

ASSESSMENT REPORT

**Holy Spirit University of Kaslik (USEK),
Lebanon**

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0. Introductory notes

The Holy Spirit University of Kaslik (Université Saint-Esprit de Kaslik – USEK) in Lebanon was institutionally accredited by **evalag** first in 2012, valid for five years. In 2016 the university decided to renew this accreditation.

The accreditation procedure was carried out by an international expert team from UK, Germany, Austria and Macedonia that assessed the university according to **evalag**'s criteria for international institutional accreditation dated 18 February 2016. These criteria follow the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area dated 15 May 2015.

The full compliance with the criteria is a requirement of awarding **evalag**'s international quality label for institutional accreditation.

1. The university and the Lebanese higher education system

1.1. Holy Spirit University of Kaslik (USEK)

The Holy Spirit University of Kaslik (USEK) is a Catholic university founded in 1938 by the Lebanese Maronite Order¹ (OLM). The university was one of the first seven universities recognised by the first Lebanese law of Higher Education promulgated in 1961, as a private Higher Education Institution delivering diplomas in Lebanon. The main campus of the university is located in Kaslik, approximately 15 km north of Beirut. Additionally, the university operates three smaller regional centres in Chekka, Rmeich and Zahle.

Currently, around 7.500 students are enrolled at USEK across its 144 undergraduate, graduate and doctoral programmes in 12 faculties:

- Pontifical Faculty of Theology
- Faculty of Philosophy and Humanities
- Faculty of Letters (including the Institute of History)
- Faculty of Law (including the Higher Institute of Political and Administrative Sciences)
- Faculty of Business and Commercial Sciences
- Faculty of Music
- Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts
- Faculty of Agricultural and Food Sciences
- Faculty of Sciences
- Faculty of Engineering
- Faculty of Medicine and Medical Sciences (including Higher Institute of Nursing Sciences)
- Faculty of Religious and Oriental Studies

¹ The Lebanese Maronite Order, is a monastic order among the Levantine Catholic Maronite Church, which from the beginning has been especially a monastic Church. The order was founded in 1694.

Specifically, USEK defines itself as a trilingual university and offers education in English, French and Arabic. The language proficiency requirements and languages of instruction are defined based on the programme language delivery for which the applicant is applying: Hybrid (offered in French and English) and English for exclusively English sections. The Arabic language is defined by exception for specific majors at which the native language is at their core (Law, Theology, etc.).

As a private university, USEK does not receive any public funding to support its activities. Thus, the university relies on student fees as its main source of income.

Table 1 shows an overview of USEK.

| Holy Spirit University of Kaslik (USEK) | |
|--|------------------------|
| Founding year | 1938 |
| Number of students | 7,345 (Fall 2016-2017) |
| in Kaslik | 6,717 |
| in Chekka | 135 |
| in Rmeich | 86 |
| in Zahle | 407 |
| Full-time academic staff | 228 |
| Part-time academic staff | 669 |
| Administrative and technical staff | 343 |
| Academic units | 12 |
| Number of programmes | 144 |
| Undergraduate | 48 |
| Graduate | 56 |
| Doctoral | 40 |
| Budget (2015-2016) | |
| Revenues | 56.6 Mio \$ |
| Tuition fees alone | 61,9 Mio \$ |
| Expenditures | 49.7 Mio \$ |
| Student Financial Aid | 13,3 Mio \$ |
| Liabilities an net assets | 209 Mio \$ |

Table 1 – USEK in numbers

1.2. The Lebanese higher education system

The Lebanese higher education system dates back to 1866 when the Syrian Evangelical College (later renamed American University of Beirut (AUB)) was founded in Beirut. Nowadays, there are about 42 higher education institutions in Lebanon, most of which were legalised in the 1990s when the education system in the country rapidly expanded following 15 years of civil war over the period 1975-1990. All universities in Lebanon are private and rely on student tuition as their main source of income, except the

Lebanese University, which was founded in 1951 and is funded by the government. About 40 % of all students are enrolled at the Lebanese University which offers education tuition-free. There is no public funding for private universities.

In Lebanon, only students holding the Lebanese Baccalaureate based on 13 school years are eligible for admission in universities. The gross enrolment rate² in higher education in Lebanon has decreased very little over the past years. In 2015, it was at about 38 % with a share of women of 45 %. When compared with other countries, Lebanon's higher education enrolment rate is considered low (e.g. Germany: 68 %; Austria: 81 %, UK: 56 %)³.

Lebanon's higher education system operates under the supervision of the Directorate General of Higher Education, which is responsible for licensing and validating the degrees and disciplines offered by the institutions. New institutions and study programmes of private universities have to be licensed.

Higher education institutions in Lebanon can be classified as follows:

- Universities: these must include at least three faculties, one of which should be for human sciences and another should be for general sciences. Universities can grant all degrees, from Bachelor's degrees to doctoral studies;
- University colleges or institutes of technology: a university college or university institute of technology must have at least one faculty. University colleges usually deliver Bachelor's degrees, while a few can grant higher degrees.

The freedom and independence of higher education is guaranteed by the Lebanese constitution. There is no national framework for the definition of the subjects. Only in the faculties of law are there around 12 compulsory courses that must be included in the curriculum of all higher education.

As for the curriculum content defined at institutional level, it has to be approved by the Equivalence Committee at the Ministry. A general framework for curriculum content is defined where core courses must cover at least 40 % of the programme, plus 25 % of general requirement and the rest should cover faculty requirement and elective courses (general and field courses).

Two major credit systems are used in Lebanon: the American Credit system (U.S. credits) and the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation system (ECTS credits). The American credits are roughly based on contact-hours. The ECTS is student-centred and calculates the relative workload of the student as an average which includes also individual study time.

Almost all the higher education institutions adopt a form of 3-cycles credit-based system (Bachelor-Masters-Doctoral):

- The first degree is a Bachelor degree (B.Sc. or B.A.) obtained after three years of study following the baccalaureate.
- Students then need at least two more years of study to obtain a Master degree (M.Sc. or M.A.). A teaching diploma (TD) can be obtained after four years of study following the baccalaureate.

² Gross enrolment rate in higher education is defined as the number of students enrolled in universities, regardless of age, divided by the population of the age group that officially corresponds to higher education level.

³ Cf. <http://data.uis.unesco.org/?queryid=142> (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, accessed 15 February 2017)

- A Master graduate gets a Ph.D. degree after a study period of at least three years.

Research activities are in general low in Lebanon. This is due to the fact that the CNRS (Conseil National de la Recherche Scientifique) is the only government-funded source for funding research at national level. All other research activities are undertaken by the private institutions themselves. Apart from the three doctoral schools established within the Lebanese University in 2008, there are no research institutes in the country and only a few universities provide doctoral studies. Research is undertaken within the doctoral programmes that exist in the higher education institutions (HEIs) or with a special exchange scheme or bilateral agreements established between Lebanese institutions and international partners. Individual researchers may also benefit from funds provided by the CNRS, CEDRE or the AUF (Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie).

Furthermore, there is still no national external quality assurance system. Certain draft laws, one concerning the implementation of quality assurance procedures in the institutions which would lead to a sort of accreditation, another for the creation of a National Quality Assurance Agency, are still waiting to be implemented.

Meanwhile, some higher education institutions have realised internal quality control within their structure; most are trying to receive accreditation from external international bodies in the United States and from Europe.

Some quality assurance procedures have already been introduced into the national licensing mechanisms intended for establishing a higher education institution, such as self-reports, audits and site-visits.

1.3. USEK in the Lebanese national context

As one of the first legally recognised Lebanese universities in 1961, USEK is an active member in national policy making activities through many committees:

- Committee of Equivalence at the Ministry formed upon the enactment of the Lebanese Law of Higher Education by Ministerial Decree in 1962;
- Task Force of Governance Development in Lebanese Higher Education Institutions formed by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education in 2013;
- Council of the Universities Association of Lebanon;
- Quality Assurance Committee of the Universities Association of Lebanon (Chair);
- Higher Education Policy Committee of the Universities Association of Lebanon;
- Scientific Research Committee of the Universities Association of Lebanon.

Besides, USEK has a leading role in the national project “Professional Standards Framework for Excellence in Teaching and Learning in Lebanese Universities (E-TALEB)” co-funded by the Erasmus+ programme of the European Union. This project emphasises the need for more cooperation between the universities in Lebanon and focuses on supporting the initial and continuing professional development of staff engaged in teaching. Dynamic approaches to teaching and learning through creativity, innovation and continuous development in diverse academic disciplines and/or professional settings are fostered.

Seven other Lebanese universities, the Directorate General of Higher Education and several European partners take an active part in this project. Considering the Lebanese situation with private higher education institutions “mainly pegged to a political or religious group, which serves to fuel sectarianism and hinders opportunities for national solidarity and integration”⁴ USEK’s activities to bring universities together under a common purpose are highly motivated.

2. The accreditation procedure

The assessment procedure was carried out with an informed peer review on the basis of a self-evaluation report provided by the university, a three-day site visit of international experts, an assessment report by the expert team and the accreditation decision taken by **evalag**’s Accreditation Commission.

The procedure applies the fitness for purpose approach which assesses to what extent the institution is able to achieve its self-set objectives. The point of reference is **evalag**’s criteria for international institutional accreditation that follow the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area dated 15 May 2015.

These criteria focus first of all on the profile and the strategies of the institution which are in the centre of the procedure. The governance structures which are used to implement strategies, the fields of activities of the institution and cross-cutting issues which influence the implementation and the success of the institutional strategies are also examined. By assessing compliance with the criteria, **evalag** checks whether the institution has objectives with regard to each criterion, whether it implements activities which serve to reach the defined objectives, and whether it uses mechanisms to assess the results of its activities. Additionally, **evalag** assesses if the institution meets academic standards that are accepted in Europe and internationally.

The following criteria are used:

- Institutional profile and strategy
- Governance
- Resources
- Teaching and learning
- Research
- Institution and society
- Quality assurance

The review team expresses the extent of compliance of the criteria with the following assessments: passed, passed subject to conditions, suspension of the accreditation procedure or failed.

As a first step of the procedure and in preparation for the site visit, USEK produced a self-evaluation report based on guidelines provided by **evalag**. At the same time **evalag** formed an expert team consisting of three professorial experts and one student expert:

⁴ Paul Doyle, Lebanon, Bradt Travel Guides 2017, p.55

| | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| Prof. em. Jethro Newton Ph.D. | Senior Adviser to the European University Association and former Dean of Academic Quality Enhancement at the University of Chester, United Kingdom; |
| Prof. Dr. Dr. Godehard Ruppert | President of the University of Bamberg and of the Virtual University of Bavaria (vhb), Germany; |
| Prof. (FH) Dr. Tanja Eiselen | President of the University of Applied Sciences FH Vorarlberg, Dornbirn, Austria; |
| Marija Vasilevska LLB. | Student of Finance and Financial Law, University of Skopje, Macedonia. |

All experts had declared to be free of any conflict of interest.

