

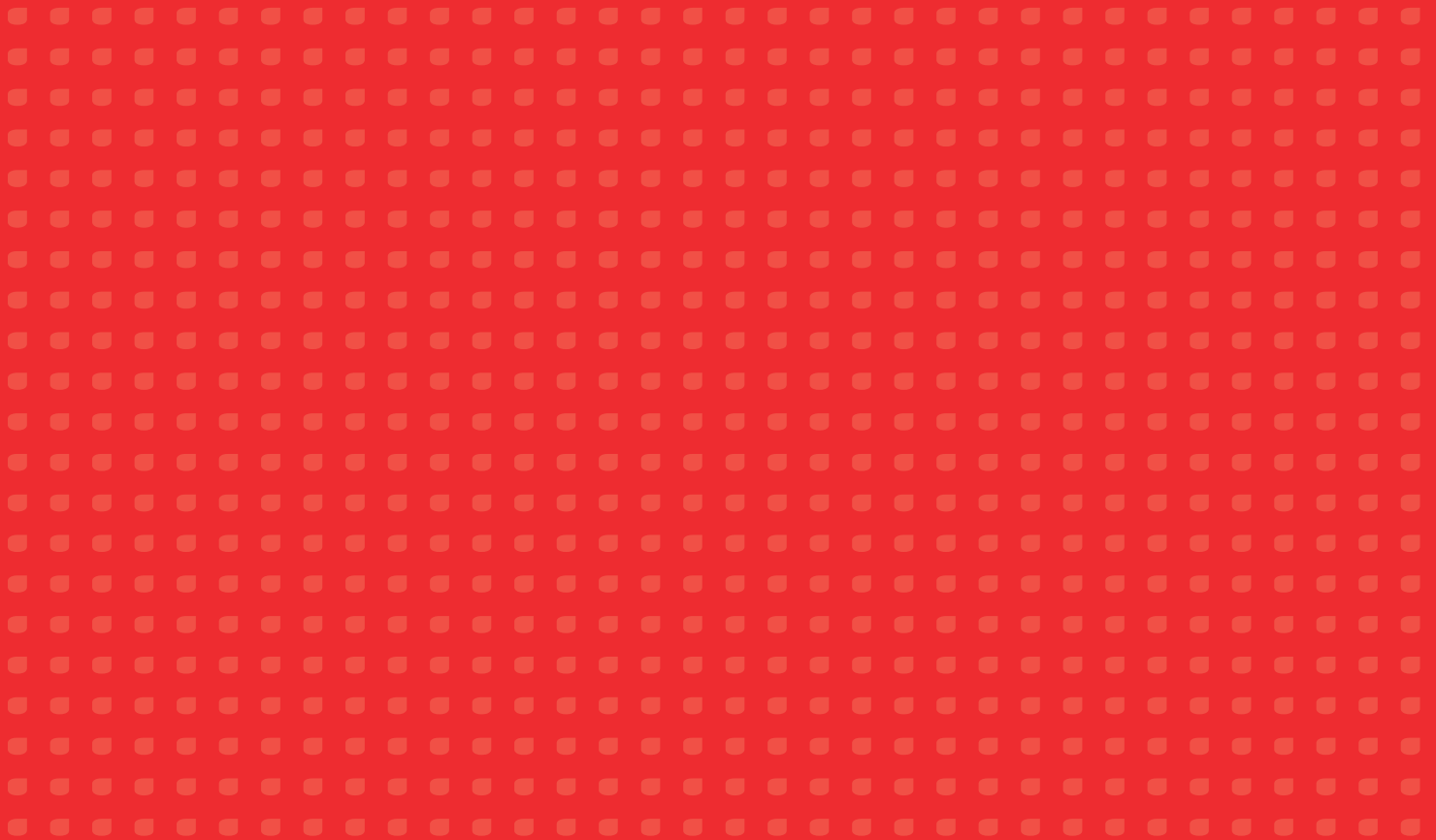


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Institutional accreditation Franklin University Switzerland

External assessment report | 29 November 2023



Content:

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Section A

Decision of the Swiss Accreditation Council

17 December 2021





The Swiss Accreditation Council publishes decisions on its website:

<https://akkreditierungsrat.ch/en/decisions/>



Section B

Procedure according to HEdA and agency accreditation proposal

6 August 2021



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1 Legal basis

In accordance with the Higher Education Act (HEdA) of 30 September 2011, higher education institutions must obtain institutional accreditation in order to use specific designated titles (Art. 29 HEdA), to access federal funding (Art. 45 HEdA) and to apply for programme accreditation (Art. 28 para 2 HEdA). These provisions apply to all public and private higher education institutions within the higher education sector.

The HEdA Accreditation Ordinance of 28 May 2015 stipulates the requirements for institutional accreditation in Art. 30 HEdA; this provision sets out the rules associated with the process and the quality standards.

2 Objective and purpose

Institutional accreditation focuses on the quality assurance systems of HE institutions that allow them to ensure the quality of their teaching, their research and the services that they provide.

