and Learning). Graduates should be open-minded and should have a sound knowledge of their chosen subject combined with the ability of critical thinking, and taking responsibility. New study programs are developed to meet the needs of the labor market. Research directions are strongly of interest to the country and Lebanese society and should contribute to the socio-economic development of the region. UOB encourages applied and theoretical research. UOB is definitely able to meet international scientific standards of higher education. The "Strategic Academic Plan", which was developed in a top-down and bottom-up approach, is well elaborated and realistic. UOB's strategy is adequate to achieve its defined objectives. For the peer group, it was, however, not clear how the achievement of the objectives is monitored by UOB. The university should implement a monitoring system with clearly defined key performance indicators to evaluate whether UOB's objectives are being achieved in all areas.

To meet the international academic standards, international relations are seen as very important. An objective in UOB's "Strategic Academic Plan" is to promote and systemize these relationships. According to the peer group, the mission of UOB is well defined and appropriate and adequately implemented within UOB and in its study programs, research activities and community projects as well as in its "Strategic Academic Plan".

2 Governance, Organization and Administration

The governance structure is clearly regulated in the Basic Bylaw, the Internal Bylaw and bylaws for the faculties and other bodies of the university.

According to these bylaws the governance's structure regarding the decision-making processes is strictly hierarchical. The Board of Trustees (BOT) is the supreme authority of the university. It has the authority to approve the University Bylaws.

The Patriarch of Antioch and all the East of the Greek Orthodox Church is the chairman of the Board and appoints the other members: three archbishops from the Holy Synod and at least twenty members from Lebanon and the Arab East for a five-year period. The secular members should have expertise in education, business and public affairs. Besides the selection by the Patriarch, the BOT decides independently from the Orthodox Church.

The BOT supervises UOB's academic, administrative and financial affairs. It appoints the president as a link between the BOT and UOB and the deans and directors (upon the recommendation of the president). The president as the head of administration and being responsible for the overall management of the university is supported by the vice presidents for educational relations, public relations, health and community relations. He oversees the departments headed by deans and directors for all areas of administration.

The BOT also appoints several special committees like the Executive Committee, the Finance Committee, the Academic Committee, the Committee for Development and Public Relations and the Committee for Planning and Construction.

On the central university level there is also a University Council (UC) consisting – in addition to the president as the chairman – of all vice presidents and deans as the legislative body with an advisory function.

On the decentralized level, deans appoint their vice deans. A faculty board discusses academic and student matters and the policy of the faculty. It consists of associate deans and/or assistant deans (if any), the heads of departments and heads of programs and centers.

The UC and the faculties set up various committees for different areas of activities. The most important committee at both levels is the Curriculum Committee, which is responsible for the design of new programs and further development of already running programs. Other committees consider matters like admission, research, library services or administration. All these committees are appointed by the president or the deans and have a consultative and advisory power.

In addition, UOB's senate acts as an advisory body on academic matters. President, vice presidents, deans and directors are ex-officio members, the other senate members are elected by the faculties and students. The term of senate members is three years, which can be renewed. The senate makes proposals to the UC concerning all matters of the university, and if necessary ad hoc committees will be established to elaborate proposals. The senate also disseminates information about UOB to the public.

UOB's five campuses have their own administrative branch offices and directors, who represent the respective campus at the central level as a link between the central management and the branch.

Students are also involved in decision-making, being members of committees at university level. A formal student council for representation of students' interests and their participation in academic issues does not exist at UOB because of the current political situation in Lebanon. As an alternative, UOB actively involves students in governance on different levels through participation in committees and working groups, for example concerning study curricula (re-) design and other relevant issues. While the students in the meeting expressed general satisfaction with their inclusion in the university and their right of petition, they asked for their own representative body.

According to the discussion with students, their voices are heard when they participate as a significant stakeholder during UOB retreats, which take place annually. Furthermore, they are regularly (twice a year) invited by the president not only to address their needs and plans concerning extracurricular activities (students' clubs etc.) but also to give general feedback and to address students' needs and challenges concerning services, academic quality, curriculum, admission, etc. They expressed their appreciation concerning the openness and engagement of all academia at UOB, particularly on behalf of the leadership, e.g. president, deans, administrative staff/management, academic and students' office, etc. Students' involvement is organized on the basis of academic merit, via appointment by academics (dean, chairman of program, etc.) for the Curriculum Committee, for example.

Whilst the decision-making process, appointments and supervision are strictly hierarchically structured, initiatives and proposals for further development of the university in, for example, teaching and learning, administration, student support and research can be brought forward by university members on all levels. For example, suggestions and proposals are initiated and discussed at faculty level and forwarded to the next level of responsibility for approval. The BOT as the highest and most powerful approval body makes suggestions for the further development of the university. The composition of the BOT guarantees that the needs of society are also integrated into the further development of UOB and its profile.