The site visit took place from 7 to 10 February 2017 at USEK. During the site visit the expert team met with the President Rev. Fr. Professor Georges Hobeika, Ph.D., the Provost and Chair of Accreditation Committees Georges Yahchouchi, Ph.D., with the vice-presidents and the heads of departments, academic and administrative staff, students, alumni and employers, and visited selected facilities of the university.

The expert team produced an assessment report which was submitted to the university for correction of potential factual errors on 6 April 2017.

From **evalag**'s side, the procedure was coordinated by Mr. Georg Seppmann with back office assistance of Ms. Julia Greger in Mannheim.

The expert team experienced extraordinary support during their site visit from the administrative staff from the Offices of the Provost and the Quality Assurance and Institutional Effectiveness Office (QA-IE): Ms. Nathalie Bouldoukian, Ms. Sandra Akiki, Ms. Krystal Kaloust, Ms. Sylvie Sebaaly and Ms. Vanessa Sfeir.

The following assessment report is structured along the assessment criteria which are the basis of **evalag**'s institutional accreditation. After a short description of the criterion, each chapter starts with a presentation of the current status regarding the criterion which is based on the information in the self-assessment report of the university and the information gathered during the site visit. On this basis, the expert team assesses the criterion. Finally, the experts list their recommendations for further improvement.

3. Institutional assessment

3.1. Institutional profile and strategy

The institutional profile and strategy define according to the criteria the main activities of a higher education institution. Therefore, it is at the centre of the institutional accreditation procedure. Applying the fitness for purpose approach, the experts mainly check whether an institution has a clearly defined strategy which fits the institutional profile and whether the strategies and profile of the institution comply with internationally accepted standards. The experts also review the processes for the definition of strategies. Furthermore, they look whether the strategies are adequate to reach the institutional objectives.

Current status

Strategic profile

USEK's self-image refers to more than 400 years of teaching philosophy and theology by the Lebanese Maronite Order (OLM) in this very region. Albeit with strong bonding to Catholic order tradition, USEK describes itself as open to the world and to new ideas and technologies and focusses on student-centred teaching and learning. Its self-defined goal is to become an international university ("American-style"⁵) serving the local and regional community without breaking with its tradition as a private Catholic higher education institution. This is manifested both in USEK's core values and its mission statement "to contribute to the development of all its students through quality educational programmes and research in various fields of study. ... USEK intends to prepare future leaders for innovation, professional growth and life-long learning, in Lebanon, within the Middle East and throughout the world. USEK is committed to a faith-based educational development of its students rooted in the Catholic tradition whereby spiritual values and ethics as well as respect for cultural and religious pluralism are promoted."⁶



Table 2 – USEK Core values

Overall, USEK's mission covers two dimensions: the educational mission and the preservation and promotion of the Maronite cultural heritage including a "community spirit" of respectfulness and diversity.

The current strategic planning dates from December 2014 and covers the years 2015-2018. The described nine major strategic directions are aligned with the university core values and the institutional mission through the various goals defined in the areas of teaching and learning, research, institutional governance, internationalisation, services to society, equal opportunities and diversity:⁷

⁵ Cf. USEK language policy

⁶ Cf. <http://www.usek.edu.lb/en/usek-in-brief/mission> (accessed 15 February 2017)

⁷ Cf. <http://www.usek.edu.lb/en/about-usek/strategic-planning> (accessed 15 February 2017)

- A. Ensure the continuance and deepening of a strong, mission-based, academically rigorous Catholic identity;
- B. Realise USEK academic programmes as a distinctive model of undergraduate and graduate students' academic achievements and career success;
- C. Enhance organisational excellence by sustaining a culture of continuous improvement and development;
- D. To foster the university local engagement through public and social service, extending the reach of our educational programmes, strategic partnership, and students' civic commitment;
- E. Achieve distinction in globalising the university;
- F. To foster a vibrant successful and interactive research community that generates ideas and makes a positive contribution to the societal cultural, environmental, health and wealth development of Lebanon and global communities;
- G. To value, support, and develop the potential of our staff team building to make the university a stimulating and successful place to work;
- H. To provide a cutting edge, innovative and stimulating teaching and learning environment;
- I. To fully utilise the potential of USEK main campus and regional campuses in serving the students, faculty and staff and provide a campus model in information technology, energy saving and environmental sustainability.

Definition process

Prior to 2012, the strategic planning process was mainly carried out at the university central level, primarily elaborated by the University President (Rector at that time) on basis of information gathered from faculties and from the administration. In order to integrate stakeholders in the strategic planning of the university, USEK amended its by-laws and created with the Board of Trustees (BOT) a strategic board responsible for the strategic development of the university which should integrate the stakeholders' views.

Therefore, the strategic planning 2015-2018 was discussed in an open debate during the Academic and Research Council, and later presented by the President to the OLM Board to approve its conformity with the university and OLM missions. In 2015, after the establishment of the BOT, the strategic planning was discussed and approved by the BOT members. At the same time, the USEK has adopted a new process for strategic planning and assessment at the academic and administrative units' levels in order to ensure that unit goals are mapped to the university goals and the institutional profile, as well as to assess the implementation of all the goals at the institutional and unit levels. For this purpose, the university has adopted the Institutional Assessment Software Tk20 that was customized to support the process. The QA-IE provided many training sessions to all the units to help them to map their own unit strategic planning directly to the university strategic goals. As for the achievement of these goals, units are required to identify their yearly objectives that enable them to achieve 3-year cycle goals. Through the year, the units have to add their performed activities and performance indicators associated to these objectives. Adding to that an annual activity report is automatically generated by the system and presented by all academic and administrative units to the University President and the Board of Trustees. This report includes the unit mission, vision, 3-year goals, achievements for the past year including the objec-

tives, activities and performance indicators and finally the objectives for subsequent years.

Assessment

Strategic profile

Due to the experts USEK shows a clear and transparent institutional profile that fits with the character of a Catholic university. The strategies pursued by the university are closely and very consistently linked with the university mission and in accordance with the traditional expectations of Lebanese society, which mostly value teaching and learning. Thus, the university focuses its main activities on serving the Lebanese Christian communities and Lebanese society at large and to convey humanistic values. This explains the focus on teaching and learning and its strong student services and student support while pursuing research is clearly a lesser priority. This national context also explains the expansion on new academic fields to meet the needs of the Lebanese labour market. Regarding its international activities the trilingual language policy is most notable, whereas exchange activities are at lower levels.

All staff members, students and alumni with whom the experts met showed strong loyalty to USEK's value-oriented, humanistic mission and its further development.

According to the experts, the university's strategy is clearly deduced from the mission and it approaches a highly professional manner. The way in which the university uses its mission and vision to derive its strategies must be appreciated.

The strategic goals reflect how USEK aims at institutional effectiveness and efficiency to improve continuously teaching and learning. The whole staff are familiar with these goals, and they seem widely accepted, even internalised. Staff as well as the other stakeholders seem to be highly committed to improve further. Overall, it has to be noted that the institution not only proclaims a mission and goals but acts in accordance with them. Undoubtedly, USEK's strategies and activities meet the internationally accepted standards for higher education institutions.

Definition process

Compared to 2012 USEK has made considerable progress. The definition process now involves more stakeholders and is made on a broader base. The recommendations made in the 2012 report to define performance indicators more clearly and to consider the results in further planning or adjusting the university activities have been implemented with the introduction of the Institutional Assessment Software Tk20.

The definition process takes account of international practices in the methods of preparing strategic plans.

Adequacy

Overall, the experts' assessment is that the strategies of USEK are consistent with its mission and profile. The strategies and activities are adequate for achieving the intended objectives.

Areas for improvement

The assessment report from 2012 noted a process of strategic development that was strongly focussed on the university central level and especially on the leadership of the University President (Rector at that time). It was also mentioned, that this advantage in matter of efficiency and institutional dynamics could lead to a negligence of stakeholder inclusion.

Since then, the university has made notable progress through new bylaws, the establishment of the Board of Trustees and the redesign of decision making processes.

The experts see the university as moving in the right direction. But, in preparing the new strategic plan even more steps should be taken in the early stages of drafting to consult across the university to obtain views of institutional and strategic priorities.

Recommendations

As USEK devises its new strategic plan the university should develop a process for enabling discussion at faculty level and with external and internal stakeholders from the very beginning. The conditions for such a process are already given.

Further data on demographic changes, the Lebanese labour market and national and international professional requirements should be collected and considered in the further strategic planning. Since there has been no regular analysis of the Lebanese education and labour market up to now, it could even be a great opportunity for USEK to develop scientific expertise in this field which could have positive effects on Lebanese society and in domestic policy.

3.2. Governance

The criterion “governance” focuses on the internal governance and decision making processes of the institution. The experts check the clarity and transparency of the organisational provisions and governance structure. They observe whether governance structures are adequate to support the institutional strategies and how decision making processes are organised. Furthermore, the experts check how stakeholder groups are involved in governance, whether the institution provides relevant information about its activities for the internal and external public and whether academic freedom is assured.

Current situation

USEK is a private university which is legally owned by the Lebanese Maronite Order (OLM). As a private university, it is autonomous from the Lebanese state and does not benefit from state funding. The OLM guarantees the sustainability of the university.

The university has always been governed by its legal owner, the OLM Supreme Council which also nominates the university officers and deans. In 2012, the University President and the OLM Supreme Council (Governing Board at that time) opened the debate for the development of USEK Bylaws and the foundation of the Board of Trustees in order to strengthen the University independence and mission through an improved shared governance structure while remaining faithful to the traditions of the University and to the full commitment of OLM to support USEK’s educational mission.

University governance and structure, decision making processes

Based on the new bylaws published on the University website, the OLM Supreme Council has delegated the governance of the University to the Board of Trustees (BOT) which includes higher education leaders as well as business leaders in Lebanon and abroad, all standing for a strong belief in the mission of the University and highly engaged in public good. The main aim of these members is the advancement of the institution's excellence at the academic, administrative and financial levels.

