

## **Accreditation Report**

Institutional Accreditation of

**University of Balamand**

**Beirut, Lebanon**

### **I Procedure**

**Date of contract:** 8. November 2021

**Date of the submission of self-assessment report:** 27 March 2023

**Date of site visit:** 19 – 20 June 2023

**Attendance by ACQUIN office:** Dr. Jasmine Rudolph, Giorina Maratsi

**Accreditation decision scheduled:** 4 December 2023

#### **Peer review experts:**

- **Prof. Dr. Hans van Ess**, Vice President for Research, Ludwig-Maximilians-University Munich
- **Prof. Dr. Klaus Kreulich**, Vice President for Innovation and Quality of Education, Munich University of Applied Sciences
- **Dr. Dr. h.c. Hans Gruber**, Chair Holder and Full Professor of Educational Science, University of Regensburg
- **Dr. phil. Sonja Mikeska**, Higher Education Consultant Quality Management and International Cooperation WANDELWERK. Centre for Quality Development, FH Münster University of Applied Sciences
- **Christopher Bohlens**, Student of Economics, Leuphana University of Lüneburg & Law, LLB Distance Learning University Hagen

The **Assessment Report** of the peer-review experts is **based on** the self-assessment report of the Higher Education Institution (HEI) and extensive discussions with the HEI management, the board of trustees, representatives of the holding company, deans, heads of study programmes, lecturers, staff representatives, students, and alumni.

The basis of the **Assessment Criteria** is part 1 of the “Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area” (ESG) in the current official version. Further, the assessment considers criteria for the institutional accreditation of non-state higher education institutions of the German Council of Science and Humanities (WR) („Guidelines for the accreditation of non-state higher education institutions” Section B.IV). At the same time the national context, particularly the national regulations regarding the establishment of study programmes, are taken into account.

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## **II Introduction**

The experts would like to thank the representatives of the HEI as well as the students that they have taken part in the discussions and willingly shared information and their views during the site visit. The discussions are valuable not only for the assessment of the institution, but also for a better understanding of the legal and sociocultural context of the local higher education system.

Evaluation basis for the peer-review experts is the self-assessment report of the HEI as well as intensive discussions during the site visit with the HEI management, board of trustees, representatives of the holding company, deans, head of study programs, study programme coordinators, teachers, lecturers, administrative staff, students, and graduates.

Main objective of the accreditation procedure is to assess the quality of the study programmes and compliance with the "Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area" (ESG). The ESG standards are applied as main assessment criteria in the international accreditation procedure. They are completed with criteria for the institutional accreditation of non-state HEIs of the German Council of Science and Humanities (WR) („Guidelines for the accreditation of non-state higher education institutions" Section B.IV). In addition, the respective country-specific criteria and standards are taken into account.

A group of experts was set up, which ensured that all areas relevant to the accreditation procedure (e.g. legal, structural, social aspects) as well as the ESG, the WR criteria, and national criteria were considered. The peer-review experts include professors, representatives of the professional practice and the student representative. A certificate with the ACQUIN seal is awarded upon accreditation of the institution.

### **1 The Higher Education System in Lebanon**

HEIs in Lebanon are licenced by the Lebanese Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE). In University of Balamand, new educational programmes developed and proposed by faculties require passing a licensing procedure from the MEHE. The university applications are reviewed by the relevant Technical Committees of the MEHE, after conducting an audit visit to verify compliance with the licensing criteria, then the Council of Education issues a recommendation for licencing. The final decision lies upon the jurisdiction of the Council of Ministers.

From the university side, the typical process involves a proposal for a new programme by the Dean, approval by the Faculty Council (FC), and request of a review process by the Provost/Chief Academic Officer of the University to be conducted by the University Curriculum Committee (UCC). The UCC is composed of faculty members from each faculty appointed by

the Dean and meets regularly to evaluate programmes, provide recommendations to the Provost and approve or disapprove of any proposed programmes. This is a dynamic process that allows programmes to be frequently updated and remain relevant for the labour market.

## **2 Short profile of HEI**

The University of Balamand (henceforth referred to as UOB) is established by the Antiochian Orthodox Church, operating as a non-profit and independent institution of higher education founded in 1988 by the late Patriarch Ignatius IV of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Church. UOB was licensed to operate by the Lebanese government, verified by Decree No. 4885, dated June 4, 1988. Its vision is to lead in the various disciplines for the advancement of knowledge and benefit of society. UOB aims at offering high quality education with affordable tuition fees in an effort to realize the founding principle of education for all and, therefore, contribute to social equity.

The main campus of the UOB, comprising of 454,000 square meters, is located in the north of the country in the district called Koura, about 80 kilometres north of Beirut. In addition to the main campus, the UOB operates three other campuses located across the country to better serve the students of Lebanon: the Dekwaneh campus in the suburbs of Beirut which houses the Lebanese Academy of Fine Arts, the Souk El Gharb campus, situated in Mount Lebanon approximately 20 kilometres outside of Beirut, and the Issam M. Fares Faculty of Technology in Beino, Akkar, North Lebanon that was launched in 2012. The UOB comprises of nine different faculties with most programmes that run in them following the American system of education. The language of the programmes is English, except for a few in French and Arabic, including the programmes run by ALBA at the Dekwaneh campus. The nine faculties are: 1) ALBA offers programmes in Architecture, Visual Arts, Decorative Arts, Cinema and Audio-Visual Realization, as well as Fashion Design. 2) Saint John of Damascus Institute of Theology. 3) Faculty of Arts and Sciences. 4) Faculty of Engineering. 5) Faculty of Business and Management. 6) Faculty of Health Sciences offers degrees in Medical Laboratory Sciences, Nursing, Nutritional Sciences and Public Health. 7) Faculty of Medicine and Medical Sciences. 8) Issam Fares Faculty of Technology. 9) Faculty of Library and Information Science which is frozen since 2019 due to low enrollment. There is also a Special Programmes unit that runs the curriculum for the freshman year (students that have permission by MEHE to complete a foreign (non-Lebanese) high school programme).

In the academic year of 2021-2022, UOB employed 244 full-time teaching staff serving the educational programmes at the eight faculties, 220 professional staff and 83 support staff members across its four campuses. UOB has a student body that comprises 5,561 students

during the academic year 2021-2022. In terms of number of students, 23,708 students (including international students) have graduated from the UOB. A decline has occurred since 2019 due to the economic collapse and the COVID-19 pandemic, hitting a low in 2020 of 5,283. Since then, the student enrollment has increased by approx. 5.2% in the 2 years following 2020. The students come mainly from the private school sector (87.37% as per 2020), 12.63% come from the public-school sector. Since the academic year 2022-2023, tuition fees are paid in US dollars marking a shift towards dollarization. The tuition is partially divided in USD, 27% of the credit rate in USD and the rest in Lebanese pound, enabling operational sustainability of the university and balancing financial pressures of Lebanese families. The charges start with 68 US-Dollars to 130 US dollars for undergraduate rate per credit, whereas for graduate rates, tuition varies between 138 US-Dollars to 195 US-Dollars. MBA tuitions are 6,885 US-Dollars per year, a Doctorate in Business Administration costs 15,000 US-Dollars per year. UOB offers two options for pursuing a degree: full-time or part-time study.

Following the economic collapse of the Lebanese pound and the high cost of fuel, the UOB offers in addition to the conventional face-to-face delivery of content, hybrid delivery (face-to-face and online) and recently the real-time synchronous education.

The UOB is a founding member of the Universities Association of Lebanon which aims to establish cooperation among Lebanese universities and enhance the quality of higher education in Lebanon and has had representatives on the Lebanese Council for Higher Education for many years. For the last three academic years, namely 2021, 2022 and 2023, the UOB has been ranked amongst the top 540 universities in the QS World University Ranking and number 2 in Lebanon.

### **III Implementation and assessment of the criteria**

#### **1 Institutional Profile and Strategy: Strategic Planning, Mission and Vision**

*The HEI has a clear mission statement in which the institutional profile, strategy, and objectives of the HEI are defined. The mission is consistent and complies with international standards. Academic bodies have adopted the mission, which is publicly available. The HEI has adequate resources to fulfill its mission and strategic planning [Examination Area 1].*

#### **Implementation**

The mission of the UOB describes its profile, strategy and objectives. It is made public on the university's webpage and can be accessed by both internal and external stakeholders. The profile of the UOB is a private non-profit independent institution of Higher Education founded in 1988 and licensed by the MEHE.

UOB is striving to position itself within the top HEIs in the MENA region and ultimately throughout the world. It aims at fostering the principles of equality, tolerance, and compassion. The policy for students' admission is implemented with respect to religion, gender, or special needs. Graduating professionals who are critical thinkers, life-long learners and active citizens in society are at the heart of its mission. The UOB seeks to limit the influence of dogmatism in all fields (intellectual, social, political, cultural and religious) and is committed to academic freedom, the provision of quality education and research in each discipline. The mission is referenced in two documents: the first is "The University of Balamand Principles and Goals" approved by the Board of Trustees (BOT) on July 17, 1998 and the second is the "University of Balamand Basic Principles" as amended by the BOT on June 24, 2011 and December 19, 2014. The University Strategic Plan for the Academic Years 2022 to 2027 is also made public on its webpage and is known to all interested parties, teaching staff, administration and students. The Executive Committee comprising the Provost, Vice Presidents, Deans, and key university stakeholders participated in the review of the mission statement upon which the strategic plan is founded. The strategic plan has defined seven strategic institutional objectives that include the enhancement of academics and research in alignment with its mission, the provision of quality and accountability in provision of education and services, the implementation of a teaching-research hybrid model in higher education, the promotion of an environment that attracts local, regional and international scholars, staff, and students, the increase of student enrollment, the enhancement of university infrastructure and resources, and lastly the provision of equal opportunities that in turn promote social mobility and community services.