The quality assurance system is assessed against quality standards by external experts (an expert peer group) who offer objective perspectives on quality assurance and enhancement concepts and mechanisms. The aim of each expert peer group is to assess whether the approaches and mechanisms in place in the institution are complete and coherent and that they facilitate the HE institution in assuring the quality and the continuous improvement of its activities, the extent and nature of which will depend on the type of institution and its specific characteristics. In assessing the institution's quality assurance and enhancement system, the expert peer group will have regard to the principle of proportionality as it relates to the resources deployed by the institution and the results that it has achieved. Consideration of the entire system in place in the institution on a seven-year cycle facilitates the HE institution in conducting a regular review of the development and the coherence of all elements of its quality assurance system.

3 Process

3.1 Admission to the Accreditation Process

The prerequisites for access to the institutional accreditation process are set out in article 4, paragraphs 1 & 2 HEdA. These provisions stipulate that the Swiss Accreditation Council must determine whether the institution in question is eligible to access institutional accreditation.

Franklin University Switzerland (FUS) was already recognised under federal law before HEdA came into force. It thus fulfils the requirements stated under article 4, paragraph 2 of the HEdA Accreditation Ordinance and was admitted into the accreditation procedure without an examination under paragraph 1 of the same article.

3.2 Schedule

The process took place in the midst of the Corona pandemic; this necessitated the conducting both the preliminary and the main review visits virtually (via the Zoomvideo-conferencing platform).

22.03.2019	Decision by the SAC on eligibility to access the accreditation process
08.06.2020	Commencement of the process
16.11.2020	Planning meeting

31.12.2020	Submission of the self-assessment report
16.02.2021	Preliminary visit
25-26.03.2021	Main review visit
06.08.2021	Expert report and AAQ accreditation proposal
05.10.2021	Position statement of FUS
06.08.2021	Final expert report and AAQ accreditation proposal
17.12.2021	Accreditation decision (SAC)
29.11.2023	Publication of the report

3.3 Group of experts

Jann Bangerter	Student, Master of Medicine, Universität Bern
Dr. Celeste Schenck	President, The American University Paris
Prof. Dr. Federico Luisetti	Associate Professor of Italian culture and society, Universität St Gallen
Prof. Dr. Isabelle Perroteau	Applied Biology and ex Internal Evaluation Manager, Università degli Studi di Torino
Prof. Dr. Patricia Pol	Former Vice-President, Université Paris-Est

Dr. Schenck served as chairperson of the group of experts.

3.4 Self-assessment report

The self-assessment report contains:

- a portrait of Franklin University Switzerland,
- a description of the self-evaluation process,
- follow-up on the outcomes of previous accreditation processes, an insight into the institution's quality enhancement system,
- an analysis of the institution's compliance with the quality standards for institutional accreditation.

The report concludes with an action plan for the development of the quality assurance system.

3.5 Preliminary visit and main review visit

On 16 February 2020, the group of experts met via Zoom with both senior institutional management and members of the self-steering committee. Representatives of AAQ were also present at this visit.

AAQ commenced the visit by providing an overview of the Swiss higher education system, including the roles of AAQ and the Swiss Accreditation Council; it also briefed the group of experts on their role and remit within the accreditation process.

The preliminary visit provided an opportunity for FUS representatives to articulate to the group of experts the institution's context and quality assurance system and, based on their reading of the self-assessment report and accompanying documentation, the group of experts sought additional information and clarification of a number of key themes:

- Challenges, learnings, and opportunities arising from operating during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- FUS' strategic planning process and evidence of the tracking of progress.
- FUS' QA (Quality assurance) system, to include the committee structure, clearly delineating student involvement, and an overarching assessment plan (including non-academic and external assessments).
- FUS' strategies for financial sustainability.
- FUS' understanding of itself as an institution operating within the European Higher Education Area.
- FUS' sustainability initiatives – both planned and implemented.
- Assessment and actualisation of FUS' student learning outcomes.
- The place of research in FUS, including its collaborations with other institutions.

The expert team also sought additional detail in respect of the recent restructuring of the institution, during which FUS' previously existing departments were merged to form four larger divisions, and in relation to the move of FUS' student evaluation system from a paper-based to an online one.

Further documentation in respect of these themes was requested and subsequently provided to the group of experts via AAQ.

The main review visit took place via Zoom over two days from 25 to 26 March 2021. During eight sessions, the group of experts spoke with a cross-section of FUS faculty and staff, management and students. Representatives of AAQ also attended the visit.

The main review visit concluded with a debrief session for FUS leadership, faculty and staff, led by the chairperson of the group of experts and attended by the group of experts and AAQ representatives.

3.6 Report of the group of experts

The report of the group of experts was submitted to Franklin University Switzerland for comment on 06.08.2021 alongside AAQ's accreditation proposal.

3.7 Position statement of Franklin University Switzerland

Franklin University Switzerland submitted its position statement to AAQ on 5 October 2021. In its statement, FUS thanks the group of experts and AAQ for their consideration of the institution and its quality assurance system. In its position statement, FUS welcomes the conditions recommended by the group of experts, describes steps that it has already taken to meet these conditions and outlines its plans to implement the recommended conditions fully.

In particular, Franklin University Switzerland accepts and welcomes the amendment to its application to have FUS accredited as a "university institute".

In its position statement FUS agrees with AAQ's proposal to extend the period recommended by the group of experts for the meeting the conditions from the 24 months to 36 months. This allows FUS to report on progress towards the development of programs at graduate level, as well as towards meeting the conditions in respect of quality assurance.