All relevant tasks are assigned and covered in an appropriate way. According to the organizational chart, there is some overlapping of tasks between the different levels of UOB. Vice presidents and deans have overlapping functions through their membership in different committees and boards, and staff members are involved in several committees on different levels. So far, no conflict of interest has occurred, and in practice this system works well and is fully accepted within UOB. This structure also ensures a good information flow between the central and decentralized level and is seen as an effective way of communication.

Formalities, rights and obligations for staff members are laid down in the “Academic Personnel Regulations” which reflect also the mission of UOB. Recruitment procedures, required qualifications for academic staff and promotion of staff are clearly described. Recruitment of staff is based on the deans’ recommendations and approved by the president and BOT.

Financial matters are comprehensively regulated by the “Financial Regulations”. The deans of the faculties/the directors of a college or institute submit a draft of their budget for the coming financial year to the Chief Financial and Business Officer, who will prepare a consolidated budget which has to be approved first by the UC and the president and afterwards by the BOT. The budget depends first of all on tuition fees (92%) supplemented by donations, gifts, endowments, investment returns and other revenues. The allocation of the funds within the university is based on negotiations between the central (president) and decentralized level (faculties, departments, institutes).

Assessment and Recommendation

Decision-making processes, decision-making competencies and responsibilities are clearly defined at UOB and integrated into binding bylaws. The academic and administrative structure shows a high level of differentiation; within UOB a multitude of committees and boards exist. The peer group evaluates the organization and management structure of UOB as adequate to its tasks and objectives. The management procedures as well as the structure and organization of UOB ensure academic freedom in teaching, learning and research. Although there is no independent academic body for making final decisions besides the BOT, academic staff can participate adequately on all levels. UOB follows a top-down and bottom-up approach; the input of all members of UOB is taken very seriously in the decision-making processes and the further development of the university. In all meetings with the peer group, UOB members expressed strong satisfaction with the organization and governance structure of the university. The combination of top-down and bottom-up processes and the culture of negotiating and coordinating instead of making strict decisions top-down ensures consensus-based developments and therefore an extraordinarily strong commitment of all members of UOB to their university.

Recruitment of academic staff is transparent, regulated and conducted by a performance-based competition using internationally accepted criteria. Equal opportunities are guaranteed and the panel couldn’t see any indication of discrimination.

The aspect of more systematic student involvement might be worthy of consideration to further improve governance structures depending on future progress at UOB. Whenever UOB does further develop the overall architecture of its governance, the peer group suggests considering and strengthening the (currently positive and obviously well-functioning) students’ involvement more systematically but with care and with respect for the actual situation in Lebanon.

UOB has no funding body; financial autonomy is secured and the functions of the BOT and the management of UOB are clearly defined and not mixed up.

Due to the high diversification of functions, committees and bodies, many faculty members have multiple memberships and overlapping functions. Up to now, this system of tight connection and short paths of information, communication and coordination has suited the existing open-minded culture of the university's management. On the other hand, there is a strong impact from certain staff members. Considering the planned university growth, the peer group recommends rethinking overlapping functions in order to establish processes independently from individuals and to secure a clearer distinction between tasks according to the university's structure.

3 Teaching and Learning

One of the main objectives of UOB is to provide teaching and learning of high quality. UOB offers a great variety of study programs which are comprised of professional-oriented disciplines from technical and mathematics-based disciplines to business administration and health sciences as well as (theory-) academic-oriented programs in science and arts. The student numbers vary significantly between the study programs; the highest student intake is seen in the programs of the Faculty of Engineering and ALBA, while others show a quite low student intake. But it is part of the strategy of the university to offer also study programs with low student numbers. This reflects UOB's mission to contribute to the academic demand of the country.

The academic standard of the study programs is adequate. As the university follows a liberal arts philosophy, all students have to take courses promoting citizenship and are encouraged to adopt critical thinking and a sound understanding of science, technology and global issues. In addition, UOB offers a Continuing Education Program to promote the development of the community. Within the study courses, the compulsory liberal arts subjects could be made more attractive for students (according to the peer group, the liberal arts subjects did not have the highest priority for students). This would sharpen the teaching profile. Being a specific and officially declared feature of UOB, SEED programs could also be further promoted among students, and curricula or alternative projects and programs might be developed to meet UOB's objective of increasing employability and integration of students in the region and promotion of engagement in society.

Some of the Bachelor's programs are strongly oriented towards a professional application in local and regional companies.

The study programs follow a student-centered approach, preparatory courses like SAT courses or language courses support students in meeting the entrance requirements. The admission requirements are clearly defined on the website and in the "Admission Guide". For admission to the undergraduate programs, an admission test as well as the Lebanese Baccalaureate or its

equivalent is required. Applicants must also demonstrate an adequate level of English or French proficiency consistent with the demands of the chosen program. For admission to a graduate program, a Bachelor's degree is required.

Students not meeting the requirements of the originally chosen study program will get support from the Office of Student Affairs to find an alternative, more suitable program. As a result, the graduation rate of the programs is very high.