So, the university governance structure consists of:

- The Board of Trustees (BOT): 23 members including the University President, the OLM Second Assistant General and higher education leaders and business leaders in Lebanon and abroad. Responsibilities: general, academic and financial policy-making functions. The BOT exercises institutional authority as set forth in the bylaws and has the authority to carry out all lawful functions. In addition to the BOT Executive committee, there are currently seven standing BOT committees are formed:
 - Academic Affairs Committee
 - Audit Committee
 - Finance & Compensation Committee
 - Fundraising Committee
 - Institutional Planning and Sustainability Committee
 - Students Affairs Committee
 - Trustee & Governance Committee
- The University President who on behalf of the BOT is leading the university, performs all actions necessary for sustaining both the academic and fiscal affairs and implements decisions made by the BOT. All nominations done inside the university are made by the President with the consultation of faculty members. He also presides over the Executive Committee and the Academic and Research Council.
- The University Executive Committee includes the President, the Vice-Presidents, the Provost and the Deputy Presidents. This committee develops the university's strategic priorities and resource allocations, reviews the university institutional effectiveness and annual reports and develops bylaws related to faculty members and human resources.
- The Academic and Research Council includes the President, the Vice-Presidents, the Provost, the Deputy Presidents, the deans, the director of library and two full-time faculty members. This council makes academic and management operating decisions and validates policies relevant to academic enhancement before being proposed to the Board of Trustees. These policies are mainly the student selection policy and criteria, the academic rules, the academic calendar, the proposals of institutional partnerships, decisions for creating new centres of research, proposals of establishing or amending curricula.
- The Academic Units Councils: At the unit level, the Academic Units Councils are composed of the Head of the Academic unit, the Head of the Doctoral Commission, the Associate Dean(s), the Heads of Departments or Heads of Studies Programs. The Academic Unit Council judges the equivalence of studies concerning the admission of students. Decisions should be ratified by the

university's Admission Commission. The Council also looks into and proposes development for the student selection requirements, files of students on probation, curricula, proposals of inter-university conventions, proposals of conventions with the private or public sector, research projects and programs, academic and scientific events. It is up to the Academic Unit Council to ensure the implementation of study regulations.

At this very moment there are 12 academic units (faculties).⁸

- The Management Board: The Heads of offices and services are convened by the President for regular meetings in the form of the Management Board. The convening of the Heads of non-academic units may be total or partial and may involve other members of the university, according to the agenda of the meeting. The Vice President for Community Life is member of the management board and he is responsible for the coordination of different office activities.
- Further committees and commissions: At the institutional level, the university has established committees and commissions in order to promote the cooperation between governance, academic units and administrative units. Their role is to spread a "high quality culture within the university", to guarantee the respect of the university mission and strategy, and to promote the participation of full-time faculty members and employees from various units in the decision making processes. Below are the committees and commissions established at USEK:

- Humanities & Social Sciences Accreditation Committee, in charge of the implementation of evalag accreditation roadmap
- Computing, Sciences & Engineering Programmes Accreditation Committee, in charge of the implementation of ABET accreditation roadmap
- Architecture Programmes Accreditation Committee, in charge of the implementation of NAAB accreditation roadmap
- Business Programmes Accreditation Committee, in charge of the implementation of AACSB accreditation roadmap
- The Peers Committee, responsible for the evaluation of the Faculty's performance in accordance with the Faculty bylaws
- The Ad hoc Committees for the Preselection of teaching candidates, responsible for the evaluation of teaching candidates in accordance with the Faculty bylaws (committees are created per discipline)
- The Admission Commission, responsible for the coordination of the student selection policy and criteria
- The Doctoral College Council, responsible for the postgraduate studies management
- The Disciplinary Council, responsible for university disciplinary concerns
- The Green Committee, responsible for the implementation of the green initiative at the University

The non-academic units and the Regional University Centres complete the organisational structure:

⁸ Cf. p. 2

- The Administrative and Technical units: USEK comprises more than 20 non-academic units: Alumni Office / Architecture and Maintenance Office / Career Services Office / Communications and Events Office / Courier Service / Editing Office / Human Resources - Administrative and Technical Personnel Office / Human Resources - Teaching Personnel Office / International Affairs Office / IT Office / Laboratories Service / Legal Affairs Office / Library / Marketing Office / Office of Relations with Public Administration / Orientation Office / Press Office / Proctoring Office / Public Relations Office / Quality Assurance and Institutional Effectiveness Office / Registrar Office / Social Services Office / Student Affairs Office / University Pastoral Office / University Restaurant / USEK Publications Office (PUSEK) / Sports Service / The Teaching and Learning Excellence Center
- The Research Units: Doctoral College / Higher Center for Research / Latin Studies Center / Latin American Studies and Cultures Center / Phoenix Center for Lebanese Studies / Entrepreneurship Center / CIRAME (Centre International de Recherche en Applications Managériales et Économiques)
- The USEK Library: It consists of the Main Library at the Kaslik campus, the library of the Regional University Center of Chekka and the library of the Regional University Center of Zahle. The USEK Library is also responsible for maintaining and managing the Center for Written Heritage Conservation and the Center for Reprography and Digitization.
- University Regional Centres: In addition to the main campus, USEK has four regional university centres: Chekka in the North of Lebanon, Zahle in the Beqaa valley, Rmeich in the South of Lebanon, Jbeil (Higher Institute of Nursing Sciences affiliated to the Faculty of Medicine and Medical Sciences).

Formal participation of students in decision making processes is underdeveloped, mostly to avoid harassment by political student groups as is the case at other Lebanese universities. Therefore, any organised student groups are banned and student participation takes place more informally, by selection of individual students. This decision seems to be accepted by the whole university community⁹. Nevertheless, USEK is currently considering a policy for more formal ways of participation of students in decision making processes and enhancement of academic programmes.

Clarity and transparency and information policy

The USEK's governance structure, the persons and committees involved, the bylaws and all information concerning the organisation is openly accessible and published on the university's website. News and information about campus activities are regularly posted both on the university website and on Facebook where the official Facebook page has more than 86.000 followers¹⁰.

Furthermore, there are several leaflets and printed brochures available about the USEK.

⁹ This differentiates USEK from most other universities in Lebanon which do not ban political groups from their campuses.

¹⁰ 86.183 on 02-03-2017

Assessment

University governance

According to the expert team, the governance structures of USEK are by and large clear and transparently documented. The responsibilities of the main university bodies are described in the bylaws of the institution which is online openly accessible. The assessment report from 2012 noted, that participation of the entire university community should be strengthened and encouraged. In the meantime, the USEK has followed this recommendation with new bylaws. The recent introduction of these new bylaws has prepared the university for the next phase of its development.

The changes in organisation and in operational processes carried out so far seem to be understood and widely accepted by the academic community of the university. The idea to become more efficient in providing excellent teaching and learning is shared by all the community.

Nevertheless in the view of the experts, much of the university's efforts still depend on single persons and personalities with strong positions. Even if this strengthens the organisation as a whole and makes the decision making processes easier and more effective, due care must be taken to ensure active involvement and participation of the wider institutional community.

Adequacy

For the experts, the governance structures seem to be adequate for a university of this size. The new bylaws, esp. the invention of the BOT and the position of the provost have proved valuable and effective.

Decision making and involvement of stakeholders

For the experts the decision making processes are clear, stakeholders are involved, the bylaws clearly describe the responsibilities. It would be helpful to create an organisational chart which illustrates responsibilities and processes - not only to increase transparency but to support a broader discussion on future development and adjustment.

The university has taken steps to provide opportunities for student involvement in formal structures at all levels of the university up to and including the board of trustees. The experts understand the difficulties with student involvement resulting from a volatile political situation in Lebanon. They appreciate that the USEK tries to guarantee a peaceful climate for studying and teaching and encourage the university to improve the possibilities for students to become active members of the university community.

Formal student representation remains a necessity for a modern and pluralistic university. The university is taking steps to try to establish ways of ensuring student participation in academic matters, quality issues and campus culture in general.

Academic freedom

The OLM as the owner of USEK has potentially a large influence on the university. Moreover, academic members of the Order serve as professors, some with leading positions in faculties: currently, three of the 12 deans of faculties are monks of the OLM (in 2012: eight of 15).

The academic staff are highly committed to the university and feels free both in scientific and teaching activities. In its interviews with university members and external stakeholders, the expert team formed the impression that the OLM restrains its influence on the current affairs of the university and assures the autonomy of the university in academic affairs. All groups consistently reported that there is no direct interference of the order in campus life. The Order does also not interfere in scientific content; in all faculties a free atmosphere can be observed.

As the experts learned during the site visit, there seems to be no competition between bigger and smaller faculties about the general conditions of teaching and research. The recently invented method of peer reviewing of classes is not openly rejected, but it appears to be really implemented only in some faculties.

Areas for improvement

The quality of data used for further planning should be improved, especially about mobility rates of staff and students. The experts doubt if the university has accurate information on the exact rates. The experts note also deficits in the collected data about the staff presented in the University Fact Book (no differentiation between female and male staff). The reporting system for research activities seems not to be followed by all researchers (see below).

As they implement the new bylaws further, the university should use this as an opportunity to achieve a better balance between centralisation and decentralisation and a stronger alignment between the top and the bottom of the organisation.

In the judgement of the experts, compared to its size USEK has still too high a number of academic units with its 12 faculties, which all represent different academic areas. Since 2012 the number has already been reduced but even the remaining 12 faculties differ significantly in the number of staff, students, and budget requirements are such that this might hinder effective management. In the view of the experts it is time to commence a university-wide communication process in conjunction with the goal of redesigning the faculties. This process should involve all stakeholders.

Experiences from comparable higher educational institutions abroad show an increase of control capabilities after redesigning the organisation of the faculties. Besides, greater faculties would improve an interdisciplinary culture and increase horizontal communication structures that could allow academic units to communicate and exchange good practices or even develop joint projects. These horizontal structures are still a little underdeveloped.

Recommendations

The expert team recommends USEK to further institutionalise participation and communication within the university. Possibilities for students to participate besides student elections should be further developed.

They also recommend to consider the number and configuration of the faculty structures with a view to achieving greater organisational efficiency and stronger coherence and cohesion between organisational units.

3.3. Resources

The criterion “resources” focuses on an appropriate resource endowment and deployment to sustain its core activities. The experts check whether there is professional

funding and financial management, whether the staff are adequate in qualification and number to support the institutional strategy, whether the search, hiring and tenure procedure are in line with international academic practices and whether resources, facilities and equipment are in accordance with the institutional strategy.

Current status

Financial resources and management

As a private university, USEK is completely responsible for the provision of resources to fulfil its mission and does not receive any money from the government. The university has to count mainly on tuition and on the fees collected from its students. According to the financial statements of USEK, over the last five years an average of 92 % of its source of funding came from student tuition fees. The revenues cover the operating expenses, and investments aimed at developing the university.

The financial resources of the university are expected to be continuously growing to meet USEK challenges. The revenues coming from students' fees provide stable resources due to the growing number of enrolment and to the periodical adjustment of fees that are still considered less than the market price or the fees of other private universities in Lebanon. The adjustment of fees in fall 2013 has led to a strong increase of the University revenues.