3.8 Statement of the expert group on the change regarding the protected designation

The group of experts notes AAQ's proposal to accredit Franklin University Switzerland as a 'university institute'. Having assessed Franklin University Switzerland against the prerequisites for achieving designation as a full university, the group of experts confirms that, while university institutes are required to fulfil the same academic prerequisites as full universities, the prerequisites for university institutes allow for the awarding of a focused portfolio of degrees, which corresponds more accurately with FUS' profile.

The group of experts supports AAQ's proposal to accredit FUS as a "university institute" and to rescind condition 5 from its report.

4 Accreditation proposal

The institutional accreditation process is a peer review process. Each expert peer group report is therefore a snapshot of the relevant higher education institution at a specific moment in time. Accordingly, expert peer group reports are not designed to facilitate the drawing of comparisons between higher education institutions. Accreditation proposals, on the other hand, must be consistent: identical findings must lead to identical proposals.

In its proposal, the agency considers the question as to whether the deliberations and findings of the group of experts are coherent, i.e. related to the relevant standard and evidence-based, and thus ensures the consistency of the proposal with previous proposals.

4.1 Context

Franklin University Switzerland (FUS) was established in Lugano, Switzerland, in 1969 as Franklin College. While initially a liberal arts college that awarded Associate of Arts and then BA degrees, building on the recommendations of the previous accreditation report of 2013, FUS has been working towards developing its research profile. In the course of this work FUS changed the name, with the agreement of the Swiss University Conference, from Franklin College to Franklin University.

In the autumn of 2020 Franklin University delivered 17 Bachelor programmes with 22 minor areas of study and 1 Master programme. The programmes cover a variety of subjects including languages, art history literature, psychology, management, finance, and environmental sciences, which are structured in four divisions: Communication, History, and Politics; Business and Economics; Environment, Health, Maths, and Psychology; and Art and Cultures. Academic education is delivered by 25 permanent faculty, 20 adjunct faculty and 55 members of staff. In autumn 2020, of FUS' 293 students, 261 were enrolled on undergraduate degree programmes, 11 on study abroad programmes and 21 were engaged in graduate studies.

As a higher education institution located in Switzerland that, for the most part, enrolls students from the US on its programmes, Franklin University has had dual accreditation (Swiss and -- through the Middle States Commission for Higher Education [MSCHE] – US) since 2005, when the Swiss University Conference and the Swiss Center for Quality Assurance (OAQ) recognised all programmes of study leading to its Bachelor of Arts degree. FUS was awarded full institutional accreditation by the Swiss University Conference in 2013.

The three institutional priorities identified by the Self-Assessment Task Force are to:

- enhance integrated, interdisciplinary, and international academic and co-curricular programs;
- implement strategic enrolment management; and
- foster institutional sustainability and innovation.

The subsection to priority one commits to supporting faculty research and teaching across the disciplines.

Central to FUS' offering is its signature Academic Travel programme, which, according to the institution, "links learning to place" and "intentionally integrate[s] the experiential learning piece into a semester-long academic course". All FUS students must participate in the programme, and degree students are required to take at least four Academic Travel classes during their four years at the institution.

4.2 Considerations

Accreditation recommendation of the expert group

In its final overall assessment (Expert Report, pp. 34) the group of experts point out a number of Franklin University's strengths: its *small size* allows FUS "to respond swiftly and efficiently to emerging situations" – as demonstrated when the institution moved from on-site to online and hybrid learning during the Covid-19 pandemic; the *dedication of faculty and staff*, which allows *inter alia* for the provision of support tailored to the needs of FUS students; and the *farsighted investment in a new building and in facilities*. Most prominent in the context of the institutional accreditation is the expert group's appreciation of the *undergraduate curriculum*, which "goes a long way towards" a "learning and living environment that prepares students to become compassionate and responsible leaders in a changing world." Finally, the expert group underlines the importance of Franklin University's liberal arts culture, which the group of experts feels is "rooted in the strong North American culture and ethos evident within the institution."

In its final overall assessment, the group of experts also notes a number of challenges that Franklin University must overcome. In particular, the group of experts highlights that Franklin University needs to formalise elements of Franklin University's quality assurance, governance and communications systems in order to "ensure consistency, efficiency, responsibility, and systematisation across all institutional instances". Given Franklin University's reliance on tuition fees, the expert group identifies the need for Franklin University to reframe its strategy regarding enrolment; the expert group highlights the need to ensure that this strategy sets out specific and measurable goals. While Franklin has a "suite" of well-established first-cycle programmes supported by its QA system, the expert group is concerned about the lack of evidence that Franklin can develop a suite of second-cycle programs and at least one PhD program. The expert group underlines the need to improve the clarity of its strategic goals as they relate to master's and doctoral programmes, and to develop a set of inter-related plans with concrete deadlines and clear allocation of responsibility.

Overall, the group of experts, in concluding its analyses and evaluation, notes that Franklin University Switzerland has a quality assurance system that covers all areas and processes of the university. Consequently, the group of experts considers the central prerequisite for institutional accreditation in accordance with Article 30 HFKG to be fulfilled.