For all study programs, program objectives as well as learning outcomes are defined and mapped to the courses of the study program. Lecturers are responsible for the content of their courses and have to prepare "a course syllabus with a clear focus on learning outcomes and competencies as well as on teaching and learning methods appropriate for the achievement of stated outcome" (c.f. self-assessment report page 64). The students as well as the (part-time) lecturers confirmed that in each course the intended learning outcomes as well as the assessment methods are explained and discussed with the students during the course. After each course, the lecturers have to submit a self-assessment on the course and suggestions for improvements.

UOB uses multiple teaching and learning methods combining theoretical elements with practical elements like seminars, lectures, practicals, internships and labs. Assessment methods and tools are chosen according to the learning outcomes.

Students are very flexible in the organization of their programs. The university uses the American credit hour system, and students can enroll on a full-time or part-time basis.

Students' workload is reasonably calculated, documented and regularly evaluated. Extended periods of study are due not primarily to a deficit of workload calculation but to the need for many of the students to continuously work for a living, particularly to pay tuition fees. Due to the fact that tuition fees are calculated on a course basis, quite a lot of students do not take the full learning load and thereby extend their study program. Often additional study time is invested to achieve English language competence at a suitable level to work academically. Nonetheless, this differs from student to student and from faculty to faculty.

The design of new study programs as well as the further development of existing study programs follows a clear process. Suggestions for new programs can be brought forward by all levels of UOB (academic staff at departmental level/faculty level, BOT). Based on the feedback of the faculties and the UC, the president makes a proposal for a new program to the BOT for approval. The concrete elaboration of a program is done by the faculty's Curriculum Committee, which also makes proposals for revision of existing programs. After assessment by the university-wide Curriculum Committee, the proposal is submitted to the UC and to the BOT for final approval. As a next step, the study program is submitted to the Ministry of Higher Education for official approval.

For all new study programs, a feasibility study has to be carried out to ensure that the needs of the Lebanese labor market and the region as well as the needs of society are reflected. This approach is very successful, as indicated by the 100% graduate employment rate.

UOB offers good study conditions for its students. The campus and its branches are well equipped, the teaching facilities are in good shape, and UOB invests continuously in the development of its facilities.

Assessment and Recommendation

The offered study courses are in accordance with the profile and the mission of the university. The study programs serve the needs of the labor market and the society of Lebanon and the region. If a need for a new program occurs, UOB is in close contact with the community and the labor market, and the portfolio is extended accordingly, even if this results in a study program with only a few enrolled students. The new program is nevertheless added because demand on the labor market for those graduates has been identified. UOB is currently developing new applied programs for the regional demand as well as highly specialized programs focusing on students from the whole Middle East region. The peer group appreciates the decision of UOB to offer and maintain also programs with low student numbers to offer students a broad interdisciplinary education.

All new programs require approval by the Ministry of Higher Education, which might hinder the flexibility of UOB to react quickly to changing demands in the labor market.

In the future, UOB should monitor whether the profile of the university could be sharpened. Expanding the number of study programs poses the risk that the number of study programs with only a few students will increase, which might cause a problem for the implementation of the didactic concept when only a few students are enrolled.

Admission procedures are well defined, admission criteria are clearly described, adequate to the program profiles and made publicly available. Also, the teaching and learning concept of UOB is well implemented in its study programs. The workload of the study programs is reasonable.

The procedures for the development and launching of new study programs and the revision of already running programs are appropriate. There is close contact between academic staff and students, and students' feedback is considered in the revision of study programs. According to the peer group, UOB follows its vision of being innovative in teaching and responsive to student demands.

The academic staff is well qualified, the student-teacher ratio is very good at 10 : 1 and provides good teaching and learning conditions. Students showed strong satisfaction with their study programs and the study environment. They reported that curriculum adjustments are discussed

with them and that solutions are found in a quick and easy way based on mutual agreement. The peer group was impressed by the strong motivation and commitment of staff to UOB and its mission.

With respect to laboratories and technical equipment, UOB meets international standards. The infrastructure and the equipment of the institution are adequate to achieve the defined goals regarding its mission and strategic plan.

4 Student Support and Student Feedback

Students receive strong support at UOB and the student life cycle at UOB is well organized. Prior to enrollment, students can get advice when choosing their study programs. Also, preparatory classes and language classes are offered by UOB to prospective students to provide them with the required knowledge for admission to their chosen study program.

The Office of Student Affairs (OSA) with its divisions Career Services, Counseling, Student Housing, Campus Life and Student Development, International Students Office, Athletics, Highlights Newspaper and Student Work Office is the main service point for students. A comprehensive "Student Handbook" provides valuable information about student rights and responsibilities as well as student services.