In terms of teaching and learning, the goal of the UOB is to provide student-centered education through educational programmes learning objectives and their intended learning outcomes. The acquisition of knowledge, skills and professional attitude intends to prepare students for the challenges of life and society after graduation. Teaching and research are based on the principles of scientific methods, including analytical and critical thinking throughout the delivery of curricula that evolve around evidence-based content and with a view also to technological developments.

The objectives of the educational programmes aim at responding to the needs of the national, regional, and international communities. In terms of internationalization, the university promotes international mobility opportunities for faculty, staff and students. The implementation of environmentally sustainable policies is also among university's objectives to promote its role of social responsibility.

The strategic objectives of the university are critically assessed periodically to identify the underlying causes that may hinder the university from accomplishing its objectives. Before the approval of the strategic plan, an internal and external SWOT analysis, as well as a gap analysis were performed to ensure that the strategy is realistic, the human and supporting resources, as well as infrastructure are adequate. The commitment of the UOB to promote social responsibility was illustrated during the COVID-19 pandemic when the UOB launched the first vaccination center in Lebanon that was hosted at an academic institution and was open to the entire public. Also, during the explosion of the Port of Beirut in 2020, the Faculty of Health Sciences provided psychosocial support, gynecology and obstetrics consultations. Lastly, UOB provides special tuition rates to students in need, public servants and other special interest groups in view of the difficult economic times and the devaluation of the national currency.

### **Assessment**

At the time of its first accreditation in 2015, the UOB presented a coherent institutional profile and a corresponding strategy defined by the University Council (UC) and approved by the BOT. To date, the profile has been consistently developed in line with internal and external frameworks.

The UOB's mission and vision are clearly defined. They are integrated transparently and diversely throughout the strategic planning process. In discussions with UOB's various status groups, it was evident that the university's mission is reflected in the faculty strategies and is shared by all UOB status groups. The UOB is united and focused in its strategy. Its mission is in line with international standards. All relevant documents are available to the public.



The Strategic Plan for the Academic Years 2022-2027, developed with the participation of all stakeholders, is appropriately detailed and coherent in terms of a focused implementation. The strategic objectives appear both ambitious and achievable.

Clearly aware of its critical weaknesses, the UOB has identified six areas for special attention in its strategic planning up to 2027, namely central services, qualified faculty, research status, external quality assurance, enrollment growth, and improvement of the study and learning environment. The gap analysis underlines the UOB's convincing professional strategic planning.

As an improvement compared to the first accreditation, the current self-evaluation report and the on-site discussions made clear how the pursuit of goals is accompanied and controlled by annual systematic monitoring. The monitoring is based on key performance indicators defined in the strategic plan. The responsibility for the monitoring process appropriately lies with the President.

UOB's development is also clearly visible in several other areas. Underlined by the expert group are: (a) the rigorous development into a leading research university, where teaching and research are interlinked; (b) the strategic upgrading of internationalization, which can be seen, among others, in the appointment of a Vice President for International Affairs and the establishment of dedicated staff; (c) the further strengthening of networking with external representatives from politics and business, which, according to the experts, provides an excellent basis for strategic knowledge transfer between the UOB and institutions and companies in Lebanon.

Through various projects, initiatives and personal engagement, the UOB maintains a regular exchange with governmental and societal sectors relevant to universities. UOB has expanded these links particularly during the crises of recent years, and community engagement was strengthened. As with all universities worldwide, the COVID-19 pandemic was a formative period for the UOB. For the UOB, the financial crisis in Lebanon and the Beirut port explosion were additional challenges to overcome. Throughout these crises, which are still ongoing, UOB has worked on education, research and social challenges based on its mission statement and its underlying values. The establishment of Lebanon's first public vaccination center is an excellent example.

With regard to transfer activities that go beyond the traditional research and teaching activities of a university, the expert group also positively noted the Service Experience: Education through Doing programme and the UOB's first start-ups, such as BIOwayste.

According to the experts, the UOB has considerable potential to develop transfer as a strategic field of action alongside research and teaching. Community building and knowledge transfer activities with the business community and society are an opportunity to make the UOB even more attractive to stakeholders, professors and new students at home and especially abroad.

To this end, it is recommended that the Community Building and Continuing Professional Education businesses be strategically expanded and given even higher priority. In order to strengthen knowledge transfer activities, it is proposed that these tasks be anchored in a Vice President's business area, either as a separate new area or as an extension of an existing one. In addition, a Knowledge Transfer Office should be established.

In addition to the strategic anchoring of transfer activities, it is recommended that entrepreneurship be significantly expanded as an interdisciplinary teaching method. On the one hand, this will meet the qualification requirements of agile international companies, and on the other, it will motivate young national and international prospective students. As a strategic measure, the establishment of a university-wide incubator for start-ups is recommended.

### **Conclusion**

The criterion is **fulfilled**.

## 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 [Examination Area 2].*

### Implementation

The UOB has established an organizational framework that is designed to meet the diverse needs of its stakeholders in academics, research, and services, while also adapting to changing circumstances. This framework emphasizes institutional integrity, transparency, and accountability. The university's academic, administrative, and financial operations, as well as its regulations as an HEI, are governed by by-laws enacted by either the BOT or the UC.

The UOB has a defined organizational structure that supports the implementation of its strategic objectives, as demonstrated by its organizational chart. The President serves as the UOB's governing authority and is supported by Vice Presidents, Deans, and Directors. These individuals are collectively accountable to a BOT consisting of 34 members.

Recently, changes were made to the UOB's governance system to review its academic and administrative structures and functions. The aim was to ensure transparency in institutional operations and to address the university's growth as an institution of higher education. This review included a recommendation from the last institutional accreditation stating that the governance structure of the UOB should be adjusted to align with the university's further development. This adjustment may involve clarifying the division of tasks and implementing procedures to systematically manage potential conflicts of interest.

In November 2018, the Office of the Provost was established at the UOB to assume the role of Acting Provost. Its primary responsibility is to oversee the planning, development, and administration of the university's academic programs and services, as outlined in the by-laws. The Provost actively participates in strategic planning, policy formulation, and budgetary decisions, providing advice and guidance to the Office of the President regarding the impact of institutional decisions on academic programs, faculty and staff development, and the student learning experience.

Aligned with its academic function, the Office of the Provost implemented two important entities: the Internal Quality Assurance Unit (IQAU) and the Office of Data and Institutional Research (ODIR). In January 2019, a Chief Information and Data Officer was appointed for ODIR, and a Director for the IQAU. While the initial Chief Information and Data Officer is no longer

with the university, the position remains on the organizational chart, and the UOB is currently searching for a replacement.

The establishment of these offices aims to support the decision-making processes of the Office of the President and the Provost. They facilitate monitoring and assessment of the university's mission, vision, and educational outcomes. Additionally, these offices lay the foundation for continuous institutional improvement based on evidence gathered through data collection and analysis.

To accommodate the increasing number of students and the expansion of academic operations, the university created the position of a Vice President for Enrollment Management and Alumni Relations in November 2019. This role focuses on managing student enrollment and engagement with alumni.

In 2019, the Office of Vice President for Internationalization and Engagement was established to enhance internationalization efforts through collaborations, exchanges, and partnerships with international institutions and industry partners. It also supports faculty members' involvement in capacity-building European programs. Furthermore, in 2021, the UOB introduced the Office of the Chief Operating Officer to oversee daily administrative operations. In 2022, the Dean of the Faculty of Medicine was appointed as the Vice President for Health Affairs. Simultaneously, three Vice President positions were removed: Health and Community Relations, Development, Administration, and Public Relations, and Planning and Educational Relations.

The UOB's organizational chart reflects the BOT as the highest governing body, responsible for ensuring the institution's continuity and maintaining its historical record. The BOT includes both secular members from Lebanon and the Arab East, who possess expertise in cultural, scientific, technical, and business matters, as well as four representatives of the Church, including the Chairman, who is the Patriarch, and three other Archbishops chosen by the Patriarch from the Holy Synod. The BOT serves a term of five years. The UOB's religious affiliation and matters pertaining to its assets are governed by official protocols, and the involvement of the Patriarch and the other Archbishops, who are BOT members, is managed according to the Articles of the Basic By-laws and the Articles of the University of Balamand Internal By-laws.

The appointment of the university President is made by the BOT for a term of five years, with the President's functions and duties outlined in the Internal by-laws. The President, in turn, appoints the Vice Presidents with the approval of the BOT for a renewable period of five years, as specified in the internal By-laws. Additionally, the President's nomination of the Provost for a term of five years, renewable according to the internal by-laws, must also be approved by the BOT.

Deans are appointed by the BOT for a renewable period of five years, based on the recommendation of the university President, in accordance with the internal by-laws and internal by-laws of faculties. Associate and Assistant Deans are appointed by the Deans of the faculty, following consultation and approval by the university President, as outlined in the internal by-laws of faculties. The administrative functions of academic department chairpersons are also defined in the internal by-laws of faculties. Deans appoint chairpersons for a term of three years, in consultation with faculty members within the department, the FC, and the university President. Chairpersons report to Deans, and their term may be renewed.

The performance of academic leadership, including Deans, is evaluated by the President, who assesses their ability to fulfill their administrative functions and achieve the strategic priorities and objectives of their respective faculties through the Deans' annual faculty reports. The President also evaluates the performance of the Deans during UC meetings.

The formation and responsibilities of the UC, the highest governing authority in the academic decision-making process, are specified in the internal by-laws of the UOB. The UC consists of the President, Provost, Vice Presidents, and Deans, with the President serving as the chair.

As outlined in the internal by-laws, the duties of the UC include proposing the by-laws of various faculties and institutes, discussing the draft budget and annual report, approving curricula and programs recommended by the faculty and institute administrations, reviewing draft contracts within budget limits approved by the BOT, proposing acceptance of grants, bequests, and donations, and making recommendations on legal matters. The UC also addresses any issue proposed by the President for discussion. The decisions made by the UC have institutional and national-level implications and are connected to the university's budget.