Based on their analysis the experts recommends that action be taken in following areas:

- Quality assurance strategy (Art. 30 para. 1 let. a item 7; standards 1.1 and 1.2)
- Governance (Art. 30 para. 1. let. a item 3; standard 2.2)
- Sustainability (Art. 30 para. 1. let. a item 6, standard 2.4)
- Activity in relation to HEI type (Art. 30 para. 1 let. a item 1; standards 3.1 and 3.2)
- Communication (Art. 30 para. 1 let. a item 2; Standard 5.1).

The group of experts recommends six conditions.

In their analysis of standard 1.1, the experts acknowledge that Franklin University has developed and implemented a quality assurance system. As this system relies on a rather complex committee structure, it places a heavy burden on both full-time and adjunct faculty. The group of experts further notes that transparency might be the driving force for this choice; however, the additional effort that the structure necessitates in respect of communication may in fact obscure the results of the committees' work. The expert group "concludes that a single document, clearly setting out the elements and participants of each of FUS' quality assurance processes is required to ameliorate the above issues."

Against this background the group of experts formulates a condition:

Condition 1 (regarding standard 1.1):

Franklin University Switzerland must systematise the articulation between its quality assurance management tools, roles and strategies.

In their analysis of standard 1.2 the group of experts concludes that Franklin University has established a quality assurance system that covers its undergraduate programmes. However, the group of experts continues that: "in spite of the enthusiasm and dedication of faculty, staff and institutional leadership, [the expert peer group] also finds that additional reflection and work is needed to ensure that quality assurance of its existing and planned research programmes is fully incorporated within the system."

Against this background the group of experts formulates a condition:

Condition 2 (regarding standard 1.2):

Franklin University Switzerland must extend its QA system to ensure that it can support all taught and research programmes envisaged in its strategic plan to facilitate the institution to fulfil its mandate of becoming a university.

In their analysis of standard 2.2 the group of experts states that they understand that Franklin University does not rely so much on metrics as it does on a "process" on tracking its strategic plan. The group of experts concludes "that the development of KPIs and metrics that align with FUS' plans would allow the institution to measure at regular intervals whether initiatives taken in furtherance of particular strategic goals – for example, to increase enrolment – were effective, or in need of revision."

Against this background the group of experts formulates a condition:

Condition 3 (regarding standard 2.1):

Franklin University Switzerland must include milestones, metrics and KPIs within its QA system that will allow it to measure its progress towards achieving its strategic goals, reporting on such progress annually.

In their analysis of standard 2.4 the group of experts expresses a concern that Franklin University's tracking "the realisation of its mission to develop students into compassionate leaders» is rather informal. The group of experts feel this would profit from formalisation.

Against this background the group of experts formulates a condition:

Condition 4 (regarding standard 2.4)

Franklin University Switzerland must connect more coherently the institution's sustainability

initiatives to the standard, by clearly integrating them with the QA system, setting objectives, and monitoring how and when they are implemented.

In its analysis of standard 3.1 the group of experts concludes: “As [Franklin University] was initially accepted for candidature with the status of a university, it continues to be required to adhere to all requirements, including that of providing graduate education at both master’s and doctoral levels, supporting research, and linking teaching and research.” (p. 22) Yet the evidence presented by FUS suggests “there is currently only one master’s program (with a low number of students) and no doctoral production.” The group of experts also notes that “there is little in the way of planning documents, calendars, budget set aside for the development of graduate programs. Therefore, FUS shows specific features and strategic objectives, but it only partially fulfils its type at present.” (p. 20)

Against this background the group of experts formulate a condition:

Condition 5 (regarding standard 3.1)

Franklin University Switzerland must provide detailed planning documents for the implementation of sufficient future master’s and doctoral programs, including milestones, deadlines for delivery, full-time faculty-hiring plans, curricular development plans and business plans. Such plans should be part of strategic planning, and should be formalized via KPIs, responsibility of persons and departments, expected delivery dates, budget, etc

In their analysis of standard 5.1 the group of experts concludes: “While the expert peer group acknowledges the efforts made by FUS to communicate its quality assurance strategy, system and the relevant outputs both internally and externally, it notes that improvement to external communication is urgently required to meet the requirements of this standard.” (p. 33)

Against this background the group of experts formulate a condition:

Condition 6 (regarding standard 5.1):

Franklin University Switzerland must make its QA strategy and the results of its assessment legible and public.

Appreciation of the considerations of the group of experts

AAQ states that the expert group has reviewed all standards.

Except for standards 3.1 and 5.1 AAQ judges the assessment of the group of experts and the conclusions drawn to be conclusive and coherently derived from the standards. AAQ further notes that the proposed conditions are in general appropriate to ensure that those areas of the quality assurance system identified as in need of further development will be appropriately addressed.