Another asset is that UOB offers jobs in parallel with their studies (and usually linked to their studies) to those students who show above-average academic merits, e.g. within the UOB administration. The average working hours of those jobs are reasonably limited. On the basis of both specific socio-economic background and/or academic merits, UOB supports students by reducing or fully compensating tuition fees and/or offering scholarships/financial aid, e.g. for living expenses. The applied criteria and the selection process are transparent and reasonable. For the best students, 100% support is given. An 85% level of support goes to students with above-average performance and/or those who have jobs at UOB.

UOB tries to encourage students to participate regularly in extra-curricular and/or internal governance activities by keeping the timetable free of courses on working days between 12:30 p.m. and 2:00 p.m. Students are involved at faculty level in the Curriculum Committee as well as in the Library and Information Technology Committee. They also have the possibility to participate in the university-wide Curriculum Committees and others committees like the Planning Committee or the Administrative Committee.

Career services (a job fair is regularly offered at the campus), services for students with special needs and online facilities are all well documented and are functioning well according to the findings of the on-site visit.

Students confirmed adequate involvement in issues of (re-)scheduling courses. For example, whenever there is an unexpected serious overlap of courses, academic staff help students to find a suitable solution. Apart from this rather informal system of service/support and consultancy, there is the formal option to address individual and/or collective students' needs via a petition. Petitions are obliged to be followed up by UOB (by the dean). Students' records are regularly monitored to the benefit of the students, who are continuously informed about their overall performance, their progress and their possible risks. A warning letter is addressed to students who would be at risk of failing exams, who are lagging behind or who are at risk of being exmatriculated because of poor performance.

Apart from existing comprehensive services for students at UOB (e.g. library system and services, computer labs, IT infrastructure for course and examination management, student advisory service, evaluation activities, participation in study program and governance committees, facilities and extra-curricular activities, etc.), students significantly showed strong appreciation for the open-door policy at UOB. Lecturers are available for any issues and students' needs.

Currently, course evaluations are carried out online each semester and students are obliged to answer the evaluation questions; only then is it possible for every student to further use the students' online system, e.g. to access information about results of exams etc. Whether this mode of forcing students to fill in evaluation forms is feasible might be discussed among both academic staff and students in the future.

Assessment and Recommendation

According to the peer group, students are provided with a comprehensive and well-managed offering of UOB services. Both, the implemented consultancy and assistance services for students as well as the active quality culture and the support of academic staff with regard to students' needs and interests are highly appreciated by the peer group.

At the moment there seems to be no need for UOB to undertake serious adjustments in terms of periods of study, workload issues, academic staff in students' services, facilities, etc. UOB's concept of total student development – social, intellectual, physical, emotional and moral – is reflected in the curricular and extra-curricular programs. Concerning student development, the existing elements could be promoted more (e.g. courses in liberal arts, SEED program).

Depending on the further development of UOB and possible further adjustment of internal governance and monitoring structures, the peer group encourages UOB to regularly consider – and if necessary improve – existing activities in supporting students systematically (if possible increase students' financial means, further strengthen language competence through English

courses and other means of support to help students manage their workload and finish their studies within a reasonable period of time).

There is no obligation to report or discuss evaluation results with students. This is also because evaluations take place when the semester ends. It should be discussed whether it would be possible to either start evaluations earlier in order to have time to discuss the results with students or find a way to inform students what happened with their feedback, e.g. as an (official) information report (at the beginning of the following semester or via internet). This might increase students' motivation to take evaluations more seriously.

Concerning the current situation in Lebanon and the present stage of development at UOB, the peer group concludes that both the informal and the formal systems of governance and internal quality assurance mechanisms are principally adequate in order to sufficiently identify and respond to current students' needs and interests.

5 Research

When the UOB was founded, its main mission was to build up a strong academic institution for higher education in North Lebanon. Thus, the main focus was on teaching and study programs, and on services. Nevertheless, it has always been part of the strategic plan to closely link the study programs with current research. This is shown in the university's achievements in launching new and innovative study programs, for example programs in Computer Science or in Aviation. It has been recognized that, after consolidation of UOB, a stronger emphasis has to be put on research, and the following main goals in the area of research have been defined:

- Strengthening research activities of individual staff members
- Encouraging interdisciplinary and international research activities
- Improving scientific publishing in peer-reviewed international journals
- Introducing PhD programs
- Introducing an internal system of research funding

The President's Annual Report 2014 set out the strategic decision to foster in particular the development of the research area: "The University is planning to offer the Doctorate degree in several fields. The greatest danger facing the University is to be purely a teaching institution with largely parochial concerns." Doctoral study programs are already offered in Medical Science and in Orthodox Theology. PhD programs are under development in Engineering, Middle Eastern Studies and some other fields. In order to prepare scientific staff members for a greater focus on research, a training course on "Monitoring & Evaluation and Research" is offered and is well received.

UOB recognized that an increase in research activities requires resources for conducting research and greater involvement in publication activities. Since 2002, UOB has been observing the publication rates and publication activities of its members. Based on the indication of weaknesses in publication activities, goals were set to improve research. An important step to reach these goals was the introduction of the “Balamand Internal Research Grants System” (BIRG) in 2006. Since then, individual researchers can apply for research grants up to USD 10,000. There is an annual possibility for submission of research proposals which is open to every scientific staff member. The annual amount of money spent on the BIRG is USD 100,000.