At the faculty level, committees led by Chairpersons or Deans, with faculty members as members, manage educational activities in accordance with the internal by-laws of faculties. These committees include the FC, Curriculum Committee, and Research Committee. Additionally, each faculty has an administrative staff responsible for supporting the implementation of educational programs and related activities.

The FC is responsible for making decisions at the faculty level. Each faculty has a FC consisting of Department Chairs and chaired by the Dean. The FC serves as a parallel body to the UC and discusses all decisions that impact the faculty. The decision-making process typically follows a defined flow: from the department to faculty-level committees, then to the Dean, and finally to the FC for ultimate approval.

The development and proposal of new educational programs by faculties require licensing from the MEHE. The process begins with the Dean, who submits the approved proposal from the

FC to the Provost. The Provost then initiates a review process by the UCC. The UCC is composed of faculty members from each faculty, appointed by the Dean, and includes the Registrar. The UCC evaluates the program and presents its recommendation to the Provost, who discusses the decision with the UC. The UC, as the decision-making body, approves or disapproves proposed programs that require licensing from the Ministry of Education and Higher Education.

The governance of the UOB includes various committees at the organizational level, reflecting the representation of principal stakeholders. These committees are outlined in the by-laws and serve as a platform for involving the voices of constituent stakeholders in important institutional matters. They play a vital role in the ongoing growth and improvement of the UOB. The key university-wide committees include Admissions, Administration, Campus Life, Commencement, Construction and Tender, Curriculum, Library, Orientation, Ranking, Research, Recruitment, and Scholarships.

The committee members are faculty members and staff whose names are proposed by the Dean to the President. Each faculty has at least one representative on every committee. University-wide committees provide an opportunity for faculty members from diverse disciplines and backgrounds to share their expertise in teaching, learning, research, and administration. They also serve as mentors to junior faculty members in committee functions, encompassing various aspects of the institution. Moreover, these committees act as catalysts for interdisciplinary educational or research projects. Some of the university-wide committees also include student representation, such as the Administration, Campus Life, Library, and Orientation committees.

Faculty members at the UOB play an active role in institutional governance through various avenues. Each faculty has its own set of committees, including Academic, Admissions, Curriculum (with student representation), Graduate, Library (with student representation), and Research committees, which work on specific issues related to the faculty's operations. Membership in these committees is determined through elections as per the faculty by-laws. Additionally, faculty members have the opportunity to serve as Chairs of Departments on a rotating basis, allowing them to gain administrative experience and participate in decision-making processes as representatives on the FC.

Student representatives serve on some of the faculty-level committees. While faculty membership is determined through elections, student membership is appointed by the Dean, except in the Faculty of Medicine and Medical Sciences where students elect their class representative to serve on the faculty committees. The election process ensures a formal group decision-making process where colleagues vote for nominees. In cases where there are insufficient

nominations, the nominated members serve by default, and the Dean appoints additional members if needed.

The Senate is another avenue for faculty members to participate in university governance. The Senate is an elected body with representatives chosen by their peers through voting, ensuring that each faculty is represented. The Senate provides faculty members with a voice in shaping and implementing policies that impact their personal and professional lives. Meetings of the Senate, chaired by the President, address issues such as faculty benefits, academic standards, technology infrastructure, and other topics of concern. Faculty members can suggest agenda items to their representatives, who bring them up for discussion in the Senate meetings.

Under the leadership of the university President, student involvement in decision-making processes has been enhanced through town hall meetings organized by the President's Office. These meetings provide a platform for the President to share information with students and for students to ask questions and express concerns directly to the President. Additionally, the President has established a dedicated page on the university website where students can post their suggestions or concerns, providing a direct link to the Office of the President.

Some faculties also seek input from alumni by involving them in university committees. This practice is currently implemented in the Faculty of Medicine and Medical Sciences and the Faculty of Health Sciences, and the UOB aims to extend this approach to all faculties, leveraging the newly established UOB alumni network and the potential mentorship role that alumni can provide to current students.

The UOB has a responsibility for ensuring the provision of resources for its educational programs. This includes allocating necessary resources for program implementation, distributing educational resources based on educational needs, and directing resources to achieve desired educational outcomes.

The primary source of funding for the university's budget is tuition fees, which account for approximately 92% of the total. Other sources of funding include grants (4%), financial investments (2%), returns from investments in faculty housing and student dormitories, and other student revenues (4%).

The UOB is committed to offering quality education at an affordable tuition fee rate, aligning with its vision of education for all. In the academic year 2022-2023, the university implemented a new policy requiring students to pay a percentage of their tuition fees in USD. This shift is in response to the increasing trend of dollarization in Lebanon, making it challenging for the UOB, and other private universities in the country, to sustain their operations without revenue in USD. Recognizing the financial pressures faced by Lebanese families, the UOB decided to partially

divide the tuition, with 27% of the credit rate in USD and the remaining portion in Lebanese Pound (LBP).

The preparation and management of the university budget are handled by the Office of the Chief Financial and Business Officer (CFBO). The budget preparation process begins with the Deans submitting their budget proposals for the upcoming academic year. The proposals are then consolidated within the university budget by the CFBO. The university budget is thoroughly discussed by the UC and the financial committee of the BOT before final approval is granted by the BOT.

The UOB's budget is documented in an annual financial statement. While tuition fees are the primary revenue source, donations to the university are also acknowledged and recorded under "Donations and Gifts." Some donations support institutional operations, while others contribute to infrastructure development. The university discloses that a return on its investment portfolio in Swiss banks serves as an additional funding source. However, it is important to note that UOB operates as a non-profit organization in compliance with applicable rules and regulations. The university's annual accounts undergo an audit conducted by an independent audit firm within a two-month period.

Furthermore, the university budget allocates resources to support students' activities, including hosting club events on campus and participating in national and international sporting events.

The UOB opened 2017 a branch in Dubai (University of Balamand Dubai, UOBD) brought to the UAE by Dubai Investments PJSC. It was located at Dubai Investments House, Dubai Investments Park, the UOBD is backed by the long-standing reputation and legacy of the Lebanon-based UOB, as stated in the self-description. Officially licensed by the Ministry of Education of the UAE. It closed operation in 2021.

The Academic Freedom Index (AFI) (see <https://academic-freedom-index.net> ) assesses de facto levels of academic freedom across the world based on five indicators: freedom to research and teach; freedom of academic exchange and dissemination; institutional autonomy; campus integrity; and freedom of academic and cultural expression. The AFI currently covers 179 countries/territories and provides the most comprehensive dataset on the subject of academic freedom. Lebanon is represented in this index as of 2022 with a value of 0.63 on a scale of 0 to 1, compared to 2012 it was decreased. Compared to the other countries, Lebanon is thus in the bottom 40-50 % of the index.

In terms of funding, the main source for funding the UOB budget is the tuition fees. The UOB has a clear line of responsibility for providing resources for the educational programmes, allocating the resources necessary for their implementation. For the first time in 2022-2023, the UOB required that students pay a percentage of their tuition fees in US dollars, acknowledging



the financial pressures with which all Lebanese families are currently facing. More specifically it was decided to divide the tuition partially in USD, 27% of the credit rate in USD, and the rest in Lebanese Pound. The budget of the university is prepared and managed by the Office of the CFBO. The process of preparation of the budget is initiated by requesting Deans to prepare their budgets for the next academic year. The faculty budget proposal is sent by the Dean to the Office of the CFBO for consolidation within the university budget. The university budget is discussed by the UC and the financial committee of the BOT and ultimately approved by the BOT. The budget is documented in an annual financial statement.

### **Assessment**

The UOB is governed within an independent structure within the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate by an appointed BOT. The experts could get the impression that the university is very independent and autonomous, except for the connection with the BOT and the Saint John of Damascus Institute of Theology.

Regarding the responsibilities, the experts recognized that these are included in the by-laws of the UOB. The by-laws are adopted by the highest body, the BOT, or the UC, depending on the responsibility. The UC acts here to regulate academic matters. Corresponding further bodies and regulations exist in the faculties. An analysis conducted by the university identified approximately 1,420 documents that serve to provide structure (forms, guidelines, job descriptions, policies, processes, procedures, and the important by-laws, etc.). The essence of a project called "Internal Process Documentation: Policies, Procedures, Processes, Organization Chart, and Workflows" lies in documenting the current state of policies, procedures, hierarchy and workflows as a foundation for the second project of assessing the gap and improving internal policies and procedures. Overall, the presence of comprehensive by-laws, along with various supporting documents and regulations, underscores the UOB's commitment to maintaining a well-defined governance structure, promoting academic integrity, and ensuring effective management of its operations. These measures contribute to fostering a transparent and accountable environment that supports the UOB's mission of providing quality education and research opportunities to its students and stakeholders.

The different areas of the UOB are linked by the BOT as well as the UC. There is a President, Vice Presidents and Deans who are in charge. The different areas of a HEI are interconnected to create a cohesive academic environment. Academic programs and departments house faculty members who deliver the curriculum and conduct research, with research findings influencing teaching. The administration and governance structure manages operations and coordinates with academic departments to achieve institutional goals. Support services such as

libraries and counseling enhance the academic experience. External partnerships and collaborations with other institutions and organizations foster knowledge sharing and real-world application. These interconnections contribute to a vibrant and holistic learning environment.

Regarding student participation, there are differences between the faculties. In some faculties there are students involved in the commissions, while other faculties have no students involved. In the BOT and UC, no students are involved.

The ESG (2015) provide for the participation of all stakeholders here. "A key aim of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) is to contribute to a common understanding of quality assurance of learning and teaching across borders and among all stakeholders. Unless otherwise stated, in this document stakeholders are understood to include all stakeholders within an institution, including students and staff, as well as external stakeholders such as employers and external partners of an institution."