Regarding standard 3.1 – “The activities of the higher education institution (...) shall correspond to its type, specific features and strategic objectives. They shall mainly relate to teaching, research and services and be carried out in accordance with the principle of freedom and independence within the limits of the mandate of the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector.” – the group of experts is clear in its assessment: Franklin University Switzerland provides a broad range of academic education on the undergraduate level (first cycle) comprising disciplines that are traditionally part of different departments (“Fachbereiche”). The graduate level (second cycle) is limited to one master programme. The doctoral level (third cycle) is non-existent. The group of experts are clear in their assessment that Franklin University’s teaching and research is in line with the requirements of the Higher Education category of ‘university’ as opposed to the category

'university of applied sciences' in accordance with article 2 of the HEdA and that Franklin University meets the requirements of article 30 paragraph 1 letter b HEdA ("Tier-one universities and universities of applied sciences shall provide teaching, research and services in several disciplines or fields of study.") The group of experts also concludes that the existing second cycle and the non-existing third cycle does not justify the denomination "tier-one university" ("Universität") according to Article 29 HEdA because Franklin University's provision does not align with the common understanding that the third cycle is a distinguishing feature of the "tier-one university".

AAQ supports this analysis without hesitation. However, AAQ questions the efficacy of the recommended condition ("Franklin University Switzerland must provide detailed planning documents for the implementation of sufficient future master's and doctoral programs (...) ", because the fulfilment of this recommended condition will not fill the gap identified by the group of experts. It will rather merely produce a roadmap to fill the gap. Further, it will take more than three years to broaden the range of master's programmes provided by Franklin University and to establish a PhD programme. In other words: the gap identified will not be filled within the next three years – and a period of longer than 36 months is beyond that which can be allowed for an institution to meet a condition.

AAQ proposes that the recommendation regarding standard 3.1 not be accepted. Instead AAQ proposes accrediting FUS as university institute in accordance with Article 2 HEdA and to grant the designated title of "universitäres Institut" in accordance with Article 29 HEdA.

With regard to standard 5.1, the group of experts see it as necessary for Franklin University to formalise its communication in respect of its QA system. At the same time, the group of experts notes in respect of standard 1.1 that Franklin has not established a quality assurance strategy ("a single document"). This explains why the quality assurance strategy could not have been published in the first place. While AAQ sees no need for an additional condition, the agency expands condition 1 so that it covers the publication of the quality assurance strategy.

Finally, AAQ aligns the formulation of condition 3 to the model of the other conditions: "Franklin University Switzerland must "

4.3 Proposal

AAQ states that Franklin University Switzerland meets the requirements of Article 30 HEdA for institutional accreditation as "universitäres Institut":

– *Article 30 para 1 let. a and c*

The analysis of the standards set out in the Accreditation Ordinance by the expert peer group demonstrates that Franklin University fulfils the requirements of article 30, para. 1, let. a, 1-7', as well as letter c or will have fulfilled them once it has met the conditions set out above.

– *Article 30 para 1 let. b*

Franklin University Switzerland's programmes cover a variety of subjects that are traditionally organised in a number of departments ("Fachrichtungen"). However, for a "universitäres Institut" this requirement is not applicable.

Based on Franklin University's self-assessment report, the analysis set out in the expert report, the expert peer group's accreditation recommendation and FUS' position statement, AAQ proposes that Franklin University Switzerland be accredited as a "universitäres Institut" with four conditions:

Condition 1 (regarding standard 1.1 and 5.1):

Franklin University Switzerland must systematise the articulation between its quality assurance management tools, roles, and strategies.

Condition 2 (regarding standard 1.2):

Franklin University Switzerland must extend its QA system to ensure that it can support all taught and research programmes envisaged in its strategic plan to facilitate the institution to fulfil its mandate of becoming a university.

Condition 3 (regarding standard 2.1):

Franklin University Switzerland must include milestones, metrics and KPIs within its QA system that will allow it to measure its progress towards achieving its strategic goals, reporting on such progress annually.

Condition 4 (regarding standard 1.4):

Franklin University Switzerland must connect more coherently the institution's sustainability initiatives to the standard, by clearly integrating them with the QA system, setting objectives, and monitoring how and when they are implemented.

AAQ considers a period of 36 months for the fulfilment of the conditions to be reasonable.

AAQ proposes carrying out the review of the conditions “sur dossier” by three experts.



Section C

Expert report

28 July 2021



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1 Franklin University Switzerland: Brief description

Franklin University Switzerland (FUS; originally 'Franklin College Switzerland') was established in Lugano, Switzerland, in 1969. It was accredited by the then -Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools in Philadelphia in 1975 to grant the Associate of Arts degree.

FUS has had dual accreditation (Swiss and -- through the Middle States Commission for Higher Education [MSCHE] – US) since 2005, when the Swiss University Conference and the Swiss Organisation for Quality Assurance recognised all programmes of study leading to its Bachelor of Arts degree. FUS was awarded full institutional accreditation by the Swiss University Conference in 2013.

Although FUS' mission and delivery are still grounded in and informed by its liberal arts heritage, since 2010, FUS has taken steps to expand its offering, and students may enrol on a major programme of study, all delivered in the English language, in one of FUS' four very recently (2021) established divisions:

- Communication, History, and Politics,
- Business and Economics,
- Environment, Health, Maths, and Psychology,
- Art and Cultures.