A further adjustment will also lead to a substantial increase in expected revenues. USEK is currently working to improve its fundraising strategy by strengthening links with local and international donors, and empowering the role of the Alumni. Some important activities and real estate projects are made possible by fundraising. For example, the Faculty of Medicine Building is funded by a donation from Byblos Bank. An Internationalisation Taskforce has been created in order to support faculty in finding funding opportunities for research and development projects.

Besides, USEK recently founded "The Holy Spirit Foundation" in the US. This foundation provides scholarships for students and works on fundraising for the university for the purpose of establishing an endowment.

USEK devotes more than 87 % of its gross income to the support of its educational purposes and programmes, such as the wages and salaries of faculty members and administrative employees, student financial aid, research, and travel related expenses and staff development, and materials and consumables relevant to learning resources.

The budget report is prepared yearly according to the academic year (August 1 - July 31) on the basis of the units heads' budget estimation. The distribution of funds between the faculties is based on a solidarity principle. Four times a year the Managerial Accountant generates the report of expenses and revenue vs. the planned budget per unit. All the unit reports are presented to the Financial Administrator. The Financial Administrator analyses the reports. In case of gaps, he discusses with the concerned responsible of unit and indicates the necessary notes on the report.

Human resources and the recruitment process

The staff of the university consists of 223 full-time and 672 part-time academic staff members and 343 administrative staff members.¹¹

The recruitment process of faculty members consists of numerous selection steps. After the initial preselection phase, the head of the academic unit initiates the recruitment request and submits it to the Provost for preauthorisation. As per the recruitment procedures in force at USEK, all the requests for candidate recruitment are evaluated by two committees:

- Firstly, by the Ad hoc Selection Committee, which interviews and assesses the candidate's teaching abilities and skills and her/his language proficiency level through a teaching demonstration that should be prepared in advance, along with supporting materials such as presentation, video, activities. The purpose of the interview and the teaching demonstration is to make sure that the candidate meets the following requirements indicated in the Rubric of Assessment for Part Time Faculty Selection:
 - High language proficiency level (according to the course assigned)
 - Adequate pedagogical content knowledge of the relevant discipline/course.
 - Appropriate teaching methods and skills.
 - Ability to engage the audience in the learning process.
 - Willingness to align her/his teaching methods with the course learning outcomes in order to reach the objectives of the curriculum.
 - Good understanding of the constructive feedback and assessment.
 - Willingness to dedicate his/her time to teaching and course preparation and to respect the deadlines of the university academic calendar.
 - Ability to use and explore the instructional technologies.
 - Willingness to be part of the professional development programs/practices implemented at USEK.
 - Good understanding of the USEK mission and culture, and has the ability to accept cultural differences and diversity.
- Secondly, the candidate is evaluated by the Peer Committee which evaluates her/his file and the authenticity of the relevant diplomas and working experience, in order to give her/him a certain rank, (varying between assistant, lecturer, assistant professor, associate professor and professor). Faculty members are then paid in accordance with the hierarchy of this rank.

In order to be accepted to a full-time position, the teacher should first be employed part-time and have a good academic and administrative record. For the first time, full-time teachers are appointed for one year. This appointment is then renewed by one year followed by three years renewals.

According to the recruitment process faculty members' qualifications must meet the required standard: Faculty members who teach undergraduate courses must hold a

¹¹ USEK has two categories of academic personnel or faculty members: full-timers and part-timers. Part-timers, who are engaged on a semester based contract, to lecture on one or many courses, are paid on a taught hour basis.

Doctoral or Graduate degree, whereas faculty members who teach graduate courses must hold a Doctoral degree in their teaching discipline or a related discipline.

All full-time faculty members are committed to teaching, academic activities, college service, development and scholarly research. During the hours when they are required to be present, they should provide, in one or more academic units, teaching, student supervision, tutorials management and research activities, while assuming, if need be, academic responsibilities or administrative functions. Full-time faculty members are assigned academic responsibilities, such as: Head of Academic Unit, Associate Dean, Head of Department, Course Coordinator, Major Coordinator, Head of Doctoral Committee, etc. In these cases, faculty members receive additional compensation to their monthly salary according to their level of responsibility.

The part-time faculty members are solely in charge of term teaching hours in one or several units.

The workload of full-time faculty members is defined according to their rank:

- 9 teaching hours per week and 30 hours presence per week for professors.
- 12 teaching hours per week and 35 hours presence per week for associate and assistant professors.
- 15 teaching hours per week and 35 hours presence per week for lecturers and assistants.

The numbers of full-time faculty members holding a Ph.D. has increased by 9 % since 2012. The ratio full-time vs. part-time faculty is 25 % full-time and 75 % part-time (an increase of +5 % full-time members compared to year 2012). 32 % of full-time faculty members and 41% of part-time members are females.

The average ratio between full-time faculty members and students is 28 (against 33 in 2021), due to optimisations in the faculties of Business and Commercial Sciences, Engineering, Law, Letters and Sciences.

The senior leadership team members are either: full-time faculty members assigned with administrative missions (such as President, Vice-President, Provost, Deputy President, Dean, Directors, Financial Administration) or employees that occupy the function of directors. 18 out of 41 members of senior leadership have more than 10 years of seniority at USEK. The administrative services are supervised by the Vice President for Community Life who oversees the administrative units and regional university centres of the university that are responsible for providing essential operations in support of the university's mission.

Staff quality assurance and evaluation

All full-time faculty members are subject to a yearly performance evaluation by the deans who have to express their opinion in accordance with a series of criteria and have to submit a yearly report to the President, detailing their academic and research activities, as well as their general contribution to the development of the academic unit. The reports are then submitted to the Peer Committee for evaluation. The promotion or the renewal of the faculty member's work contract depends on this evaluation. A faculty member can also, and at any time, request a promotion by submitting a request to the Teaching Personnel Office.

Administrative human resources

USEK currently employs 343 full-time administrative and technical staff members who provide administrative support for the academic units and administrative and technical units. 22 out of 27 employees who are graded as IV or V (director, vice-director, associate director, division manager, chief accountant, etc.) have more than five years of seniority at USEK. Two thirds of these employees have graduate degrees from recognized universities in Lebanon.

Performance evaluation of employees and auto-evaluation by the employees themselves are two main processes used for the evaluation and continuous development of staff. Furthermore, as well as the employee feedback on auto-evaluation and the Directors feedback on staff performance, the human resource office assesses employee's organisational behaviour. The summary of all feedback results are assembled in a compiled folder for needs analysis, initially prescribing action plans for related staff. Action plans could vary from training to a promotion or a job rotation; there could also be an incentive, depending on the level of performance of the designated employee.

The university also organizes special senior administrative staff training workshops and retreats held in the United States for subjects related to institutional effectiveness and academic programme review, institutional research and reporting, development and fundraising, international initiatives and globalisation, alumni, overview, and registration, records, grading, scheduling, and graduation services, university life, career services, student involvement, counselling and psychological services, human resources and payroll.

Facilities

The premises of USEK are well-maintained and are constantly being enlarged and upgraded. The university maintains modern laboratories equipped for teaching and applied research and a library of 3,230 square meters with 220,000 print volumes and an increasing number of electronic books and other electronic resources such as research databases. In the library, there are well designed and communication friendly common learning areas where students can work together. However, the places are only sufficient for 3% of students. The main library is open from 8:00 am to 7:00 pm from Monday to Friday and from 9:00 am to 1:00 pm on Saturdays. There is qualified support staff to help students in their research.

The university has also modern IT technologies to support the teaching and learning as much as for campus management.¹² Besides the use of an USEK email for life students benefit from the student information system Banner SIS with an integrated e-learning platform (Moodle) and an e-portfolio platform (Mahara). The last enables students and staff to create digital Portfolios with their professional, personal and educational development and achievement and keep that updated.

Meanwhile, 80 % of the students register online through the self-service facility of the Banner SIS or by using the USEK mobile app. The recently invented Institutional Assessment Software TK20¹³ assesses the student outcomes of the programmes in order to improve continuously and provide the best quality education to all the students.

The IT Office is currently working on adopting Data Analytics and business intelligence software to further provide input for decision making processes to the university man-

¹² USEK uses a HP ConvergedSystem combined with advanced virtualized blade servers.

¹³ Cf. p. 9

agement. They are also exploring the adoption of software for Advising and Degree Audit to sustain the student advice and graduation processes.

The BLUE evaluation system gathers students' perceptions on all the courses and services delivered during the semester; overall 95 % of students participate in the course feedback.

The property and buildings of the main campus are owned by USEK.

Assessment

Financial management and funding

The university relies for its funding almost exclusively on its tuitions. Students pay an average of approximately \$8,000 per year in tuition fees with variations between the programmes. In recent years, this allowed the university to sustain its operations, to spend a significant amount on student financial aid while, at the same time, investing in its campus. The faculties enjoy a certain budget autonomy which gives them some leeway in pursuing their projects. In general, the experts had the impression that desired projects do not fail for funding reasons.

With the establishment of the BOT, fund raising activities have begun. The experts see these activities as a good beginning to increasing independence from tuition fees.

The financial management is professional; the process of preparing the yearly budget is clear and executed with the collaboration of the faculties. In the interview with faculty members as well as with the Financial Department it became clear that this process works without any difficulties.

The deployment of resources is according to the expert team consistent with the mission of a student-centred institution. USEK spends about 58 % of its expenditures on its staff (teaching and administration) to provide the student services, which account for one third of total staff costs. Facilities represent about 7 %.

Staff

The staff of the university is, according to the expert team, appropriate to provide high quality education to its students and to develop research as 81 % of the 216 full-time academics hold a Ph.D. (In 2012 that was 73 %). The administrative staff is very professional. Altogether, the experts were impressed by the dynamic and motivated staff members, both academic and administrative, which are a big asset of USEK. The experts appreciate as well the extensive support provided to staff to improve the human resource base in areas such as pedagogic practice, higher qualifications and general capabilities.

The search and tenure procedures of the university seem to the expert team to fulfil by and large academic standards and ensure the selection of academics based on an academic decision.

In general, staff mobility rates at USEK are not remarkable. International mobility seems to be limited to short periods, e.g. participation of conferences, workshops etc. The university should make further efforts to increase the level of mobility, especially for longer periods abroad; that could be supported by more intense partnerships with universities abroad.

Facilities

The facilities of the university are appropriate for sustaining the teaching and, in some respects, the research activities of the university. USEK has modern equipment and a library that provides access to relevant literature and journals. The technical equipment which the experts saw during the site visit allows a high quality of teaching. This kind of equipment is also appropriate to carry out applied research projects and to deliver services to partners within Lebanese society.