A cultural difference between the European Higher Education Area and Lebanon can be identified here. As a rule, student participation is not provided for. Nevertheless, the participation in some faculties is to be commended. However, there is no overarching student representative body. This is also based on the experiences at other HEIs in Lebanon, where the establishment of a "student union" is negatively tainted because it was politically instrumentalized. There are no plans for further student involvement in committees in general. This aligns with the unique characteristics and cultural differences of our country's universities, which differ from most European universities where students also serve on committees. While the experts recognized equal participation alongside professors in relevant commissions, equal rights do not necessarily imply an equal representation of students and professors in these committees. In order to adhere to the requirements outlined in the ESG, it is important to enhance student engagement in quality management and quality assurance. Consequently, students should more actively be included in the relevant commissions to ensure that the demands of the ESG are met. Nonetheless, the UOB should find a way to ensure student participation in the committees and to have a targeted representation of interests for all students. Community building and knowledge transfer activities with businesses and society can greatly enhance the attractiveness of a HEI to stakeholders, professors, and new students, both domestically and internationally. To leverage these opportunities, it is recommended to strategically expand and prioritize the Community Building and Professional Education businesses within the institution.

One way to achieve this is by anchoring the related tasks in a dedicated business area under the Vice Presidents' purview. This business area can be established as a separate new division or an extension of an existing one, such as Enrollment Management and Alumni Relations. By positioning community building and professional education as distinct focus areas, the institution can allocate dedicated resources, leadership, and strategic direction to these endeavors.

Furthermore, it is suggested to establish a dedicated knowledge transfer team or department within the institution. This team would be responsible for facilitating the transfer of knowledge, expertise, and research findings from the academic community to external stakeholders, such as businesses and society. The knowledge transfer team would play a crucial role in fostering collaborations, partnerships, and technology transfer initiatives, thereby strengthening the institution's impact and relevance in the broader community.

Expanding community building and professional education businesses, along with establishing a knowledge transfer team, can yield several benefits. It can enhance the institution's reputation, visibility, and influence among key stakeholders, including industry partners, government bodies, and the public. By actively engaging with businesses and society, the HEI can foster mutually beneficial relationships, including internships, research collaborations, and funding opportunities. These efforts can also contribute to the development of industry-relevant curricula, providing students with practical skills and increasing their employability.

Additionally, the expansion of community building and professional education businesses, along with a dedicated focus on knowledge transfer, can attract international students. The ability to connect academic knowledge with real-world applications and engage with businesses and society offers a unique educational experience that appeals to students seeking a comprehensive and globally relevant education.

In summary, expanding the community building and professional education businesses, and establishing a dedicated knowledge transfer team, can enhance the attractiveness of the HEI to stakeholders, professors, and new students. These initiatives can strengthen partnerships with businesses and society, drive innovation, and provide students with valuable practical experiences. By strategically prioritizing and investing in these areas, the institution can position itself as a leading player in community engagement, knowledge transfer, and industry collaboration. In general, it can be affirmed by the experts that the university has clearly defined responsibilities, which are documented in binding statutes and other relevant documents. The organizational and management structure of the institution aligns with its goals and tasks. There is a clear distinction between individuals responsible for major duties and decision-making processes. As a result, the governance of the educational institution complies with national standards. Adequate regulations for the recruitment of academic staff are established and designed based on academic criteria. This system ensures transparency, accountability, and the implementation of meritocratic principles in governance. The allocation of financial resources within the institution, including the rules and criteria governing this process, is documented, and presented in a transparent manner.

## **Conclusion**

The criterion is **fulfilled**.

### **Recommendations**

1. The involvement of the student body in the committee structures in the faculties should be increased.
2. The introduction of a student representative body for the entire university should be supported.
3. The community building and knowledge transfer activities with business and society are an opportunity to make UOB even more attractive to stakeholders, professors and new students at home and especially abroad. To this end, it is recommended that the Community Building and Professional Education businesses be strategically expanded and given higher priority. As a measure, it is suggested that the tasks be anchored in a business area of the Vice Presidents. Either as a separate new area or as an extension of an existing one, e.g. Enrollment Management and Alumni Relations. In addition, a knowledge transfer team or department should be established.

### 3 Teaching and Learning

*Objectives and content of study programmes are in accordance with the HEI's mission and strategy. Study programmes 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 programmes are clearly defined. The HEI offers professional support services for students. Support services have adequate staff [Examination Area 4, ESG Standard 1.2, ESG Standard 1.3, ESG Standard 1.4].*

#### **Implementation**

UOB follows a student-centered approach in teaching and learning that is in line with its mission statement, the university's objectives and educational strategy. The student-centered approach of UOB acknowledges the emotional and social aspects of students' development along with their cognitive growth. To facilitate faculty members' instructional approaches, the university is using a Moodle learning management system which is adopted for all courses and their components that are being offered in any given semester. A special office for the management of the Moodle has been designated to support teaching staff and students. The instructors can adapt the courses by including asynchronous forum discussions, constructing of tests and assignments on Moodle.

Within departments, a common approach to the teaching learning strategy can be found. This approach is rooted in regular department meetings, weighing of certain types of assessment for grading and establishment of how many assessments should be planned for in a course. The homogeneity in teaching is ensured through common plans how to create the syllabi for the courses and how to write learning objectives and learning outcomes. Additionally, workshops are offered to familiarize teaching staff with all different types of pedagogical strategies. The Education department uses a variety of teaching approaches and since 2015 has held workshops for the benefit of all UOB instructors to learn interactive strategies. Fares 118 is a room designated for the department of education to use; it was designed for instructors to model student-centered teaching strategies and was functional in the 2019-2020 academic year.

The curricula are designed based on a liberal arts philosophy which aims to develop robust critical thinking, analytical skills, and problem solving abilities, and entails a strong moral compass. Life-long learning skills is another implicit general learning objective that pervades the curriculum. Students in all English medium degrees are required to take 18 credits (6 courses) that serve to address this liberal arts philosophy. Special attention is given to the employability of as many of the degree programmes as possible. To achieve this aspiration, UOB has signed agreements with several national, regional and international organizations in order to provide

practical training for students at both the undergraduate and graduate levels, such as working in machine shops or in instrumentation labs (example from the Mechanical Engineering Faculty). To establish strong links with the community through partnerships, some Bachelor programmes require an internship that combines class-based learning and activities in the workplace (Bachelor in Business Administration). The UOB has close connections to industry practitioners who deliver specialized lectures and conduct professional development workshops for students and even participate in the assessment of student projects and presentations. To enhance the employability of UOB graduates, the UOB runs a Career Services unit that provides workshops on resume writing and interviewing skills. It also supplies job postings and organizes an annual career fair where companies come to campus and students can meet representatives and inquire about employment opportunities. Each student is assigned an academic advisor who provides them personalized guidance on academic matters. Feedback from academic counselling meetings is reported in departmental meetings or is informally discussed among advisors and program coordinators. Students with deficient backgrounds get the knowledge base needed to pursue higher education through remedial level courses. Quality education for all is reflected in students' financial assistance of several types. Top performing students receive scholarship, and mechanisms for some tuition remission are implemented. To enhance the student-centered approach to teaching and learning, UOB established the Office of Student Affairs (OSA). The OSA contributes to the educational mission of the UOB by offering services, programmes and opportunities to students that nurture social and emotional growth.

The offered programmes are continuously reviewed and revised to meet the needs of the time. A programme coordinator may seek input from the environment where graduates will be expected to work. New programmes are initiated at any level inspired by the UOB mission. Most of the time, the initiative comes from the departments and from UOB professors who are well-informed about industry needs. There are regular discussions about program relevance in all departments across the UOB. When a department decides that a renovation is needed or a new programme should be created, a discussion with the Dean will be arranged. Once the proposed idea is initiated, a proposal is developed which includes a rationale for initiating the programme, its objectives and learning outcomes, as well as its relevance to the UOB mission. If a new programme is approved at the faculty curriculum level, it then needs a review by the UCC. The UCC submits its recommendation to the Office of the Provost who then delivers it to the Dean and to the UC for discussion and a vote on it.

The concepts of validity, reliability, fairness and flexibility are applicable to the assessment methods, which are largely dependent upon the characteristics of the programme. The validity of the assessment method is evaluated by the assessment content that should be aligned with

the course objectives and intended learning outcomes. Formative assessment practices are routinely applied in courses given the student-centered nature of the teaching/learning approach at UOB. In the past five academic years, the UOB student to faculty ratio was below 15 and varied between 10.7 to 13.7. This suggests that students have ample access to their professors. The number of credits required to be awarded a degree is fully in line with the MEHE guidelines and international standards. An undergraduate degree typically takes a minimum of 3 years of study following the freshman year where applicable. A doctoral programme was officially established at the Saint John of Damascus Institute of Theology by the MEHE in 2013.

In terms of student engagement, the Student Affairs and Career Services department sponsored student engagement opportunities by offering a variety of internships and volunteering experiences via holding Opportunity Day and Careers Services Days virtually and physically. Students are encouraged to attend extracurricular activities, such as online club and varsity and athletic teams' meetings and remote student work experience. The psychological development of students during their learning experience is addressed by the presence of a Counselling Centre served by a counsellor on the main campus.

### **Assessment**

A remarkable focus has been set on the strategic development of teaching and learning since the previous institutional accreditation. The UOB has defined a concept of student-centered teaching and learning and has implemented it fully in the university's strategy. Thus, this concept received broad recognition in all parts of the UOB and is acknowledged as a central concept by students and by teaching staff, but also by the leadership and by the administration, and by the general public outside the UOB.