The BIRG is monitored by the Research Council. The Research Council comprises members from each faculty. Members are appointed by the president for one year, with an option to renew membership any number of times. One of the tasks of the Research Council is to develop and monitor quantitative and qualitative criteria for measuring research activities and to advise the president – and thus the University Council – to formulate strategic research goals. The Research Council discusses all BIRG submissions – in the first nine years just over half of the proposals were accepted, slightly under half of the proposals were rejected – and delivers funding proposals to the president. Faculties which do not contribute many (or any) proposals are formally encouraged to increase their respective activity and to submit proposals. The Research Council monitors and evaluates the usage of the grants, both concerning the research goals and the strategic goals of the university. It reports to the president. In the Program Evaluation Report (January 2015), a detailed quantitative and qualitative analysis was presented.

Assessment and Recommendation

The UOB made strategic decisions to improve its research activities and undertook systematic measures to do so. A system was implemented that is broadly accepted within the university. In accordance with the strategic goals, the university as an organization is well prepared to focus more on research. The Research Council inspires scientific staff members from all faculties to develop research ideas, to conduct research, and to publish the results accordingly. There is a financial support system to initiate research activities. The developmental plans concerning research thus are based on strategic decisions, make use of careful administration, and supply a system of regular outcome reports to monitor, evaluate and inspire research activities. Strengths and weaknesses are clearly analyzed and reported. The system is very transparent and helpful. It is well accepted all over the university, with excellent interdisciplinary interaction and open communication.

The analyses show that effort is still needed to build up a strong professional research community. Currently, most research activities deal with applied research; this reflects the deep involvement of the UOB in the local area and in the region, but does not directly serve the goal of adequate

integration in international and world-wide research communities. Compared to universities in different countries, the UOB, like every Lebanese university, is facing the difficulty that there is no national research funding agency. So far, the financial resources used in the BIRG are useful for inspiring new research activities, but do not conform to a broader development of research at UOB. Also, at the moment a large percentage of the research grants is used for consumables rather than for immediate research activities. At UOB, considerable research efforts already exist, but yet are too much based on individual drive rather than on institutional support (strategy). For example, the publication activities are varying a lot between and within faculties. Some researchers make good use of their international cooperation, often resulting from their own educational career, but such activities are individual attempts rather than outcomes of a strategic policy.

In the workload of academic staff, teaching is still very dominant, but there are already some attempts to reduce teaching load by giving freedom to devote some working hours to research. However, those attempts are not yet fully developed. Also, there is still a lack of young scientific staff members who might focus on a research career.

UOB sees the support of doctoral study programs as an eminently important step towards improving the attitude to research within the university.

Also, active participation in international conferences could be increased. The lack of participation might be due to a lack of resources for travelling, but also to a lack of research activities. The BIRG system does provide substantial support to improve internationalization.

The promotion of its research activities at UOB is still at an early stage. UOB has identified areas for improvement, however appropriate strategic and administrative steps have already been taken to foster research activities within UOB. The university is strongly recommended to continue in the planned steps to improve the quality and quantity of research. The development of doctoral study programs should be strongly pursued. Flexible models should be developed to split the professional workload between teaching, research and administration activities. The support of research activities should include, if possible, resources for international cooperation (both incoming and outgoing mobility), conference attendance and interdisciplinary cooperation in research centers to support the individual development.

The UOB is recommended to systematically continue its attempts to increase research activities within the university. This should include:

- Development of doctoral study programs in different faculties, with the strategic aim to cover all faculties;
- Reconsidering the balance of the individual workload, with the possibility of offering different career models, some with a larger percentage devoted to research activities;

- Implementation of funding for international cooperation, conference attendance and interdisciplinary research activity;
- Supporting international publications in peer-reviewed journals;
- Developing an institutional strategy to coordinate and focus the different individual research initiatives and create synergetic effects.

6 Resources

Human Resources

UOB has a total of 1,422 employees, with 1,131 belonging to the faculties and 291 to staff. The teaching staff comprises of 334 full-time staff members and 594 part-time staff members. In addition, in the Faculty of Medicine there are 135 full-time doctors and 68 affiliated doctors. The academic standard of the teaching staff is secured through the appointment procedure.

To fulfil its mission, the recruitment of highly-qualified staff is integrated into the strategic objectives of UOB.

The selection process for new staff is well elaborated. Eligible candidates are invited for an interview with the faculty dean, program directors and full-time faculty members. Besides an appropriate academic qualification and a high level of teaching competence, applicants should also show a commitment to the objectives of UOB, which is further explained in the document "On Exclusive Hiring". Prospectively, research aspects will gain more importance in the recruitment process. Newly appointed faculty members are assigned a mentor when starting their job at UOB.