The situation of working and study spaces dedicated for students seems not to be sufficient. Although impressive in the open and bright atmosphere of the reading room in the library, the number of places appears too small.

The IT infrastructure of the university is up to date and equipped with modern and functional software which was also affirmed by different stakeholder groups during the site visit.

Overall assessment

Altogether, USEK provides sufficient resources to sustain its operation at the desired quality level. Funding is sustainable but strongly dependent on student tuitions. The budget distribution follows largely the mission and strategy of the university. USEK has very committed and dynamic staff. The search and tenure procedures comply with academic standards. USEK has a well-maintained campus with modern facilities.

Recommendations

The university should continue its efforts to diversify sources of external funding, in particular through donations, endowments and sponsorship.

As for the work places for students, the university should establish more such places with tables and sockets across the whole campus.¹⁴ For instance, the lobby area of the “H” building would have enough and appropriate space to set up student work spaces, even for group work. It should be considered if there would be also a possibility to dedicate lecture rooms on the campus for student work rooms. Overall, in the library and in other buildings, the number of work spaces should be at least 13 %, measured by the number of students.

3.4. Teaching and learning

Teaching and learning is one of the main topics of higher education institutions. In the accreditation procedure the experts check whether the study programmes comply with the institutional strategy and national regulations. They also check the academic standards of the study programmes and how research and teaching are linked. The experts review whether the institution employs student centred teaching and learning processes which pay respect to the diversity of students and their needs. Moreover, they assess how the assessment of intended learning outcomes is organised and how the student life cycle is organised.

¹⁴ According to a study by the German HIS Hochschul-Informationen-System GmbH, universities should provide work place for students in an amount of altogether 13 % based on the number of students, 10 % at the library, 3 % across the whole campus. For Kaslik, this would mean 750 places in the library and additional 250 places across the campus. (Cf. Vogel / Woisch: Orte des Selbststudiums. HIS Forum Hochschule 7/2013, online at http://www.dzhw.eu/pdf/pub_fh/fh-201307.pdf, accessed on 4 April 2017.)

Current status

Teaching and learning with a view to the university strategy

The USEK sees a competitive advantage in the quality of its teaching and learning provided for students. Therefore, the university has established administrative and academic policies and procedures in order to promote good practices and to guarantee excellence. In 2013-2014, USEK adopted a new programme framework in order to unify the concept and structure of study programmes, to make it comparable to internationally offered programmes, to improve transparency and to promote assessment. With the implementation of the new programme framework and new general education requirements, all undergraduate programmes were reshaped to include programme mission derived from the institutional mission, the programme educational objectives, the programme learning outcomes and programme mapping of courses with the programme outcomes.

According to the university's mission to bring forth thoughtful and engaged students which are active citizens of the country, the region, and the world, with a critical and appreciative understanding of religious tradition, ethical theories and moral developments, the university has created general education requirements for all university students. In 2014 the university reviewed these requirements, increased the number of credits¹⁵ from 12-21 credits to at least 30 credits of the undergraduate studies curriculum and reconsidered the common core and specialisation & emphasis courses. This has led to gradually reduce the number of offered programmes from more than 300 in year 2012 to 144 programmes (with emphasises) in year 2017.

The general education parts include basic general knowledge, while taking into consideration that students who are enrolled in professional fields such as sciences and engineering should be exposed to the humanities and social sciences and students enrolled in humanities fields should be aware of natural sciences and quantitative reasoning. Besides, the university has imposed a multilingual language policy upon all programmes, except for theology and liturgy programmes: all students have to be able to study and work in English and French (with exception made for exclusively English sections). The majority of Lebanese students have graduated from private schools, with French as a first foreign language and English as a second foreign language. The language policy adopted by the university has strengthened the use of English, as a must, Students in all USEK undergraduate programmes have to enrol in courses delivered in English. The university offers intensive and remedial courses in English, according to the student level evaluated in the placement admission test. Students cannot graduate unless they reach the advanced level defined for each language (equivalent SAT or TOEFL for English, DELF equivalent level for French). The university catalogue shows that no programmes are delivered exclusively in French.

USEK has a unified admission procedure for all its programmes. Admission criteria include the previous degree, and depending on the programme, admission tests or letters of recommendation. For undergraduate students, language tests in accordance with the university's language policy are required.

Grading is performed on a common basis with a numerical grading system over 100 points. The course grades usually combine several assessments such as participation,

¹⁵ USEK uses the North American credit system. The credit is the measuring unit of the number of hours per semester. Every credit represents one teaching hour (50 minute) per week during a 15 week semester (including exams and tests). Therefore, a three credit course generally represents 45 hours of attendance, including exams.

homework and projects, midterm and final exams. The university offers specific counselling for students in order to avoid and reduce drop-out. (The average rate of drop-out is about 9 %.)

The university continuously develops new programmes and educational strategies, in order to meet the demands of the labour market, stakeholders' expectations and sustain the university mission. Among the programmes that have been created within the last five years are: Bachelor/Master in Religious and Pastoral Education, Bachelor of Engineering in Civil Engineering, Master in Criminology, Bachelor/Master Food Engineering, Ph.D. in Agricultural & Food Sc. / Nutrition & Food Sc., Master in Diplomacy & International Security, Master in Information Studies, Master in Cyber Security and Cyber Defence.

Proposals for the creation of new programmes or modifications to current programmes are discussed by the Academic Unit Council and submitted to the Provost for comments and approval. The Provost makes sure that the proposal fits with the university programme framework, that it ensures collaboration between academic units, and responds to the stakeholders and employability expectations. The Provost also ensures that the programme mission is derived from the institutional mission, that there are educational objectives for the programme and programme learning outcomes, and that there is mapping of assessment with the programme outcomes. Thereafter, the University Academic and Research Council approves the new programme before the official Decree from the Ministry of Education and Higher Education can be obtained.

Proposals for course modification or creation are studied in the Academic Unit Council and submitted to the Provost for accessibility and approval. The university has adopted a common syllabus design, whose contents are introduced to the Institutional Assessment Software Tk20. All faculty members could access Tk20 to generate their course syllabi.

The student outcomes along with the assessment data sources are regularly monitored. After data and evidence is collected by the Office of the Provost, the student outcomes are assessed annually and evaluated both at the department and faculty levels according to special rubrics. A summary along with recommended actions are then prepared and an implementation strategy is developed taking into consideration that during the same year, the delivery of key courses used as a source of assessment should be ensured in at least one of the terms either Fall, Spring or both.

In November 2016, the Office of the Provost launched a reviewing process for the programmes with low enrolment. Faculties were requested to perform an assessment for these programmes after discussing all the aspects of the programme during the Academic Unit Council meetings while including faculty, graduates and students in the assessment process.

Student centred teaching

To ensure the quality of student centred teaching, USEK has defined a teaching and learning strategy around the following points:

- Promotion of **active learning** and use of technology to support and enhance educational provision
- Delivery of courses in face-to-face environment with an **interactive** strategy where **lectures** are not strictly designed to be given as a one-way means of instruction. Instead, they are designed to be activity and inquiry based.

- Blended teaching wherein **e-learning technology** (Moodle, Mahara) supports faculty members in making the course documentation available to the students and in creating better interaction with the students
- Promotion of **teamwork and peer observation** in teaching and learning: peer observation between students and teaching staff.
- Support for **research and innovation in teaching**: In many courses students are asked to conduct research in a field relevant to their discipline. To demonstrate their acquired knowledge in research methodology, students write research papers and articles and present their own papers orally in class. As such, the undergraduate programmes prepare students to further enhance their research skills in the Master and Ph.D. programmes that are mainly based on research.
- Commitment to the **continuous development of staff** through traveling support (for participation in international academic and scientific activities) and workshops and training sessions in the fields of active learning, online teaching and e-learning, programme outcomes definition and assessment, cultivating and implementing teamwork, etc. The university also supports even the participation in certificate programmes abroad, e.g. Post-Graduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education PGCLTHE with the collaboration of the University of Chester/UK, Online Certificate in Teaching and Learning provided by Norwich University/United States, “The Professional Educator” – UT Global Initiative for Education and Leadership, University of Texas Austin, United States.

By launching the Learning and Teaching Excellence Centre (LTEC) in 2015, the university pooled its activities in the further development of teaching and learning competences.

During the academic year 2015-2016, USEK offered fully online courses within the general education framework (62 courses with a total enrolment of 1,777 students). In this context, USEK promotes online education to take advantage of online teaching to reach the society and Lebanese immigrants worldwide and to achieve distinction in globalising USEK.

Besides teaching and learning, USEK offers a wide range of professional student services that cover the entire student life cycle from initial information of prospective students over support during studies at USEK to support in finding jobs after graduation. The majority of the on-campus services is combined in the Student Affairs Office, which is also the main contact for any study related problems. USEK also offers student social services which provide financial support based on open accessible criteria. The Social Service Office also advises and supports students facing personal, family or medical difficulties.

Assessment

Teaching and learning with a view to the university strategy

According to USEK’s mission and vision, teaching and learning is considered the main activity of the university. The experts agree that the university is largely oriented towards the provision of education for its students. USEK strives to adjust its study programmes to the needs of society. Therefore, the university has introduced study programmes in new academic fields such as sciences and engineering that have been built up and strengthened during the last years in order to reflect the demands of the

labour situation in the Middle East (notwithstanding that reliable data on the regional labour market is yet to be found).

The expert team views positively a consistent implementation of the university strategy in the field of teaching and learning. The reshaping of the undergraduate programmes and the strengthening of the general education parts is highly appreciated by the experts, together with the reduction of the number of offered programmes from more than 300 in year 2012 to 144 programmes in year 2017. The university has taken action against the fragmentation that has been warned against in the report from 2012.

The expert group supports the general education concept of the university that both allows and forces students to choose courses in academic fields other than their own study programme. This concept strongly supports the humanistic educational mission of the university and contributes to a more holistic education of the graduates.

The expert group assesses the academic standards of the study programmes as being met. The university has appropriate procedures for the development of study programmes. The responsibility of the programme content is up to academics, compliance with university and national regulations the appropriate study organisation are ensured. USEK seems to assure appropriate workload of its study programmes. Research methodology and internships are in place in bachelor and master programmes.

The experts appreciate the university's efforts to enhance the learning experience of their students. Notable in this respect is the wide use of e-learning at the university. The experts also note very positively the variety of training programmes offered for lecturers and the use of tutors to support students. Students expressed their satisfaction with the study environment at USEK. They especially appreciated the human environment that the university manages to uphold.

A large asset of the university is its professional student services which are offered by a service-oriented and competent administration. The students also appreciate the services offered by the university and report a well organised study process.