The concept of student-centered learning takes into account multifaceted aspects of education, learning, and development, including emotional and social aspects in addition to cognitive growth. The strategic placement of the concept ensures that teaching activities, including higher education teaching development, are aligned with learning activities.

While the concept on the one hand is a common concept, it offers on the other side a wide range of possibilities for different approaches in the design of student-centered teaching and in the assessment of student-centered learning. The UOB offers study programmes the opportunity to develop specific patterns that are in line with the concept, for example the "team-based and case-based learning curriculum" in the Faculty of Medicine and Medical Sciences. This strongly serves the purpose to identify appropriate competences and knowledge in each study programme.

The UOB succeeds to align the freedom in the definition of the study programmes with a strong commitment to the overall strategic characteristics of student-centered learning. One of the key issues for success is that there are transparent and widely known implemented processes and responsibilities when it comes to initiatives how to create or modify study programmes. Such developments emerge from the departments, but are critically discussed in the UCC. Among others, students are actively involved in these processes. The realization of the concepts in the faculties are safeguarded by program managers – the implementation of this function throughout the UOB is a strong factor in the development of teaching and learning.

A key issue is that on the one hand study programmes are specialized and define specific competences and knowledge to ensure an high academic and research-oriented standard, on the other side all study programmes contribute to broad purposes, as described in the UOB's liberal arts philosophy which aims to develop robust critical thinking and analytical skills, problem solving abilities, and a strong moral compass.

There is a variety of assessment procedures available, again being differentiated across study programmes. All of them, however, include aspects of study-centered teaching and learning, and of general competences like critical thinking and moral decision-making.

While in general all processes are well-defined, safely based in the university strategy, and widely accepted by all relevant parties, the complexity of the issue creates challenges as well. From the UOB perspective, there are two intersections that deserve continuing attention: a) interaction between teachers and students about all facets of student-centered teaching and learning – in particular visible in feedback and discussion of learning processes and course evaluations; b) interaction between faculties and study programmes about innovative approaches of student-centered teaching – in particular visible in discussions about the generalizability and transfer potential of specific approaches. The UOB is encouraged to further systematically develop both intersections.

All aspects concerning the organization of study programmes are explicitly worked out and fully comply with all requirements; this concerns the allocation of resources, the staff-student ratio, the selection and admission of students, the usage of IT in teaching and learning (the Lebanese law disallows hybrid teaching, although capacities were created during the COVID-19 pandemic; the UOB provides modern and elaborate models of real-time synchronous education), counselling and career service for students, health services, physical education, etc.

## **Conclusion**

The criterion is **fulfilled**.

Recommendations:



1. The UOB should systematically observe the intersection between teachers and students and their interaction about student-centered teaching and learning. This concerns in particular the discussion of course evaluation results. Different feedback strategies should be focused, and possibilities should be explored how evaluation results can directly impact future teaching and learning.
2. The UOB should systematically observe the intersection between faculties and study programmes about innovative approaches of student-centered teaching. This concerns in particular discussions about the generalizability and transfer potential of specific approaches like entrepreneurship as a teaching method or team-based and case-based learning curricula. While such concepts are developed in specific domains or study programmes, they might yield considerable spin-offs in other areas when they are broadly discussed.

## 4 Research

*Research activities fit into the mission of the institution. The structure of the HEI 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 [Examination Area 5, ESG Standard 1.8]*

### Implementation

The UOB's mission statement, as amended in 2022, emphasizes the role of the university in generating new knowledge through research, as stated at the end of the last paragraph: *“Through the provision of quality education and rigorous research, the university aims at achieving leadership in each discipline, strengthening interdisciplinary research programmes and leading in new fields of education”.*

The UOB Research Strategic Plan was approved in 2018 by the UC. It analysed university's research output in comparison to key universities in Lebanon, identified factors which were hindering research productivity at UOB, and proposed structural reforms as well as non-structural initiatives to be adopted by the UOB. The role of implementing the major structural changes was given to the Acting Provost. The first change concerned the promotion policy for professorial ranks that was established over 12 years prior with a view to mobilize faculty members to conduct original research and to publish in journals with a high impact factor or, at least, in Scopus-indexed journals. In the new promotion policy, that is based on three pillars of teaching, research, and service and commitment, clearer and quantifiable points were posed to evaluate the achievements of each candidate in the three pillars. The outcome of the change was to raise awareness among all faculty members that research productivity is a key parameter for obtaining promotion to a higher academic rank. It also enabled certain disciplines such as Theology, Fine Arts, Christian-Muslim Studies, Archaeology, and Mass Communication, to have different research criteria from those applied in the mainstream promotion policy. The process for promotion starts at the department or programme level and involves peers who serve on the Faculty Promotion Committee, headed by the Dean. The recommendations of the faculty are then addressed to the office of the Provost where verification and processing of the promotion applications are done. The recommendations of the Provost are discussed with the President and the decision on each application is taken by a vote in the UC. Following the UC decision, the President presents and discusses the promotion file of each candidate, as well as the UC decision, with the Academic Committee of the BOT which forwards its recommendations to the BOT for approval.

A second structural change, aimed at promoting research activities at the UOB, was the establishment of Postdoctoral Fellowship (PDF) as a key academic position at the university.

This position was judged as being essential for research development and for transfer of technology. The PDFs are expected to assist in the co-supervision of graduate students' research projects, to improve the quality of theses and to generate publications. The PDFs will also gain a teaching experience over a period of 3 years (teaching only 1 or 2 courses per semester) and conduct high quality research. The third structural change, initiated by the Provost and aimed at promoting research development, was the establishment of a new University Research Management Structure. The new structure is chaperoned by the Provost who also chairs the university-wide Balamand Research Committee (BRC). Members of the BRC are nominated each year by the Provost, based on a record in research accomplishment and in the ability to obtain research grants either nationally or internationally. The direct cost of research funding by the university included mainly the purchase of research equipment, the travel support for faculty members to attend international conferences or to undertake training for acquiring skills in new technologies. The investment, over the last 6 years, in purchasing research equipment was over 1 million dollars in 2016/2017 and in 2017/2018 and went down to nearly \$48,000 in 2019/2020 or in 2020/2021. This drop was mainly caused by the devaluation of the Lebanese Pound and by the COVID-19 pandemic. UOB had invested, between 2018 and 2022, in co-funding the cost of research grant applications submitted by its own faculty members to the National Centre for Scientific Research (Centre Nationale pour la Recherche Scientifique).

The concept of research at the UOB is mainly built on the requirement for each faculty member to generate new knowledge in his/her own field of study. This translates into the need to conduct research and to use the generated knowledge in the teaching process. Since 2019, the new governors of the university had cancelled the approach of priority topics in research and are now supporting any application for funding, from any discipline, based on the originality and the academic and scientific merit of the project.

Since 2019, the UC has adopted a recruitment strategy. It aims at recruiting academics with a high research accomplishment and by focusing on hiring faculty members at the ranks of Associate Professor or Full Professor, with quality publications and experience in teaching. Only 2 Full Professors were recruited in 2022, one in the Faculty of Medicine and one in the Faculty of Health Sciences), due to a lack of applicants from abroad which can be explained by the financial crisis in the country.

In terms of teaching load, 12 credits per semester in both the fall and the spring semesters are foreseen. This translates into 4 courses of 3-credits each, per semester. The university by-laws allow a reduction of the teaching load for research by 3 credits per semester. In the last six academic years, professors from only 5 faculties had requested a teaching load reduction for research. In 2020, the President urged the UC to develop a new policy on teaching load

reduction for research, to further reduce the time allocated for teaching. Another strategy of supporting research is the availability of seed money to junior faculty members, or to recently arriving academic members, who are willing to supervise or co-supervise research projects of graduate students. Faculty members at the UOB had also been able to get research support from another Lebanese Non-Government Organization, the Lebanese Industrial Research Achievements Programme.

The number of publications was 109 in 2016, then the number increased to 171 in 2019 and to 220 in 2022. The UOB adheres in all of its functions and practices, including research, to a code of ethics outlined in the chapter of its by-laws entitled “Code of Business Ethics”. The UOB has only one PhD program – at the Saint John of Damascus Institute of Theology. The MEHE licensed this programme in 2013.

### **Assessment**

With the decision to hire a Provost experienced in international research environments the university has clearly taken a necessary step to further develop the institution from the status of a teaching university to a university at which teaching is based in research. Several measures have been adopted in 2019 to attract researchers to the UOB. Among these the possibility of obtaining a reduction of the teaching load for doing research was especially important. This measure has been supported and enhanced by the President in 2020. In fact, a teaching load of four courses per semester that has been in place for long is too heavy a load for conducting research at the same time, and a reduction to three courses (as was in principle decided) has been an important measure to improve research. In addition to this, internationally visible research output has been encouraged by the possibility of promotion to higher academic ranks and an higher annual salary. Finally, the availability of seed money for junior faculty members or newly arrived faculty members and the introduction of postdoc positions have, at least in principle, considerably improved the competitiveness of the UOB. The allotment of seed money will certainly help the UOB to hire highly motivated and qualified researchers in an increasingly competitive environment. The increase of the budget allotted to research from a mere 50.000 US \$ to 500.000 \$ is a big success.

The decision to give priority to promotion according to success in publishing papers in Scopus-recognized journals is also a valuable instrument in order to turn the UOB into a successful research-based university. At the same time, the leadership of the university has assured the experts that this type of research assessment is modified when it comes to assessing scholarship done in the humanities. The experts welcome this decision and encourage the university to abide by the idea that “one size cannot fit all”. Moreover, it seems to be important both to apply hard criteria for promotion in general, and to pay attention to the personal situation of

researchers and teaching staff. Academics currently have to cope with difficult circumstances of life due to the problematic situation prevailing in Lebanon.