In the area of teaching and learning, UOB differentiates between the following positions: lecturer, instructor, adjunct professor, assistant professor, associate professor and professor and researcher. The "Academic Personnel Regulations" regulates all issues for academic staff and the "Personnel Regulations for Non-Academic Employees and Workers" is the equivalent for non-academic staff.

The teaching workload for the full-time faculty members is 24 credits per academic year, which means 12 teaching hours (contact hours) per week during the 15 weeks per semester. A reduction of the full teaching workload is granted for administrative duties. Engagement in research is honored by a maximum of three credits per semester. The teaching workload of the part-time staff is limited to six credits per semester. Measures for staff development are in place.

While during the founding phase, nearly all academic staff consisted of scientists with a profound European or American scientific career, UOB now also recruits senior academic staff by means of an internal promotion policy as well as by internationally advertised job offers. Among the junior

faculty, quite a significant number have already been part time-lecturers, and alumni can also be found among them.

Financial Resources, Facilities and Equipment

The budget of UOB amounts to approximately USD 75 million per year, with 92% coming from tuition fees. Additional income results from gifts, services, endowment and financial revenues. For extra investments, the refunds of the endowment are used. Concerning the cost for planned new buildings, UOB depends, like all private universities in Lebanon, on private donations. The university is very successful in recruiting third party funds for new buildings, laboratories and lecture theaters, and also for renovations and other costs.

The allocation of the budget within UOB is done according to student numbers. The faculties as well as the other institutes and organizational departments can apply for additional financial resources if the needs arises, e.g. for projects or additional equipment. About 10% of the budget is spent on financial aid for students.

In recent years, UOB has experienced solid growth in student numbers. UOB expects to see student enrollment increase in the future by about four to five percent per year through higher numbers of students in the study programs and to a greater extent by offering new study courses. The demands for additional building facilities for teaching and learning as well as research are also considered in the "Strategic Academic Plan".

The five campuses of UOB provide a good teaching and learning environment. The laboratories and classrooms, the library and recreational facilities as well as the offices meet international standards and are well-maintained. The same is true for the media equipment. Some students expressed their wish to have 24 hour access to the library (and other facilities), but this is obviously important only for a minority, as comparatively few students live on campus.

Assessment and Recommendation

According to the peer group, UOB has excellent human resources, which are adequate for fulfilling its objectives in teaching, learning and research. The recruitment process for academic staff follows academic standards. The faculties are involved in the selection procedures, while the formal decision is up to the University Council and respectively to the president. The peer group was impressed by the strong commitment of all UOB staff to the mission of UOB and its objectives.

The facilities are appropriate for teaching, learning and research, and the laboratories and the library are well equipped. Concerning the strengthening of research, UOB should consider future research activities in its business plan, e.g. for required extra equipment.

7 Quality Assurance

The quality assurance system is one of the most visible characteristics of the UOB. Within the university, quality assurance and accreditation are outstanding strategic issues. They are defined as processes and systems whose main purpose is continuous improvement based on evidence, achieved by rigorous reviews which are carried out internally and externally.

There are several interconnected sub-organizations that are responsible for the development, maintenance and further improvement of the Quality Assurance system: the AQAT (Academic Quality Assurance Team), the CETL (Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning) and the OTM (Office of Tests and Measurements). They interact closely and contribute to the definition and revision of goals and of indicators of goal achievement. The assessment of study programs is based on a well-developed, clearly documented internal review process based on comprehensive self-study reports. Once shortcomings are identified, an external evaluation/audit is required. The personal representation of the quality assurance and accreditation system is made visible by the office of one dean who acts as accreditation officer. Quality assurance is not confined to this office, but rather is an integral part of all activities, be it teaching, research or administration. It is based on a careful reporting system, including detailed information to the president who takes the responsibility to keep the system viable. The reports make extensive use of well-developed sets of objectives and indicators, which are continuously analyzed in evaluation activities.

One example of the implementation and maintenance of the quality assurance system is the provision of a systematic "Training on Monitoring & Evaluation" offered to the university's staff members. There is considerable interest in participating in this training.

Assessment and Recommendation

All quality assurance activities with UOB are transparent and are impressively well-known to all status groups within the university. The reporting system is fully acknowledged by each status group, and the reliance on data reports is a shared value within all status groups. Obviously, and in contrast to many universities in Europe, the fact that quality assurance has played an important role within UOB since its foundation is paying off. Therefore, problems concerning the acceptance of the quality assurance system do not exist, problems which often occur when a quality assurance system is introduced into a long-standing traditional university organization.