While initially a liberal arts college that awarded Associate of Arts and then BA degrees, building on the recommendations of the previous accreditation report in 2013, the institution has been working towards developing its research profile and the desire to continue this work is highlighted as part of three priorities¹ arising from FUS' self-assessment exercise:

"[FUS] has always placed the highest priority on the quality of the education it provides to undergraduate students. In recent years this has been broadened as we have introduced our first Masters programs. We will support faculty research and teaching across the disciplines". FUS developed and approved its first master's degree in 2010: The Master of Science in International Management (MSIM) is one of two master's degrees now provided by the institution (the second, which saw its first enrolments in 2020, is the Master of Arts in Political Economy of Money and Development; MAPE). The expert peer group heard that FUS envisages that, in coming years, each of the four divisions will develop and deliver a master's programme. The institution has also commenced planning for a joint DBA/PhD programme with a South Korean university – Seoul Business School – although these plans are still at an early stage (see standard 3.1 for further detail).

At the time of submission of the self-assessment report to AAQ (autumn 2020), FUS had 25 permanent faculty, 20 adjunct faculty and 55 members of staff. Of its 293 students, 261 were enrolled on undergraduate degree programmes, 11 on study abroad programmes and 21 were engaged in graduate studies. The institution aims to ensure that its graduates are "responsible, compassionate and collaborative leaders" in a global landscape and this goal – the institution asserts – is supported by its multicultural, residential campus, in which 55 nationalities are represented.

¹ The three institutional priorities identified by the Self-Assessment Task Force are to: enhance integrated, interdisciplinary, and international academic and co-curricular programs; implement strategic enrolment management; and foster institutional sustainability and innovation. The subsection to priority one commits to supporting faculty research and teaching across the disciplines.

Central to FUS' offering is its signature Academic Travel programme, which, according to the institution, "links learning to place" and "intentionally integrate[s] the experiential learning piece into a semester-long academic course". All FUS students must participate in the programme, and degree students are required to take at least four Academic Travel classes during their four years at the institution.

FUS' hybrid status as a "US-style institution in Switzerland" can be challenging in achieving funding for research on which North American universities typically rely: the SAR (Self-assessment report) sets out that many of the granting agencies that American professors turn to are not open to Franklin because the institution does not operate on US soil; Swiss agencies do not typically pay a professor's salary as US agencies would – further, many of the funding instruments provided by the Swiss National Science Foundation are aimed at larger institutions, so are not suited to FUS' needs.

The institution is currently working towards the development of a Center for Environmental Justice and Sustainable Futures, which aims *inter alia* to provide an interdisciplinary research support system across the campus and integrate environmental justice and sustainability into teaching programmes.

Further, in order to expand its campus and to reduce current rental costs, FUS is planning construction of a third building in Sorengo. It is planned that this new building will house *inter alia* a student centre, a second auditorium and student dormitories that will accommodate over 150 students.

2 Analysis of follow-up on the results of previous procedures

The last accreditation of FUS by AAQ took place in 2013. In the report arising from that process, the expert peer group set out a number of recommendations, summarised as follows by FUS in its self-assessment report:

- "Developing and articulating more fully Franklin's mission, vision, strategic plan, learning outcomes, and a Facilities Master Plan.
- Integrating the mission, strategic plan and learning outcomes more effectively in institutional processes at all levels.
- Offering and assessing graduate programs in line with [FUS'] core mission.
- Evolving more effective assessment practices at the institutional, program, and course level, creating a stronger culture of assessment overall.
- Securing Franklin's sustainability for the future."

In addition to the thematic areas outlined above, the 2013 expert peer group's recommendations also encouraged FUS *inter alia* to:

- implement an "active college-wide research policy" and – linked with the fourth bullet point above – develop a clear policy and system of periodically evaluating and assessing the quality and impact of research produced. The 2013 peer group also recommended greater investment in research by FUS.
- ensure that faculty and students "have comprehension of the European Bologna Process".
- explore innovative solutions for maintaining and developing teaching skills and offer "possibilities for career path[s] for adjunct faculty, as well as for their continuing education".
- explore potential collaborations in respect of collaboration with international partners – in Europe and further afield – to encourage development of its research.

It is clear to the expert peer group that FUS has made much progress since the last accreditation process in addressing the above issues – for example, during the main review visit the group heard details of the international partnerships with other institutions and with industry (in Europe and further afield) that are planned or already underway; a further example of progress is provided in the institution’s modifications to address in the comprehension of faculty and students of – as well as lacunae within the QA system in relation to – the Bologna Process and education within the European Higher Education Area. These include the provision of diploma supplements that ‘translate’ the credit awarded for FUS modules and programmes into ECTS (European Credit Transfer and accumulation System) .

However, the expert peer group considers that some work remains to be done in responding to the conditions stipulated in the last accreditation report. The relevant areas are discussed at greater length throughout this report, and include:

- the articulation of detailed KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) and milestones for strategic goals, as well as annual evidence of assessment of strategic plan
- full documentation of the assessment plan in place in FUS
- further development of FUS’ graduate programmes
- incorporation of FUS’ programmes within the QA system, so that all programmes – undergraduate and graduate – are appropriately supported by the system.
- further clarification and articulation of the three European Bologna cycles from bachelor, master to doctorate.
- evidence of continued development of full and adjunct faculty, including the integration of full-time FUS faculty in its delivery of graduate programmes.
- incorporation of adjunct faculty within the institution’s assessment infrastructure.