Unfortunately, the three-fold crisis that has struck Lebanon (Covid-19 pandemic, financial crisis, and the 2020 explosion that severely has affected the UOB) has forced the leadership of the university to put some of the already decided measures on hold. We encourage the university to put all the measures described into place as soon as it is financially possible. An important step to enhance the attractiveness of the UOB for students at the graduate level is the decision to encourage all faculties to think about the introduction of new PhD programs. Despite high hurdles imposed by the Lebanese government, three faculties have already decided to apply for the introduction of PhD programs while the Faculty of Business and Management is collaborating with a European university regarding the title of a PhD. The board of the university should encourage even more of its faculties to think about the possibility of introducing PhD programs.

Although some measures that already have been decided are not in place yet, the criterion is fulfilled because it is obvious that the university has made great efforts to improve the research environment on campus.

### **Conclusion**

The criterion is **fulfilled**.

## 5 Resources

*The HEI has adequate human and financial resources, infrastructure, and equipment to achieve its objectives. The academic staff recruitment process meets academic standards [Examination Area 3, Examination Area 6, Examination Area 7, ESG Standard 1.5, ESG Standard 1.6].*

### 5.1 Human resources

#### Implementation

According to the self-assessment report and discussions during the site visit, the UOB has sufficient human and financial resources, infrastructure, and equipment to implement its vision and strategic objectives. Offering higher education courses is the core activity of the university, and all resources are managed around this goal. In terms of human resources, the UOB has two teaching categories that are described in the Academic Personnel Regulations: full-time and part-time faculty members. Full-time faculty members have an academic contract with the university that requires teaching in both regular semesters (fall and spring) at a particular contracted credit load. Full-time faculty members contracted at the professorial ranks are expected to perform teaching, research, and service to the university (participation in university and faculty level committees). There are four types of full-time academic appointments: Professorial rank (Assistant Professor, Associate Professor, and Full Professor), Senior Lecturer, Post-doctoral Fellowship, and Lecturer. Part-time faculty members have a teaching contract that stipulates the number of credits they are being offered for a particular semester.

Instructors and lecturers should hold a master's degree at a minimum, whereas senior lecturers should hold a PhD. The teaching staff recruitment is based upon the recommendation of the Dean and approval of the Provost and the President. Recruitment at the Assistant Professor level or higher requires evidence of research expertise and publications, primarily in refereed journals. The recruitment procedure involves a public posting about a vacant academic position on the UOB website which is in line with the university values of integrity, transparency, and accountability. For the 2021-2022 academic year, 71.3% of the teaching force in full-time capacity held doctoral degrees, while approximately 29% held a Master degree level qualification. In the academic year 2021-2022, 244 full-time faculty served the educational programs in the 8 faculties. Part-time faculty members are engaged depending on the needs of the course offerings. The efficacy of part-time faculty members is ensured through a vetting process that involves collecting informal student feedback by the chairs of departments and course and program coordinators as well as formal feedback from the course evaluation surveys.

The UOB has adopted the American credit system in teaching and learning, with the exception of ALBA, whereby 1 credit means 1 contact hour a week. Full-time faculty in the professorial ranks, including the senior lecturer position, have a teaching load of 24 teaching credits per academic year; 12 credits, or 4 courses in each regular semester, fall and spring. The instructor and lecturer ranks have a 15-credit load per semester. Part-time instructors are restricted to teaching a maximum of 9 credits per semester, and the majority of part-time instructors are engaged for only 3 credits.

In terms of administrative staff, the UOB employs 220 professional staff and 83 support staff across all four campuses (mainly in the campus of Koura). The UOB allows faculty members the right to redeploy to a campus of their choice, and the academic staff has the right to decline delivering a course at another campus location

Professional developmental support is provided to the professional staff in order to enhance their soft and technical skills. This is conducted through training sessions that were held on campus every year before the COVID-19 pandemic. During the pandemic, the UOB partnered with the online learning platform Coursera to offer staff free access to over 3,800 curated courses from top universities and companies.

### **Assessment**

The UOB had sufficient human resources before the three-fold crisis struck Lebanon. Qualification, amount and performance of the academic personnel corresponded to the profile and strategic plan of the university. There are clear criteria for selecting scientific staff members. The experts were told that the UOB lost academic and other staff due to the crisis although the university seems to have been slightly less exposed to this problem than other Lebanese universities. Although chances existed to hire staff that either was laid off by other HEIs or that has left out of its own initiative, the current situation in Lebanon poses a difficult challenge as far as qualified labor is concerned. In a highly competitive situation it is not easy to replace skilled labor, for example, at the Issam Fares Library Learning Center. However, a motivating team spirit seems to be in place at the UOB so that the experts are convinced that it will overcome this difficult situation. External funding has been secured for centers such as the Nahyan Center for Christian-Muslim dialogue or the Institute of Environment and it is to be hoped that parts of these funds will be also available for co-financing staff members in parts of the university that will not as easily be able to attract such funding themselves. Part-time lecturers are needed for enabling the university to reduce the teaching-load of researchers. Due to the crisis the reduction of teaching load has been difficult to achieve, but the university is on track to integrate part-time lecturers once the financial situation is getting better.

## 5.2 Financial Resources

### Implementation

The UOB is operating within an unstable national context imposed by the dollarization of the Lebanese economy. The strategic plan is designed in line with its financial and earnings capacity.

Donations to the UOB as a funding source are acknowledged upon receipt under “Donations and Gifts”, some of which support institutional operations, while others support infrastructure. The annual university budget is documented in an annual financial statement. The Office of the CFBO customizes instalment plans for students on a semester basis. The CFBO Office uses the LOGSIS integrated software system on the Oracle database. The office consists of 13 employees assigned to work within 5 different areas of responsibility: students, payroll, cash and bank, general accounting, and payables.

The process of preparation of the budget is initiated by requesting Deans to prepare their budgets for the next academic year. The proposed faculty budget is sent by the dean to the President and the Office of the CFBO for consolidation within the UOB budget. The university budget is then discussed by the UC and then submitted for approval to the Financial Committee of the BOT.

A solid tendering procedure is followed for expenses of the UOB. Any request exceeding \$3000 USD is discussed in the bidding committee for the best balance between quality and price. The university’s annual financial accounts are audited once per year over a period of 2 months by an independent audit company. The UOB intends to maintain a low student to faculty ratio to be in line with international standards for the provision of quality education in order to assure that students benefit from personalized attention. In the past five years, the UOB student to faculty ratio was below 15 and varied between 10.7 to 13.7. The UOB monitors the student to faculty ratio and has taken initiatives to improve it, such as adding more course sections at different campuses or merging low enrollment classes.

The UOB has opted to divide the tuition partially in USD, 27% of the credit rate in USD, and the rest in Lebanese pounds (LBP) for the academic year 2022-2023. Students are fully informed about the financial cost of their credit load, as tuition fees are communicated through the Student Information System.

### Assessment

The financial crisis in Lebanon creates fundamental uncertainties for long-term planning. However, the UOB can rely on strong support to hedge against the uncertainties. The UOB can



rely on the sponsorship of the Antiochian Orthodox Church and on strong roots in the Lebanese society. The UOB constructively cooperates with ministries and the government, which benefits all parties involved. The great benefit that the UOB brings to the region and to the Lebanon as a whole, stands for sustainable financing despite the strains of the crisis.

The many projects described in the Strategic Development Plan 2023-2027, some of which are costly, have been systematically assessed for financial feasibility by the CDDBO. According to the experts, the analysis and the expenditure principles, which are presented in detail in the "financial Impact" chapter of the strategic plan, are serious and leave sufficient scope for different financial scenarios. The two major projects under development, the completion of the UOBMC and the expansion of the Balamand Medical Simulation Centre, will be financed through donations and fundraising. Here and elsewhere in the financial plan, it is clear that ambitious projects for the development of the UOB will not be at the expense of the funding of studies and teaching. The risk of losing third-party funding affects specific projects, but does not jeopardize the UOB's core business areas.

For the basic budget, the risk of unfunded expenditure is also reduced by means of financial planning and control processes. For example, all expenditure exceeding the annual budget of an organizational unit is first evaluated by the central controlling department and, depending on the amount, then submitted to a responsible committee for approval.

Overall, the experts consider the UOB's finances to be sound and realistically planned, as far as this is possible within the current uncertainties. In principle, and especially in view of the existing uncertainties, it is recommended that knowledge transfer and entrepreneurship, and possibly also fee-based international continuing education programmes, be expanded in order to create an additional basis for financing research and improving study conditions in the future.

### **5.3 Facilities and Equipment**

#### **Implementation**

All four UOB campuses are equipped with the essential infrastructure and digital tools necessary to provide a quality education. These facilities include: state-of-the-art laboratories for the natural sciences, computer science and engineering programmes, computer labs equipped with many and useable software programmes for student use, libraries, classrooms, multipurpose halls, auditoriums, and conference rooms. Moreover, amenities such as green spaces, on-campus dormitories, university health center, counselling center, student lounges, Offices of Student Affairs and Campus Life and Development, mail center, transportation services between campuses, catering facilities serving hot meals and sandwiches, gymnasium, Olympic

size football field and tennis courts, as well as WIFI-campus coverage, are offered to serve and support students in their programmes of study.

The main campus has about 85 classrooms and 25 laboratories. Classrooms are equipped with PCs and projectors to support students in their learning experience. Most laboratories are discipline-dedicated, while others are used for common multipurpose functions. Several classrooms are equipped with advanced technology for videoconferencing as well as smartboards.

The UOB boasts 7 libraries across all 4 of the geographic campuses. The library is run by the University Librarian with librarians positioned on all campuses. The Issam M. Fares Library Learning Centre, consisting of 5,000 square meters spread over 4 floors, is the main library on the main campus in the district of Koura and employs 15 staff members. The main library, which opened its doors in its current location in 2011, was designed to satisfy the latest innovations in educational technology and research facilities: classrooms with interactive whiteboards, videoconferencing and distance learning technologies, reading areas equipped with 70 computer stations, and two computer laboratories equipped with 48 computers.