The experts note the role being played by the LTEC in supporting staff in implementing modern approaches to learning and teaching including student centred learning.

Moreover, the expert team notes that the university allocates appropriate resources to teaching and learning. The staff met during the site visit was very dynamic and motivated and expressed a high commitment to USEK. In general, the experts deem the student-staff ratio to be appropriate.

Overall assessment

The site visit confirms to the expert team that teaching and learning of high quality is the main activity of USEK. The university devotes energy and resources to providing a wide range of study programmes at high academic quality. Teaching is carried out by dynamic and motivated lecturers and supported by highly professionalised student support services. Robust links between teaching and learning and research are only partially realised. These should be strengthened.

Financial and social support for students in need is obviously a high priority of USEK.

Areas of improvement

In the discussion with the students it was mentioned that feedback on assessed work is treated differently between different individuals and study programmes. The universi-

ty needs to strengthen arrangements that all students receive formal opportunities for feedback on their assessed work.

Recommendations

Overall, the university should strengthen the interdisciplinary cooperation in teaching and research. The implementation of the general education framework is a step in the right direction. A new customisation of the faculties would be the next.

Moreover, the Learning and Teaching Excellence Center should provide staff development to promote the importance of links between research and teaching across all faculties.

3.5. Research

The criterion “research” focuses on the research profile of the institution and whether it fits the institutional strategy. Moreover, the experts check whether the academic standards are fulfilled, how the research process is organised and supported by the institution and how research is evaluated within the institution. It is also checked, how the training of young researchers is organised, how the institution assures the academic standards of the training of young researchers and how the institution assures the rights of young researchers.

Current status

Research at the USEK relates to the mission of the university, and is mainly focussed on applied research serving Lebanese society. It is based upon two principles:

- First, on the research units at the institutional level that sustain the fulfilment of the university mission to focus on promising areas with 88% of the total research expenditures of the University.
- Secondly, on the orientation of academic units that support Faculty members, researchers and graduate students; helping to develop research projects and publishing.

In 2017, there are eight research units at USEK:

- Phoenix Center for Lebanese Studies (PCLS) devoted to documentary resources, research, and academic publications to promote knowledge and awareness of Lebanese culture and thought;
- Latin American Studies and Cultures Center (LASCC), a cooperation centre between USEK and the Lebanese community in Latin America. Simultaneously it is also a publishing house for Latin America in Lebanon. Latin America is one of the world regions which hosted the majority of the Lebanese emigrants (and those of the Middle East) and which maintains a strong relationship with Lebanon;
- Latin Studies Center, which supports research on the language of Latin. The studies, both historical as well as literary, consist of translations and aim at organising various activities, such as visits, conferences and colloquia.
- CIRAME, a centre for applied business research, aimed at improving managerial practices and developing economy and business instructions. CIRAME's research programmes take on the themes of the Master in Research and oth-

er professional Masters in Management Sciences proposed by the Faculty of Business and Commercial Sciences;

- Higher Center for Research (HCR) that shall define and promote the university research policy in all the faculties and encourage faculty members to consider research as an integral part of their teaching. The HCR organises on-campus faculty student symposiums related to the university mission and Catholic identity. Moreover, the HCR tries to increase research opportunities, funds research projects, elaborates thematic axes, sets up a general policy for research, which advocates and supports interdisciplinary projects, and establishes partnerships with public and private research institutes while simultaneously collaborating with national and international partners, as for example the National Council for Scientific Research, the Lebanese Central Administration of Statistics, several institutions at universities in Strasbourg, Bordeaux, Nancy, Lyon, Montréal, and others.
Since 2006-2007, the Higher Centre for Research has launched six calls for proposals and funding research projects and supported more than 50 projects (cf. Table 4).

| Call for proposals | Submitted projects | Selected projects | Ratio |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|--------------|
| 1st call | 30 | 6 | 20% |
| 2nd call | 27 | 11 | 41% |
| 3rd call | 25 | 12 | 48% |
| 4th call | 12 | 9 | 75% |
| 5th call | 15 | 8 | 53% |
| 6th call | 11 | 8 | 73% |

Table 3 – Call for proposal projects (2006-2015)

- Doctoral College that contributes to the coordination and the coherence of Doctoral studies within the different faculties and institutes of related disciplines, representing a doctoral school for exact sciences and another for human and social sciences. The Doctoral College consists of a Council composed of the Dean of the Doctoral College, Coordinators of the Doctoral Schools and Heads of the Doctoral Commissions within the different Faculties. Doctoral schools exist in all fields except in sciences and engineering, as so far only the public Lebanese University has the right to grant Ph.D. degrees in sciences and engineering. In these two fields, USEK cooperates with foreign universities. Recently, USEK has created Ph.D. programmes in Agricultural and Food Sciences, Agricultural and Nutrition. In the last three years, USEK granted 240 Ph.D. degrees.
- Entrepreneurship Center, just recently founded to promote innovation and entrepreneurship within the USEK. It should empower students, faculty, alumni and its community by providing necessary tools, resources and networks to support their entrepreneurial initiatives
- Laboratories for research and academic purposes. Within the last five years, the laboratories service was significantly improved by the creation of 20 engineering labs.

USEK invests about 8.6 % of its yearly expenditures in research (2016: about 3.5 Mio \$). The faculties report on research in their annual activity reports. The number of publications of USEK faculty members during the last three years exceeds 600. The USEK has recently confirmed that scientific publications can be listed in Scopus, the largest abstract and citation database of peer-reviewed literature: scientific journals, books and conference proceedings.¹⁶

Most recently, USEK provides several incentives to faculty members to promote and strengthen research activities:

- The full-time faculty professional development leave policy is to make it possible for full-time faculty members to take time off from normal academic duties for scholarly research and study with full basic salary (first 4 months) and half basic salary (remaining period).
- The full-time faculty members' appraisal criteria are reconsidered: Based on an administrative resolution signed by the President in October 2016, faculty members were invited to complete their "full-time faculty individual plan for research in 2016-2017". In this context, quality and innovation research will be considered as one of the main criteria in full-time faculty members' appraisal, in addition to high quality teaching and high quality services.

Assessment

Since 2012, the USEK has made efforts to strengthen the field of research and to link it with teaching and learning. Research at the USEK offers itself primarily as applied research which is reasonable, according to the expert team. The experts appreciate the efforts made to create more incentives for researchers and they recognise the institutional measures, especially the appointments made to the positions of Dean of Doctoral College and Deputy President of Research and the potential contribution this can make to capacity building in research.

Research activities, however, differ between faculties. In the interviews with faculty members and students, the experts came to the conclusion that most university members are not informed about a comprehensive and central research strategy. The calls for research proposals from the last years were not recognised as part of a university strategy. The experts observed that for most faculty members the research profile of the university as a whole remains unclear. If they themselves do research, there seems to be a clear concept, but only at faculty level.

The experts appreciate the steps being taken to record the volume of research, publications, and outputs and to raise the profile of research activity through engaging with the services of Scopus.

Even if the status of research activities has been increased since 2012, the overall research output of the university seems rather low. This might be by and large in line with the mission of a teaching university. It also reflects the Lebanese tradition which might value education much more than research. The budget allocation supports this view as the state only supports research in a very modest way.

However, according to the expert panel, research at USEK meets academic standards. The university gives its researchers the freedom to pursue their projects freely and gives them – within the limits of the budget allocation – support to carry out research. Support for research in the HCR follows a defined process which seems transparent.

¹⁶ <https://www.elsevier.com/> (accessed on 15 February 2017)

Recruiting procedures for academic staff members follow, by and large, internationally accepted standards. With its regular evaluations of internal projects and faculty activity reports, USEK carries out basic monitoring and evaluation of its research activities. As a next step, the USEK should clearly define more diverse performance indicators that would help to assess its research performance. This definition process should be completed together with the faculties.

The structure of the Doctoral College and the regulations for the doctoral education seem to be appropriate to the expert team.

Overall, research is not the main priority of USEK. Research activities of university members are encouraged but only funded in a limited way and, due to their teaching loads and administrative tasks, researchers lack sufficient time for pursuing their research. Therefore, the research output is low and largely focussed on applied research related to the needs of Lebanese society, which is in line with the university mission. However, USEK is still lacking a clear research profile based on its best academic fields and an effective monitoring processes for its research performance to show evidence of this profile.

Areas for improvement

There is a lack of a clearly articulated and documented policy for research, enterprise and knowledge transfer. Even if such a policy might exist, it is not widely communicated.

For the experts there is a need for greater coordination of research activities and more effective communication for institutional research priorities.

Recommendations and conditions

If the university wishes to strengthen its research activities, the expert team sees it indispensable to invest more resources and to raise additional research funds.

The experts strongly recommend the university to develop an institutional policy for research, enterprise and knowledge transfer together with clear institutional objectives and realistic targets.

Several new fields of research could be developed at USEK with its high professional academic equipment: environmental research, new traffic models, empirical surveys on the needs of education/further education and the labour market, to name but a few.

The experts suggest that the university should consider even more incentives and the introduction of sabbaticals in order to support and enhance the research output of its academic staff.

The experts also recommend to make strategic partnership contracts with universities abroad. Only in this way can the university offer perspectives for the young scientists in the fields without the right to grant doctoral degrees.

3.6. Institution and Society

The criterion “institution and society” checks, whether the strategy of the institution takes the needs of society into account. The experts assess the activities with which the institution connects to society with cooperations, internationalisation, entrepreneurship, diversity. They also review whether the activities fit the strategy.

Current status

The main topic of USEK is to serve Lebanese society as marked in its mission. From this mission, the university derives strategies in all its fields of activity as already stressed above.

The main objective is teaching and learning where the university strives to provide high quality education. Consequently, the university adjusts its study programmes regularly and offers programmes in new academic fields. With its three regional centres in Christian rural areas, where USEK mainly offers bachelor programmes in the most demanded fields, the university intends to contribute to the development of these areas by providing education. The regional centres have only few academic staff members but are served by the lecturers of the main campus and are connected online. In the fall of 2016-2017 there have been 628 students enrolled at the regional centres, which is about 8.5 % of USEK's students.¹⁷

USEK continuously holds and organises societal activities for the enhancement of academic, cultural, social, humanitarian and recreational aspects of the life of society.

In 2015-2016, 62 scientific and 41 social awareness and students activities were organized, also entrepreneurship competitions and corporate related activities.

The number of internship possibilities did increase in the years after 2012.

The USEK Green Committee, created in 2016, closely collaborates with outside constituencies (governmental, non-profit, private organisations, and businesses) on sustainability issues. This committee supports sustainability initiatives within the campus and community in order to create a culture of students, faculty and staff who are socially, economically and environmentally engaged. The Green Committee also works on improving campus-wide single-stream recycling.