3 Quality assurance system of Franklin University Switzerland

FUS’ self-assessment report (SAR) describes its quality assurance strategy as based on “a culture of evidence-based assessment” that aims to improve “effectiveness at all levels of [the] institution”. Its system is described as one that includes all constituencies of the institution – faculty, staff and students.

In the supplementary documentation provided to the expert peer group after the preliminary visit, FUS describes its quality assurance and assessment as comprising three main categories:

- strategic planning and assessment
- assessment of academics as well as of non-academic departments
- overall institutional assessment

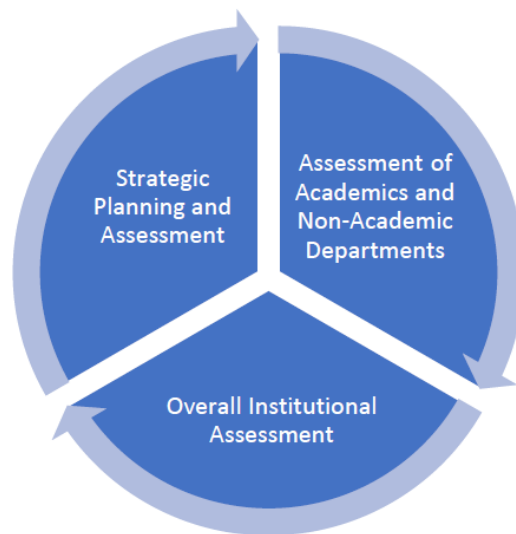


Fig: Diagram presenting the elements of FUS' assessment system (FUS *Overview of Quality Assurance Strategy and System* document)

FUS' **strategic plan** (2018-2023) and the assessment of its implementation are tracked by means of a tool and calendar into which are mapped the strategic planning goals and activities. The strategic plan was most recently updated in March 2021. However, during the review visit, the expert group heard that this update took place by way of an informal Cabinet process. The expert group is of the view that this process is in need of further formalisation, which should include regular and public assessment. A recommendation in this regard is included under standard 2.2.

In its SAR and in the supplementary information provided to the expert peer group after the preliminary visit, FUS describes its **assessment process** as one that is bottom-up and comprehensive, encompassing assessment of academic and non-academic areas (including finance, the registrar's office and the library). The quality assurance strategy in respect of academic matters is set out by the Student Learning Outcomes and Assessment Committee (SLOAC) – a standing committee comprising three faculty members (elected by faculty) and one staff member (elected by staff). The committee also oversees all academic assessment carried out within the institution. Student learning is assessed by means of evaluations that are completed by students at the conclusion of each class through FUS' online student course evaluation platform, EKIT. The resulting data are reviewed by the faculty and, annually, by the VP and Dean of Academic Affairs, who also holds overall responsibility for institutional assessment and is the point of contact for accreditation by both AAQ and MSCHE. Faculty and staff also participate in annual evaluations of their performance with their supervisors, during which they set goals for the year to come; faculty annual review includes review of each member's research, teaching, and service.

FUS' overall **institutional assessment** system is concerned with collecting the totality of data generated from all areas of the university, including enrolment, finance and academic affairs, analysing and sharing the analyses to feed into strategic planning.

From its review of:

- FUS' self-assessment report and the detailed accompanying evidence inventory,

- the supplementary information provided subsequent to the preliminary visit, and
- its discussions with FUS representatives during the main review visit,

the expert peer group received an impression of the North American quality culture embodied by the institution. However, even after the main review visit, the group found it a challenge to establish a clear picture and holistic overview of FUS' QA system and its communication to FUS' constituents. For a small institution, FUS produces a plethora of reports and has a very large number of committees, meaning that the institution's staff must fulfil multiple functions – in addition to their teaching and research, faculty members generally take on a high service load. FUS points out in the additional documentation supplied, that while its small size can be an advantage, lending it nimbleness and flexibility, the absence of a single member of staff with responsibility for quality assurance and assessment means that the institution does not always close the assessment loop successfully. There is little written documentation of the overall QA plan, and even less tracking of the progress of the assessment loop. This matter is discussed further below – in particular, under standards 1.1, 1.2 and 2.5.

4 Analysis of the compliance with the quality standards

Area 1: Quality assurance strategy

Standard 1.1: The higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector shall define its quality assurance strategy. This strategy shall contain the essential elements of an internal quality assurance system aimed at ensuring the quality of the activities of the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector and their long-term quality development as well as promoting the development of a quality culture.

Description and analysis

FUS' QA system is one that is very much based on the North American liberal arts model. The last accreditation report included as a recommendation that FUS increase its efforts to ensure that faculty and staff are "aware" of the characteristics and requirements of the Bologna process, and the supplementary documentation supplied post-preliminary visit set out a number of steps that FUS has taken in this respect, including the promotion of mobility through the introduction of research leave for faculty and study abroad opportunity for students and the provision of an ECTS conversion service for students. This will be considered further below under standard 3.3.