The UOB libraries' collections consist of 81,641 print books titles in 102,472 volumes and 999 print periodicals titles in 7,311 bound volumes. The libraries provide access to 597,120 electronic books, 74,513 electronic journals in 78 subscription databases. In addition to these databases, the libraries provide access to 32 open access databases.

### **Assessment**

The UOB's infrastructure and equipment are appropriate to the defined strategic objectives. The infrastructure provides quantitatively and qualitatively sufficient access to learning materials for the students enrolled in the institution's degree programmes.

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a positive impact on online teaching and the online procurement of literature. Students have access to online journals and books. In the discussion rounds, students emphasized how important the implementation of sustainability at the UOB is to them. They consistently try to consume all teaching and literature materials digitally in order to avoid the unnecessary printing of paper.

The institution also uses plagiarism-checking software to ensure the originality of students' work. The UOB uses a university management system that tracks the student journey from enrollment to graduation. Discussions with students and staff revealed that the UOB has sufficient resources to run a higher education institution.

### **Conclusion**

The criterion is **fulfilled**.

## 6 Quality Assurance

*The institution has adequate quality assurance procedures and mechanisms to ensure that the results of quality assurance procedures are for continuous improvement [Examination Area 2, ESG Standard 1.1, ESG Standard 1.7, ESG Standard 1.9, ESG Standard 1.10].*

### Implementation

Quality assurance and accountability in the provision of education and services are at the heart of the UOB strategy. The UOB aims at nurturing a culture of trust among university stakeholders as well as national, regional, and international stakeholders in relation to systems and procedures in the areas of teaching and learning, research, and services.

The monitoring and evaluation system of educational programmes is one quality assurance strategy that supports accountability. The academic freedom of faculty members to produce and transmit knowledge for the benefit of students and society is the guiding principle. Academic freedom allows for an environment that is conducive to questioning, creating, and experimentation. The systems at the UOB that support academic freedom include a faculty member's right to select course materials and course content, pedagogical strategies, types of assignments and assessments of student performance.

Institutional autonomy is another aspect of quality assurance linked to academic freedom. The UOB and its degrees are licensed to operate by the Lebanese government. Once the criteria for the licensing of a degree have been met and are verified by the MEHE, the UOB has autonomy in developing the specific courses' content and making the pedagogical choices.

Quality assurance is not only recognized as a strategy at the UOB, but also as an institutional entity shown by the establishment of the IQAU and the ODIR in January of 2019. Their role is to support the decisions of the Offices of the President and the Provost in monitoring and assessing the achievement of the UOB's mission and vision and the outcomes of its educational programmes, as well as founding the process of institutional continuous improvement on evidence derived from data collection and analysis.

With a view to continuous quality improvement, the UOB implements a comprehensive review of institutional policies and practices. An example is the policy management project called the Internal Process Documentation (IPD), approved in 2020, with the goal to review and evaluate the policies, procedures, and processes guiding institutional operations. Following internal working groups among faculty and staff stakeholders, IPD deliverables were archived in a systematic way on a central repository into categories: internal process documents, internal procedures, internal policies, workflows, organizational charts, and job descriptions for evaluation.

The professional staff at the UOB supports the management of educational programmes and is adequate in size to fulfil its job description. The credentials of the professional staff also match the position they hold. Annual appraisal forms are filled in by the Dean to ensure good practices in staff performance and to identify areas for performance improvement. Resource deployment within faculties or departments is performed on a need's basis. The monitoring and evaluation activities of educational programs at the UOB involves the collaboration of the principal stakeholders which include its students, faculty members, and administration. Members from all academic faculties have a say in internal stakeholders' representation. These university wide committees serve the stakeholders in institutional business and activities of ongoing importance to UOB's continued growth and improvement in teaching and learning, research, services, or administration. A mechanism to achieve this is the UCC which is composed of faculty members from each faculty and meets upon the request of the Office of the Provost to address new educational programmes proposed by faculties. The UOB collects and analyzes the following list of outcome data during student enrollment in study programmes and after their program achievement: results of student assessments, course/laboratory evaluation surveys, university evaluation dashboards, student progression and achievement, student admission, performance of student cohorts, graduating senior surveys or exit surveys, performance of graduates and alumni surveys.

### **Assessment**

The implementation of the quality assurance system at the UOB shows that quantitative and qualitative instruments are used to monitor both the implementation of the strategic planning at university and faculty level and to monitor and evaluate the current state of quality of education with regard to the individual study programmes. The talks with the various stakeholders have shown that there is a regular monitoring and auditing of syllabi at departmental level. Data are being collected and channelled back to the various stakeholders (Deans and Chairs), who are responsible for taking action in case of any major quality problem.

Student feedback is collected in paper pencil method in the form of course evaluations and internship evaluations and the students the expert panel met in the interviews all reported a general open-door-policy at the UOB, which enables them to openly and informally communicate their needs and views to the teaching staff and academic advisors and which guarantees that their concerns are heard and taken seriously. In most of the faculties, students are members of the curriculum committees. The students reported about current plans to establish a kind of "student advisory board" on university level. New study programmes are created based on current societal needs and on market analysis results and feasibility studies. Representatives from the industry and other employers are integrated in the process; results from alumni and employer surveys are used. The expert group gained the impression that in this respect

the externals are integrated in the process, however not in each faculty in the same systematic way. New study programmes and major changes have to be licensed from the MEHE, but smaller changes are discussed within the Curriculum Committee and can be implemented directly. So far, there is no national accreditation of study programmes, but the internal quality management foresees that there is at least one internationally accredited programme in every faculty.

During the interviews with the expert group, the various stakeholders of UOB showed that they have a strong commitment for a high quality of teaching, learning and services, which is also mirrored in the fact that UOB obtains a good position in the QS rankings. Each faculty has shown their own approaches and their own focus areas. “Quality Champions” were nominated throughout the faculties, which highlight existing quality projects or initiatives with pilot character. In order to evaluate the status quo, a SWOT analysis and a specific “Quality Diagnosis Study” to check the compliance with ESG quality standards have been undertaken. The identified weaker points are currently used to work on a more systematic approach at university level. The expert group acknowledges the efforts which are currently taken in order to systematize the various existing good practices in quality assurance and recommends to develop some kind of overall “Quality Policy Manual”, in which the underlying principles (such as the student-centered approach) are summed up as institutional macro- level guidelines, while at the same time keeping the space for faculty specific solutions to implement the institutional principles. In such a manual, the existing continuous improvement processes should explicitly be described, and the closing of the loop of the PDCA cycle should be given attention. In that sense, the expert group encourages the UOB to continue the ongoing implementation of the process management system, in which the consolidated flowcharts and regulations for the standard processes are collected and managed transparently, and include the quality assurance processes accordingly.

All in all, the expert group is convinced that quality assurance has a high strategic priority for the UOB. All stakeholders are deeply committed to living the quality cycle implicitly in their daily tasks by fulfilling their assigned tasks and roles and by being committed to an open-door policy and to a pragmatic problem-solving manner. The necessary next step would be to explicitly formulate an UOB quality policy document.

## **Conclusion**

The criterion is fulfilled because the relevant ESG standard is implemented in practice. The following recommendations should help the UOB to document and further develop their quality practice even more precisely and more explicitly.

**Conclusion**

The criterion is **fulfilled**.

**Recommendations:**

1. The currently planned process management system should also include process descriptions regarding the quality management system with clear responsibilities.
2. In order to further develop quality management, the university should make sure that all control loops of the PDCA cycle are closed; an explicit concept of continuous improvement should be developed that derives institutionalized recommendations for action.
3. A regular exchange with the industry and employers should be ensured by an advisory board (or similar). This could be established at the program level or at the faculty level, if not yet in place.
4. An evaluation of the UOB's service facilities such as the library, transportation, counseling services, etc. should be conducted in order to guarantee an encompassing evaluation system.
5. As part of UOB's quality concept, the student-centered learning concept should be developed more explicitly and reviewed in the faculties. This could be flanked by appropriate workshops for teachers and module leaders.

## 7 Internationalization

*This criterion only applies in those cases where internationalization is part of the institutional strategy [Vision and Objectives on Internationalization].*

### Implementation

The UOB aims at positioning itself in the upper area of HEIs in the MENA region and throughout the world. For this purpose it has developed an internationalization strategy which is consistent with its 2022-2027 strategic plan objectives. Among its objectives is to “promote a university climate that attracts local, regional, and international scholars, staff, and students”. This is realized through a variety of mechanisms that include: educational academic programmes, applied and translational research (Joint-PhDs, projects), accreditation procedures, international orientation activities, international institutional affiliations, diversity of full-time students and faculty members, and dedicated services to the community.

The office of the Vice President for Internationalization and Engagement (VPIandE) was created in 2019 to oversee the achievement of this goal. The VPIandE specifically oversees all affiliations with international institutions and creates an internationalization strategy for both the short-term and long-term. This position complements the 2017 former university president decision (December 21, 2017) to establish a European Projects Unit (573522-EPP-1-2016-1-FR-EPPKA2-CB) European project design and management In the South MediTerranean (EPU or EuNIT) region which is currently located in the office of the VPIandE. The EuNIT is a European project that aimed, over 3 years (2016-2019), to increase international activity in HEIs in the Southern Mediterranean region.