The university yearly organises the Good Friday ceremony in its main Campus Kaslik, with the participation of the President of Lebanon and several other ceremonies and church festivals, as well as a host of political, social and educational figures. USEK is committed to honouring diaspora and social personalities who serve its regional and wider community, by organising honoris causa ceremonies or inviting them to be key speakers in the graduation ceremonies.

Thus USEK strengthens its social role, its brand and its contacts. There are efforts made to bring more alumni into activities.

The university intends to provide a humanistic education and to convey human values in its education which should contribute to an open and pluralistic society. Therefore, USEK has implemented general education in all of its study programmes and maintains a campus, on which activities of political parties are banned. In addition, the university has a student-centred service-oriented administration that supports student well-being on campus and offers its financial and social support.

In the research field, which is a lesser priority to USEK than teaching, the university carries out applied research serving the needs of Lebanese society.

Another priority with regard to society is the function of USEK to preserve Maronite heritage. In this respect, the university conducts research on Maronite history and maintains the central library and archive for Maronite documents and the first worldwide edition of the New Testament in Syriac. In order to preserve these historic documents, the university library maintains excellent equipped restoration and digitalisation facilities.

¹⁷ Cf. p. 3

Assessment

According to the expert group, USEK fulfils in an exemplary way its services to society. The university has a clear vision on how it wants to serve society and implements it consistently within the range of its activities. These activities are by and large geared towards serving society and are closely linked to the university strategy. The experts underline the high priority the university and its staff give to the importance of its contribution to Lebanese society, culture and heritage.

The experts appreciate USEK's commitment to providing education to rural areas with its regional centres.

The experts also appreciate the range of opportunities for internships.

The internal and external groups the experts met during the site visit knew and appreciated the societal mission of the university. The university seems to be in regular contact with external stakeholders in order to detect the needs of its environment and adjusts its activities accordingly.

Areas for improvement

For the experts, there should be build capacity in the area of enterprise and entrepreneurship.

Recommendations

The experts encourage the university to improve the relations with its alumni in order to link them closer to the university and to build on their experience in further developing the university.

The recently established Entrepreneurship Centre should be used to create a greater entrepreneurial spirit in USEK's faculties and to increase the level of engagements with external enterprises.

As robust data are missing, integration of graduates from USEK into the labour market should be monitored and analysed.

3.7. Quality assurance

The criterion "quality assurance" focuses on the internal and external mechanisms used by the institution to monitor and improve its quality. The experts check the quality assurance concept of the university as a whole, which indicators are used to monitor the progress in achieving its objectives and how the institution collects, analyses and uses relevant information about its activities. Moreover, the experts look at whether quality assurance is used regularly and systematically for quality enhancement, whether the quality feedback loops are closed and how the institution fosters the development of a quality culture in general.

Current status

Quality assurance as a continuous improvement of the activities of the university is seen as a strategic priority of USEK. The university has made efforts in meeting European and American academic standards and, thus, is engaged in external quality as-

surance procedures on the programme and institutional level with European and American quality assurance agencies. Accreditations yet received by USEK between 2012 and 2016 are as follows:

- evalag Institutional Accreditation¹⁸
- Matrix accreditation (UK) for student support services¹⁹
- Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET) accreditation for 9 computing and engineering programmes²⁰

At this point in time, several other programme accreditations are in progress, e.g. for a cluster of eight undergraduate study programmes in humanities and social sciences, for the business programmes (with AACSB²¹) and for the architecture programmes (with NAAB²²).

The Quality Assurance and Institutional Effectiveness Office (QA-IE) is coordinating and developing further the several quality processes around teaching, learning, and research. Internally, the university has built up a quality management system in order to develop the quality of the study programmes, including the activities of the teaching staff and the administrative procedures, and to provide information for the management of the university. Therefore a common framework is being established that should take into account the particularities of the different faculties and define the objectives, criteria and measurements.

The QA-IE has developed the institutional assessment software Tk20 for planning, assessment, and reporting for use by the university. At the administrative level, all the university units introduce their strategic planning into Tk20 and mark the progress on all the activities undergone to attain the yearly objectives. Furthermore, a periodic activity report as well as important indicators are generated automatically from this system. At the academic level, all programme frameworks and its courses descriptions are also introduced into Tk20 in the purpose of generating automatically the programme catalogue and programme framework including the student outcomes and curriculum map.

Since 2012, participation in an on-line evaluation is obligatory for students as their final grades for the semester will only be released once they finalised the course evaluation. The results of the evaluation are communicated to the individual teachers and the heads of departments but are not later displayed or discussed with the students. The results are also used in the regular teacher's evaluation. The evaluation of teaching from the students' perception was significantly improved during the last years to reach the overall grade of 93.3/100.

The university also counts on students' feedback regarding the administrative services through the survey "On-Campus Well-Being" at the end of each semester. During the last years, the student satisfaction rate was significantly increased from 73% in year 2012 to 82% in year 2016, especially after the implementation of the matrix standards for the students support services accreditation.

USEK also carries out yearly performance evaluations of its academic staff. The evaluations are used by the Peer Committee to decide on contract renewals or promotions

¹⁸ Cf. <https://www.evalag.de/en/international/international-accreditation/institutional-accreditation/> (accessed 15 February 2017)

¹⁹ Cf. <http://matrixstandard.com/> (accessed 15 February 2017)

²⁰ <http://www.abet.org/> (accessed 15 February 2017)

²¹ <http://www.aacsb.edu/> (accessed 15. February 2017)

²² <http://www.naab.org/> (accessed 15. February 2017)

of staff members. The evaluation is carried out by the deans on the basis of a performance report of the academic regarding its performance in teaching and research, the student evaluation results and exam results.

The introduction of new teaching and learning methodologies is an important pillar of institutional quality assurance. Therefore, the university offers extensive staff trainings on teaching methodologies and is introducing its e-learning platform which is as well flanked by staff trainings. Moreover, a programme for mutual teacher's evaluation aiming for improved teaching methods was created.

At the national level, USEK is committed to contribute to the establishment of a National Lebanese Quality Assurance Agency.

Assessment

The expert team appreciates the high priority attached to linking quality assurance with improving institutional effectiveness. They observe a highly professional and motivated acting personnel of the Quality Assurance and Institutional Effectiveness Office (QA-IE).

According to the mission of the university, the quality assurance activities focus mostly on teaching and learning and administrative processes related to the well-being of students. Consequently, the students express high satisfaction with the education and student services at USEK.

The quality assurance concept used by USEK seems to be appropriate to assure and improve the quality of teaching and learning at the university. Moreover, the tools which are currently in place seem to be accepted and implemented throughout the institution and used for improvement.

The experts see the institutional linkage between the quality assurance function (QA-IE) and the learning and teaching enhancement function (LTEC) as a noteworthy achievement of the university.

The university has made progress since 2012, especially with the definition of quality indicators. The use of TK20 seems to have proven its worth and is carried out systematically for further improvement. Moreover, it is accepted university-wide.

Areas for improvement

There is no formal feedback to students on the views they express in feedback surveys. In the interviews with the students the experts noted that students were unaware of any concrete measures the university has taken on the basis of the analysis of feedback surveys. Closing the feedback loops has also been stated as a problem in the 2012 assessment report.

The feedback process for services self-evaluation seems also to be quite unclear.

The central data reporting seems to be on the right lines but the experts have received indications that not all necessary data is reported regularly, for example the report of research activities is not consistently completed by all faculty members.

Recommendations

The experts understand that the university refrains from publishing individual teacher results for reasons of data protection but point out that the university should seek ways

to discuss the feedback with the students in order to give students a clear signal that their opinions are seriously taken into consideration. Therefore, they recommend the university to put in place robust mechanisms for ensuring that students are informed about actions being taken to address the issues they raise in institutional and department level surveys. A new “You said – We did” culture could be devised to show improvements and to strengthen the community feeling.

4. Assessment

Overall assessment

USEK presented itself as a modern and dynamic university moving forward at great speed. The university has an exceptionally clear mission and vision that indeed influences the activities and the everyday life at the university. USEK’s mission to provide high quality education and to serve Lebanese society is underlying all activities of the university and is implemented consistently. The dedication of the university to its mission and to the well-being of its students exceeds the usual commitment of a university. The experts were also impressed by the dynamism of the professors and administrative staff and their identification with the university and its mission.

Therefore, the expert team sees the mission of USEK and the way the university lives this mission as the greatest asset of the university. While having a clear focus on teaching and learning as its main activity, USEK provides a wide range of study programmes at high academic quality and adapts its programme offer constantly to the demands of Lebanese society. The professional student services which contribute to the productive study atmosphere and the high commitment of students to the university are exceptional. Although USEK is focussed on its regional and local community, it is open to new ideas and the international environment while at the same time preserving its traditions. The university and its employees develop their quality by using internal quality assurance processes and benchmarking activities with international partners.

The experts highly appreciate the role USEK plays in professionalising the Lebanese higher education market together with the other Lebanese universities and governmental units.

As well as its strengths, the relative weaknesses of USEK are reflected in its mission. As its mission is mostly focused on teaching and learning and services to Lebanese society, research activities are not sufficiently prioritised by USEK. Nevertheless, USEK has made progress in this field since 2012 and should make further progress in this direction to find new fields and sources of funding of research.

In terms of governance, USEK has made progress with the invention of the new by-laws. They have remarkably strengthened the management possibilities without weakening academic freedom.

However, the university is still divided into too great a number of relatively small academic units. It would be wise to end this fragmentation by reshaping the faculties around neighbouring study programmes and new interdisciplinary alignments. For a university the size of the USEK not more than six to seven faculties seem to be reasonable and optimum number.

The expert team recommends that USEK should continue to improve

- in its measures to become more efficient and effective;
- in its efforts to continuously improve teaching and learning

- in its research activities and search for new research possibilities and partners
- in its claim to foster humanistic, responsible and interdisciplinary thinking within the university and above.

Altogether, the expert team sees USEK on its way to good progress and encourages the university to pursue its planned development path.