The philosophy of the quality assurance system at the UOB is closely related to the university strategy in general. Quality assurance is not only seen as a tool to improve the study programs, aiming both at professional development of teachers and at students' learning experiences and

outcomes, but also to improve research and administration and to contribute to the fulfilment of the university's image and responsibility within the region and globally. In each of these areas, the university has developed strategic goals and implemented indicators that help to evaluate and assess the goal achievement. Goals and indicators are developed at each level of the university: at the leadership level (president, Board of Trustees, University Council), at faculty level, and at the level of working units, directorates (Human Resources; Finances and Business; Procurement and Campus Services; Construction and Maintenance; Information Systems and Technology; Library), etc. The definition of all quality assurance entities is based on detailed analyses of international standards, as expressed, for example, in the ENQA, AROQA or NEASC standards. The availability of relevant data is systematically used to monitor the development of the university, the faculties, research activities, administration, construction/building affairs, study programs, alumni information, teaching quality, the professional level of staff members, and student satisfaction and outcomes. The results are permanently matched against the strategic goals and are used to modify those goals where necessary. Explicit feedback loops are implemented at each of the levels of quality assurance. As each person responsible for study programs is involved in quality assurance activities, and as there is a credible "open door" policy concerning student contact, there is an atmosphere of a critical yet open and constructive discussion about evaluation results, with a large number of activities to be undertaken if the evaluation shows that some goals have not been achieved. The platforms to make use of evaluation results include forums with student feedback for teachers, mentor-protégé dyads provided for new academic staff members, or development appraisals with the dean.

The system of quality assurance at the UOB is extremely well developed and serves all its purposes in an excellent way. The strong emphasis on a) indicators and metrics, b) transparency, c) involvement of all stakeholders, d) coverage of all parts of the university organization, and e) continuous monitoring and development of goals contributes to this system. The UOB is strongly encouraged to keep alive this system and to continue to invest a corresponding effort in the future as well.

8 Internationalization

In the respect that UOB is by definition and practice a trilingual (English, Arabic and French) university in Lebanon and that UOB declares the following in its mission and other statements:

- to be secular and not geographically restricted concerning recruitment of staff and students,
- to promote Christian and Muslim dialogue and

- to foster intercultural and interreligious discourse,

the UOB can be defined as cosmopolitan, intending to connect and spread knowledge from the Christian, secular and Arab worlds within a regional context. Nonetheless, UOB lays emphasis on being an institution for people in the region rather than largely recruiting students from outside Lebanon. At the same time, UOB transfers knowledge and people to the region and back into the global network via international cooperation (e.g. 85 bilateral agreements with higher education institutions worldwide, cooperation of ALBA with ECLAS (European Council of Landscape Architecture Schools), mobility project HERMES of Erasmus Mundus, etc.), international networks and international events. Also, it has recently become increasingly important for research to go beyond national borders. UOB undertakes research cooperation with North America and Europe to gain contact with international centers of excellence. In terms of quality assurance, UOB participated in the Tempus TLQAA project to incorporate not only a European perspective in higher education quality assurance for itself but also for higher education institutions in Lebanon.

The internationalization objective is incorporated into the “Academic Strategic Plan” and aims to “promote the involvement in the progress of HE around the world and this by monitoring and anticipating the needs of the community and the labor market as well as by boosting the relation with the community [...]”. This is followed up by faculty initiatives (bottom-up), e.g. by offering e-learning CEP programs in Spanish, whose students largely come from Latin America and Spain. Also, the Office of Admission has been successful by recruiting students from the Gulf area, Iraq, Syria and Jordan.

On the study program level, UOB strives to equip students with international standards and capacities “to make them eligible for international certification” (c.f. self-assessment report page 120) and for an international market. For instance, the medical exams are carried out according to the American standards in medical education (MCAT). This ensures that students gain a high international quality standard and that they have a good chance to access employment markets outside Lebanon.

International staff exchange is strongly supported by UOB governance bodies. Although this is currently not an explicit part of an overall strategy and monitoring system and thus depends on initiatives on an individual and/or faculty level, UOB showed evidence of striving for any opportunities in daily practice that are reasonable and fruitful for global exchange and attraction of academic staff from abroad.

Assessment and Recommendation

The peer group acknowledges the existing activities in the area of internationalization. UOB’s great willingness to strengthen its international activities was evident. Students are strongly

interested in going abroad for a few months or a semester and also show a strong interest in having more incoming students in their programs and classes. The peer group encourages UOB to follow this wish more systematically and to look into options with greater effort – depending on the given capacities. Even though there are ERASMUS activities, it seems that they are not sufficiently known among students and are largely not availed of on a wide scale at UOB.

The politically fragile situation in Lebanon and the location of UOB in a regional context is to be considered a continuous and specific challenge to UOB internationalization activities and strategies. This might also be one reason why, for instance, the number of full-time foreign faculty members belonging to human sciences went down from 22 to 16 within the last five years.

Keeping in mind the currently specific socio-political setting in Lebanon, internationalization activities are not easily followed in an overall strategy. However, UOB is encouraged to keep up its existing intention, willingness and engagement to further systematically build up partnerships and networks and increase internationalization in teaching, learning and research, while strengthening the already existing culture of international activities that currently appears to be largely still depending on individual initiatives of UOB staff.