The UOB is committed to provide students with knowledge, skills and competences to serve societal needs and evolve locally, nationally and internationally. Three languages are spoken in UOB classrooms: English, Arabic and French in accordance with the educational programme requisites at each faculty, with English being predominant. The ALBA school of Fine Arts at the Dekwaneh Campus teaches its curricula exclusively in French, as well as French language tracks in Education and Physical Education. Arabic is the language of study for the Arabic literature programme, and the Christian-Muslim studies programme and a few courses in the Cultural Studies. For the last three academic years, 2021, 2022 and 2023, the UOB has been ranked among the top 540 universities in the QS World University Ranking and number 2 in Lebanon. The UOB has forged strong collaborations with European institutions to strengthen its educational programmes, to transfer knowledge and information, and to conduct research in the international area. In this context, UOB highly encourages the mobility of students and academic and professional staff, in both directions. To differentiate themselves from competitors, the UOB aims to establish unique centers of research to feed into the

learning environment and to provide a research-led teaching environment. The performance measures that indicate the success of the UOB's internationalization strategy include: strengthening curricula to be international and global, providing facilities for quality and applied research to increase knowledge, enhancing faculty and staff international competence and mobility, engaging with other HEIs and with industry via meaningful articulated MoUs.

In line with the internationalization strategy devised, the Faculty of Health Sciences has established an International Advisory Board (IAB). The IAB includes members from leading international universities engaged in health sciences education and research. The IAB advises the Dean on all academic developments and on the strategic growth of the faculty including fundraising.

Accreditation plays an important role in the internationalization strategy. Many students inquire about the status of accreditation of the institution and educational programmes by international agencies before taking a decision to enroll.

### **Assessment**

One of the key characteristics of the UOB is that it is in principle and in every part based on a strategy aiming at internationalization. The basic decision to implement the American HEI system and to provide study programmes in English language is one of the key elements of this strategy. In order to comply with the UOB's strategic plan, decisions are made that safeguard local, regional and world-wide visibility. Thus, strong traditions are kept when the study programmes of the ALBA school of Fine Arts are taught in French, and when programmes in Arabic literature or Christian-Muslim studies are taught in Arabic.

The UOB internationalization strategy covers all aspects of students (incomings, outgoing), staff members (international exchange and international recruitment) and institutional cooperations (concerning both research activities and joint study programmes).

The strategic relevance of internationalization is visible in the act to establish the office of the VPI and E in 2019; this guarantees a strong governance presence of internationalization aspects throughout the UOB. Administrative activities are well established, sufficient resources are continuously provided. Processes related to internationalization thus are systematically observed. Challenges became visible in recent years, some of which were strongly impacted by external factors, in particular the COVID-19 pandemic which drastically decreased mobility, and the economic crisis in the Lebanon which strongly impedes recruitment of professors from abroad. The UOB has created support systems to alleviate the effects, and it should continue



doing so by carefully monitoring specific problems. Currently, outgoing activities (student mobility; staff and lecturer cooperation networks; conference attendance and international publication) seem to deserve particular attention.

### **Conclusion**

The criterion is **fulfilled**.

### **Recommendations**

1. In order to increase the student outgoing rate, processes should be implemented through which students are continuously encouraged to study abroad or to conduct an international internship.
2. Processes should be implemented through which faculty is supported and enabled to work abroad, for example as guest lecturers.
3. Funding should be provided for international research cooperation, international conference attendance and publication in international peer-reviewed journals.

#### IV Recommendation to the Accreditation Commission of ACQUIN

##### 1 **Assessment of compliance with the Standards and Guidelines in the Higher European Area (ESG) in the actual official version and the German Council of Science and Humanities (WR)**

The institutional structures and performance were assessed on the basis of the "Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area" (ESG), criteria for the institutional accreditation of non-state HEIs of the German Council of Science and Humanities (WR) („Guidelines for the accreditation of non-state higher education institutions" Section B.IV), and the national or other relevant regulations.

The expert group concludes that the **ESG standards** 1.1 (Policy for quality assurance), 1.2 (Design and approval of programmes), 1.3 (Student-centered learning, teaching and assessment), 1.4 (Student admission, progression, recognition and certification), 1.5 (Teaching staff), 1.6 (Learning resources and student support), 1.7 (Information management), 1.8 (Public information), 1.9 (On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes) and 1.10 (Cyclical external quality assurance) are fulfilled.

The expert group concludes that the WR examination areas 1 (Institutional conception, profile, and development objectives), 2 (Governance structure, organization, and quality management), 3 (Staff), 4 (Study and teaching), 5 (Research), 6 (Equipment (rooms and facilities)) and 7 (Funding) are fulfilled.

The assessment criteria are as follows:

**Institutional Profile and Strategy: Strategic Planning, Mission and Vision.** The HEI has a clear mission statement in which the institutional profile, strategy, and objectives of the HEI are defined. The mission is consistent and complies with international standards. Academic bodies have adopted the mission, which is publicly available. The HEI has adequate resources to fulfil its mission and strategic planning.

The criterion is fulfilled.

**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**.

### **Teaching and Learning**

Objectives and content of study programmes are in accordance with the HEI's mission and strategy. Study programmes 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 programmes are clearly defined. The HEI offers professional support services for students. Support services have adequate staff.

The criterion is **fulfilled**.

### **Research**

Research activities fit into the mission of the institution. The structure of the HEI 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**.

### **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**.

### **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**.

### **Internationalization**

The HEI 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 **fulfilled**.

## 2 Accreditation Recommendation

The peer-review experts recommend an **unconditional accreditation** with the following **recommendations**:

### Recommendations

1. The involvement of the student body in the committee structures in the faculties should be increased.
2. The introduction of a student representative body for the entire university should be supported.
3. The community building and knowledge transfer activities with business and society are an opportunity to make UOB even more attractive to stakeholders, professors and new students at home and especially abroad. To this end, it is recommended that the Community Building and Professional Education businesses be strategically expanded and given higher priority. As a measure, it is suggested that the tasks be anchored in a business area of the Vice Presidents. Either as a separate new area or as an extension of an existing one, e.g. Enrollment Management and Alumni Relations. In addition, a knowledge transfer team or department should be established.
4. The UOB should systematically observe the intersection between teachers and students and their interaction about student-centered teaching and learning. This concerns in particular the discussion of course evaluation results. Different feedback strategies should be focused, and possibilities should be explored how evaluation results can directly impact future teaching and learning.
5. The UOB should systematically observe the intersection between faculties and study programmes about innovative approaches of student-centered teaching. This concerns in particular discussions about the generalizability and transfer potential of specific approaches like entrepreneurship as a teaching method or team-based and case-based learning curricula. While such concepts are developed in specific domains or study programmes, they might yield considerable spin-offs in other areas when they are broadly discussed.
6. The currently planned process management system should also include process descriptions regarding the quality management system with clear responsibilities.
7. In order to further develop quality management, the university should make sure that all control loops of the PDCA cycle are closed; an explicit concept of continuous improvement should be developed that derives institutionalized recommendations for action.

8. A regular exchange with the industry and employers should be ensured by an advisory board (or similar). This should be established at the program level or at the faculty level, if not yet in place.
9. An evaluation of the University's service facilities such as the library, transportation, counseling services, etc. could be conducted in order to guarantee an encompassing evaluation systems part of the UOB`s quality concept, the student-centered learning concept should be developed more explicitly and reviewed in the faculties. This could be flanked by appropriate workshops for teachers and module leaders .In order to increase the student outgoing rate, processes should be implement through which students are continuously encouraged to study abroad or to conduct an international internship.
10. Processes should be implemented through which faculty is supported and enabled to work abroad, for example as guest lecturers.
11. Funding should be provided for international research cooperation, international conference attendance and publication in international peer-reviewed journals.

## V Decisions of the Accreditation Commission of ACQUIN

Based on the evaluation report of the peer group and the statement of the university the Accreditation Commission of ACQUIN decided on its meeting on 4 December 2023 :

**The University of Balamand is institutionally accredited without conditions. The accreditation is limited until 30 September 2027.**

The following recommendations are given for the further development:

- The involvement of the student body in the committee structures in the faculties should be increased.
- The introduction of a student representative body for the entire university should be supported.
- The community building and knowledge transfer activities with business and society are an opportunity to make UOB even more attractive to stakeholders, professors and new students at home and especially abroad. To this end, it is recommended that the Community Building and Professional Education businesses be strategically expanded and given higher priority. As a measure, it is suggested that the tasks be anchored in a business area of the Vice Presidents. Either as a separate new area or as an extension of an existing one, e.g. Enrollment Management and Alumni Relations. In addition, a knowledge transfer team or department should be established.
- The UOB should systematically observe the intersection between teachers and students and their interaction about student-centered teaching and learning. This concerns in particular the discussion of course evaluation results. Different feedback strategies should be focused, and possibilities should be explored how evaluation results can directly impact future teaching and learning.
- The UOB should systematically observe the intersection between faculties and study programmes about innovative approaches of student-centered teaching. This concerns in particular discussions about the generalizability and transfer potential of specific approaches like entrepreneurship as a teaching method or team-based and case-based learning curricula. While such concepts are developed in specific domains or study programmes, they might yield considerable spin-offs in other areas when they are broadly discussed.
- The currently planned process management system should also include process descriptions regarding the quality management system with clear responsibilities.
- In order to further develop quality management, the university should make sure that all control loops of the PDCA cycle are closed; an explicit concept of continuous improvement should be developed that derives institutionalized recommendations for action.
- A regular exchange with the industry and employers should be ensured by an advisory board (or similar). This should be established at the program level or at the faculty level, if not yet in place.
- An evaluation of the University's service facilities such as the library, transportation, counseling services, etc. could be conducted in order to guarantee an encompassing evaluation systems part of the UOB's quality concept, the student-centered learning concept should

be developed more explicitly and reviewed in the faculties. This could be flanked by appropriate workshops for teachers and module leaders. In order to increase the student outgoing rate, processes should be implemented through which students are continuously encouraged to study abroad or to conduct an international internship.

- Processes should be implemented through which faculty is supported and enabled to work abroad, for example as guest lecturers.
- Funding should be provided for international research cooperation, international conference attendance and publication in international peer-reviewed journals.