Assessment grades

| No | Assessment criteria | Assessment |
|----|--|------------|
| 1 | Institutional profile and strategy | A |
| 2 | Governance | A |
| 3 | Resources | A |
| 4 | Teaching and Learning | A |
| 5 | Research <i>Condition:</i> The university has to put in place an institutional policy for research, enterprise and knowledge transfer together with clear institutional objectives and realistic targets. | B |
| 6 | Institution and Society | A |
| 7 | Quality assurance | A |

Assessment levels

| Level | Assessment | Description |
|-------|--|--|
| A | Passed. | The institution fulfils or exceeds all criteria. All activities are in line with the profile and objectives of the institution and provided at a high academic level. |
| B | Passed subject to conditions | The institution does not fulfil some relevant criteria. However, the institution should be able to remedy the shortcomings within nine months after the assessment. |
| C | Suspension of the accreditation procedure | The institution does not fulfil relevant criteria, but it is likely, that it will be able to remedy the shortcomings within 18 months after the assessment. The HEI may apply for a resumption of the accreditation procedure. |
| D | Failed | The institution does not fulfil relevant criteria, and is not expected to be able to meet all assessment criteria within 18 months' time. |

5. Accreditation recommendation of the expert group to the Accreditation Commission of evalag

According to the expert team, Holy Spirit University of Kaslik (USEK) meets **evalag**'s criteria for institutional accreditation. Therefore, the team recommends USEK for re-accreditation and recommends awarding the **evalag** label for institutional accreditation.

The team recommends USEK to consider and implement the following conditions (C) and recommendations (R) to further improve the university:

Institutional profile and strategy

- R 1** As USEK devises its new strategic plan the university should develop a process for enabling discussion at faculty level and with external and internal stakeholders from the very beginning. The conditions for such a process are already given.
- R 2:** Further data on demographic changes, the Lebanese labour market and national and international professional requirements should be collected and considered in the further strategic planning. Since there has been no regular analysis of the Lebanese education and labour market up to now, it could even be a great opportunity for USEK to develop scientific expertise in this field which could have positive effects on Lebanese society and in domestic policy.

Governance

- R 3** USEK should further institutionalise participation and communication within the university. Possibilities for students to participate besides student elections should be further developed.
- R 4** USEK should consider the number and configuration of the faculty structures with a view to achieving greater organisational efficiency and stronger coherence and cohesion between organisational units.

Resources

- R 5** USEK should continue its efforts to diversify sources of external funding, in particular through donations, endowments and sponsorship.
- R 6** As for the work places for students, the university should establish more such places with tables and sockets across the whole campus. For instance, the lobby area of the "H" building would have enough and appropriate space to set up student work spaces, even for group work. Possibilities to dedicate lecture rooms on the campus for student work rooms should be considered. Overall, in the library and in other buildings, the number of work spaces should be at least 13 %, measured by the number of students.

Teaching and learning

- R 7** USEK should strengthen the interdisciplinary cooperation in teaching and research. The implementation of the general education framework is a step in the right direction. A new customisation of the faculties would be the next.

- R 8** The Learning and Teaching Excellence Center should provide staff development to promote the importance of links between research and teaching across all faculties.

Research

- C 1** The university has to develop an institutional policy for research, enterprise and knowledge transfer together with clear institutional objectives and realistic targets.
- R 9** If the university wishes to strengthen its research activities, it is indispensable to invest more resources and to raise additional research funds.
- R 10** Several new fields of research could be developed at USEK with its high professional academic equipment: environmental research, new traffic models, empirical surveys on the needs of education/further education and the labour market, to name but a few.
- R 11** USEK should consider even more incentives and the introduction of sabbaticals in order to support and enhance the research output of its academic staff.
- R 12** USEK should make strategic partnership contracts with universities abroad. Only in this way can the university offer perspectives for the young scientists in the fields without the right to grant doctoral degrees.

Institution and society

- R 13** USEK should improve the relations with its alumni in order to link them closer to the university and to build on their experience in further developing the university.
- R 14** The recently established Entrepreneurship Centre should be used to create a greater entrepreneurial spirit in USEK's faculties and to increase the level of engagements with external enterprises.
- R 15** As robust data are missing, integration of graduates from USEK into the labour market should be monitored and analysed.

Quality assurance

- R 16** USEK should seek ways to discuss the feedback on courses with the students in order to give students a clear signal that their opinions are seriously taken into consideration.
- R 17** USEK should put in place robust mechanisms for ensuring that students are informed about actions being taken to address the issues they raise in institutional and department level surveys. A new "You said – We did" culture could be devised to show improvements and to strengthen the community feeling.

6. Accreditation decision of the evalag Accreditation Commission

At its meeting on 27 June 2017 the **evalag** Accreditation Commission decides with one abstention to re-accredit the Holy Spirit University of Kaslik (USEK) with the condition (C) and recommendations (R) mentioned in Chapter 5.

Annex

Annex 1: Site visit schedule

Tuesday 7th of February - Arrival of expert panel and preparations

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|---------------|--|
| 6:30pm-7:30pm | Internal meeting of expert panel, review of site visit plan |
| 8:00pm | Dinner |

Wednesday 8th of February - First day of site visit

| | |
|-----------------|---|
| 8:30am-9:00am | Meeting with the President, Rev. Fr. Professor Georges Hobeika |
| 9:00am-9:45am | Meeting with the University Executive (without the President) Vice Presidents, Provost, Deputy Presidents |
| 9:45am-10:00am | Break |
| 10:00am-10:45am | Meeting with Deans |
| 10:45am-11:45am | Meeting with Strategic Planning / Finance and Human Resources Provost, Dr. Georges Yahchouchi, Vice-President for Finance and HR Director, Rev. Fr. Georges Azzi, Chief Accountant, Mr. Georges Ghanem, HR Manager, Ms. Micheline Kayem |
| 11:45am-12:30pm | Meeting with Heads of academic units and Associate Deans (max. 12 in total) |
| 12:30am-1:30pm | Lunch at the University Restaurant |
| 1:30pm-2:30pm | Quality Assurance, Teaching and Learning, Professional development Director of Quality Assurance and Institutional Effectiveness Office, Nathalie Bouldoukian Deputy President for Teaching & Learning, Dr. Faten El Hage |
| 2:30pm-3:15pm | Meeting with Teaching Staff All faculties, mixed gender, new colleagues, experienced colleagues (max. 12 in total) |
| 3:15pm-4:15pm | Meeting with students All levels, all faculties, mixed gender, some PhDs, representatives of the student assembly (max. 12 in total) |
| 4:15pm-5:00pm | Meeting with Research and Doctoral College and representatives of research teams/research units Deputy President for Research, Prof. Nehme Azoury Dean of the Doctoral College, Prof. Nicole Chalhoub Research team representatives |

| | |
|---------------|--|
| 5:00pm-6:00pm | Meeting with the Trustees |
| 6:00pm-7:00pm | Internal meeting of expert panel: review of first day |
| 8:00pm | Dinner |

Thursday 9th of February - Second day of site visit

| | |
|-----------------|---|
| 9:00am-9:30am | Debriefing meeting of the first day Provost, Dr. Georges Yahchouchi |
| 9:30am-10:30am | Campus Tour - University Resources: Library, Laboratories, Green Committee, LTEC Library Executive Director, Ms. Randa Chidiac Laboratories Service Director and Head of Green Committee, Ms. Samar Azzi |
| 10:30am-12:30am | Internal meeting of expert panel |
| 12:30pm-1:30pm | Lunch |
| 2:00pm-6:00pm | Internal meeting of expert panel: review of the second day |
| 8:00pm | Dinner |

Friday 10th of February - Third day of site visit

| | |
|-----------------|--|
| 9:00am-10:00am | Meeting with cross-institutional staff (library, laboratories, international affairs, marketing, research, heads of central services, student support services) Associate Vice President for Students, Dr. Celine Baaklini Director of Registrar, Dr. Joseph Azzi Director of Orientation, Mr. Nassib Azzi Director of Student Affairs, Mr. Bassem Hachem Director of International Relations, Ms. Clemence Drouet Director of Social Service, Rev. Fr. Abdallah Badaoui Director of Careers Services, Mr. Khalil Abboud Deputy President for International Affairs and Global Initiatives, Dr. Rima Mattar |
| 10:00am-11:00am | Meeting with external stakeholders, employers, and alumni |
| 11:00am-12:00pm | Internal meeting of expert panel |
| 12:00pm-1:00pm | Closing meeting with the President and the Provost |
| 1:00pm-2:00pm | Lunch |
| 2:00pm | Departure |

Annex 2: Profiles of expert group members

Prof. em. Jethro Newton Ph.D. (UK)



Until July 2012 Jethro Newton was Dean of Academic Quality Enhancement at the University of Chester, having previously held the position of Dean of Learning and Teaching. Prior to 2002, he held positions at the University of Wales, the University of Bradford, and the Open University. Currently working on a freelance basis, he holds a position as Senior Adviser to the European University Association. Jethro studied sociology, literature and the history of ideas at the University of Bradford, gained a Graduate Certificate in Education from the University of Leeds, and was awarded a Masters in Sociology and Social Policy by the University of Salford. He received his doctorate from the University of Wales, having completed a thesis on academics' responses to quality policy.

His academic interests and publications are in the areas of higher education policy, including governance and leadership, and quality management, and evaluation of policy and strategy implementation.

Prof. Dr. Dr. Godehard Ruppert (Germany)



Since 2000 Godehard Ruppert is President of the University of Bamberg, having previously held the position of Vice-President. Born in Beuel/Bonn, he studied Catholic theology, philosophy, education and journalism at the Universities Bochum and Muenster. He received his doctorate in theology from the University of Wuerzburg in 1984 and graduated to the habilitated Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Hanover. Since 1991 he is Full Professor of Religious Education at the University of Bamberg. Godehard has long experience in different functions in the academic self-government, e.g. Academic Senate of the University, Dean, President of the Virtual University of Bavaria, German Rectors' Conference, Bavarian University Association, and is member of several scientific boards and councils in Germany and abroad. During his presidency institution and profile of the University of Bamberg was revised to increase international visibility and attractiveness. Besides, third part funding increased with the factor 11.

Prof. (FH) Dr. Tanja Eiselen (Austria)



Tanja Eiselen was elected President of FH Vorarlberg (Vorarlberg University of Applied Sciences) in Dornbirn in 2016. FH Vorarlberg enjoys excellent relations with business and industry in Vorarlberg and its charter is to provide degree programmes with a direct link to work practice. Tanja studied psychology at the University of Bremen/Germany and graduated in Work and Organisational Psychology. After work experience from several positions (manager trainings, e.g. at Mercedes Benz AG Bremen; women's promotion; organisational consulting) she joined FH Vorarlberg in 2002 becoming Professor for Human Resource Management. Prior to

her presidency Tanja was Representative for University Didactics (since 2011) and Vice-President (since 2014).

Marija Vasilevska LL.B. (Macedonia)



Marija Vasilevska is studying finances and financial law at the University of Skopje/Macedonia. She holds a Bachelor of Law from the University of Skopje. As member of QA pool of the European Student Organisation (ESU) Marija took part in several evaluation and accreditation procedures in Europe.

Besides, she is student representative in the Senate of the University of Skopje and student member of the Commission of Self-Evaluation.