9 Evaluation of the Accreditation Criteria by the Peer Group

1.1 Mission and Vision

The University has a clear mission statement in which the institutional profile, strategy and objectives of the university are defined. The mission is consistent and complies with international standards. Academic bodies have adopted the mission, which is publicly available. The university has adequate resources to fulfil its mission and strategic planning.

The criterion is fulfilled.

The peer group recommends the following recommendation:

- *A system of continuous monitoring of whether the goals of the university are achieved in all respective areas should be implemented.*

1.2 Governance, Organization and Administration

Responsibilities, decision-making processes and decision-making competencies are clearly defined and integrated into statutes. Organization and management structures are adequate to the tasks and objectives of the institution and assure freedom in teaching and learning.

The criterion is fulfilled.

The peer group recommends the following recommendation:

- *The governance structure of the university should be adjusted according to the further development of the University of Balamand, e.g. through a clearer division of tasks, procedures to manage systematically possible conflicts of interests.*

1.3 Teaching and Learning

Objectives and content of study programs are in accordance with the university's mission and strategy. Study programs have an adequate academic standard, are well structured and have an adequate workload. They comply with national legal regulations. The processes of creating and implementing as well as revision of study programs are clearly defined.

The criterion is fulfilled.

1.4 Student Support

The university offers professional support services for students. Support services have adequate staff.

The criterion is fulfilled.

1.5 Research

Research activities fit into the mission of the institution. The structure of the university and the general conditions support research activities. The teaching workload allows room for research. Recruitment policy should correspond to the research activities and research strategy of the institution.

The criterion is fulfilled

The peer group recommends the following recommendation:

- *The University of Balamand should systematically continue its attempts to increase research activities within the university. This should include:*
 - a) *Development of doctoral study programs in different faculties, with the strategic aim to cover all faculties*
 - b) *Reconsidering the balance of the individual workload, with the possibility of offering different career models, some with a larger percentage devoted to research activities*
 - c) *Implementation of funding for international cooperation, conference attendance and interdisciplinary research activity*
 - d) *Supporting international publications in peer-reviewed journals*
 - e) *Developing an institutional strategy to coordinate and focus the different individual initiatives and create synergistic effects.*

1.6 Resources

The institution has adequate human and financial resources, infrastructure and equipment to achieve its objectives. The academic staff recruitment process meets academic standards.

The criterion is fulfilled.

1.7 Quality Assurance

The institution has adequate quality assurance procedures and mechanisms to ensure that the results of quality assurance procedures are for continuous improvement.

The criterion is fulfilled.

1.8 Internationalization

This criterion only applies in those cases where internationalization is part of the institutional strategy.

The higher education institution has an internationalization strategy which is consistent with the strategy of the institution. The activities in the area of internationalization fit into the internationalization strategy.

The criterion is in general fulfilled.

10 Accreditation Recommendation of the Peer Group to the Accreditation Commission of ACQUIN

The peer group recommends the institutional accreditation of the University of Balamand without conditions and **with the following recommendations:**

1. A system of continuous monitoring of whether the goals of the university are achieved in all respective areas should be implemented.
2. The governance structure of the university should be adjusted according to the further development of the University of Balamand, e.g. through a clearer division of tasks, procedures to manage systematically possible conflicts of interests.
3. The University of Balamand should systematically continue its attempts to increase research activities within the university. This should include:
 - a) Development of doctoral study programs in different faculties, with the strategic aim to cover all faculties;
 - b) Reconsidering the balance of the individual workload, with the possibility of offering different career models, some with a larger percentage devoted to research activities;
 - c) Implementation of funding for international cooperation, conference attendance and interdisciplinary research activity;
 - d) Supporting international publications in peer-reviewed journals;
 - e) Developing an institutional strategy to coordinate and focus the different individual initiatives and create synergistic effects.

IV Accreditation Decision of the Accreditation Commission of ACQUIN

Based on the peer report, the statement of the university and the statement of the standing expert committee, the accreditation commission took on September 29th, 2015 the following decision:

The University of Balamand is institutionally accredited without conditions.

The institutional accreditation is valid until September 30th, 2021.

For the further development of the university the following recommendations are given:

1. A system of continuous monitoring of whether the goals of the university are achieved in all respective areas should be implemented.
2. The governance structure of the university should be adjusted according to the further development of the University of Balamand, e.g. through a clearer division of tasks, procedures to manage systematically possible conflicts of interests.
3. The University of Balamand should systematically continue its attempts to increase research activities within the university. This should include:
 - a) Development of doctoral study programs in different faculties, with the strategic aim to cover all faculties;
 - b) Reconsidering the balance of the individual workload, with the possibility of offering different career models, some with a larger percentage devoted to research activities;
 - c) Implementation of funding for international cooperation, conference attendance and interdisciplinary research activity;
 - d) Supporting international publications in peer-reviewed journals;
 - e) Developing an institutional strategy to coordinate and focus the different individual initiatives and create synergistic effects.