FUS presents assessment as forming the core of its quality assurance activities and the SAR presents a complex web of assessment activities and tools that include the following:

- Course Assessment Plans – assessment reports from individual faculty members about their courses;
Major Assessment Plans (MAPs) – assessment reports from academic departments about their majors;
- Departmental Assessment Plans (DAPs) – Assessment reports from non-academic or academic support departments such as the library, Registrar, etc.;
- The Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Committee (SLOAC) – a committee that guides assessment related to student learning outcomes and compiles student surveys. The committee is also responsible for cross-curriculum reports such as Academic Travel, First-Year Seminars and Capstone courses.
- Ruffalo Noel Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory

The SAR describes how the institution has, since the last AAQ review process in 2013, placed

an increased emphasis on assessment as part of its general evaluative processes and incorporated assessment more organically into the activity of the organisation, including in the activity of the Curriculum Committee and one-to-one meetings that take place between the Vice President and Dean of Academic Affairs and each full-time faculty member as part of the annual faculty evaluation process. The institution also notes that it has worked to create a more inclusive assessment culture by systematising assessment activities – for example, by developing databases to store assessment reports. To support all of these developments, the institution has commenced provision of pedagogical workshops for faculty focussing on practical assessment activities; further, there are regular assessment updates for faculty and staff during their respective monthly meetings.

The SAR acknowledges that elements of the assessment system continue to require improvement and points in particular to the creation of effective MAPs – the report highlights requests from faculty to provide more specific guidelines for assessment procedures and recognises that a template might be helpful in this regard. A template for DAPs was provided to faculty in autumn 2020.

Since the last accreditation process, FUS has endeavoured to make student learning outcomes at both degree and programme level more visible to external stakeholders. This has in part involved revising the institution’s catalogue, which was published in autumn 2020; FUS envisages that further developments to the website will also assist in this regard.

While the expert peer group was able to identify a wide range of activities carried out by the institution to assess and assure the quality of its provision, such as the institution’s course assessment plans, major assessment plans, and student evaluations detailed above), for the most part, the system comprising these activities, how they interact with each other and lead to improvements, is neither adequately documented nor communicated to stakeholders (internal or external). The issue of communication will be discussed below under standard 5.

The peer group acknowledges the benefits of FUS’ small size – as FUS has stated, this allows it to react swiftly with agility and flexibility – but notes that this strength can also pose challenges for the institution: much of the communication between actors in FUS’ QA system is informal and occurs through word of mouth. The expert peers heard much about faculty members’ willingness to follow up on informal feedback and suggestions received from students during the main review visit: students expressed their gratitude for the dedication of faculty and staff, and were aware of enhancements to faculty teaching practice that had emanated from previous course evaluations – but this closing of the feedback loop tended to be rather ad hoc – i.e. delivered occasionally by faculty during class rather than formal dissemination to FUS’ constituents. In articulating and documenting its QA strategy, FUS should ensure that it sets out clearly how it ensures that the feedback loop in respect of each process is closed.

As noted under the description of FUS’ QA system at section 3 above, FUS has implemented a rather complex committee structure, which places a heavy burden on both full-time and adjunct faculty comprising its membership and reduces the time available for research (this issue will be considered in greater detail below under standard 3). In addition, while part of the rationale behind the committee structure might be to increase transparency, the added effort required for communication – between committees and from committee to administration and to the wider FUS community – may in fact lead to the work of committees being obscured. FUS might consider whether the number of committees could be decreased to reduce the associated workload on faculty and staff and ensure that committee outputs are clearly communicated to all.

The expert peer group is of the view that a single document, clearly setting out the elements and participants of each of FUS’ quality assurance processes, is required to ameliorate the above issues. This document should articulate how processes and participants are linked with

each other, as well as how the quality assurance system is incorporated within the institutional strategy.

Conclusion

The expert group assesses standard 1.1 as partially fulfilled.

Condition 1: Franklin University Switzerland must systematise the articulation between its quality assurance management tools, roles and strategies.

Recommendation 1: The expert peer group recommends that, Franklin University Switzerland ensures that the QA strategy sets out clearly how it ensures that the feedback loop in respect of each process is closed.

Recommendation 2: The expert peer group recommends that, Franklin University Switzerland optimise its QA system, increasing its readability, ensuring its systematization and annual tracking and documentation, and reducing the workload for the benefit of its research activity.

Standard 1.2: The quality assurance system shall be incorporated into the strategy of the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector and efficiently support its development. It includes processes verifying whether the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector fulfils its mandate while taking account of its type and specific characteristics.

Description and analysis

In the SAR FUS notes that, following recommendations arising from the last AAQ accreditation process, it revised its mission statement as part of a 360-degree strategic planning process to articulate more fully its core values and strengths; all constituencies participated in this process. The revised mission statement focusses on preparing students to become “responsive, compassionate, and collaborative leaders” “in an increasingly complex and interconnected world”. The MSCHE accreditation team advised FUS to incorporate more explicitly graduate students into the mission or vision statements to reflect both undergraduate and graduate student constituencies. The expert peer group supports this recommendation and makes further comment on the potential for inconsistency in the FUS experience for graduate students under standard 3.1.

FUS confirms in the SAR that both its mission and vision statements guide all constituencies of the department in departmental strategic planning. The three primary goals of the strategic plan are:

- “Support academic excellence by enhancing integrated, interdisciplinary, and international academic and co-curricular programs.
- Implement Strategic Enrollment Management by developing one-, three-, and five-year enrollment plans to meet the academic, net revenue, and learning community needs of the University.
- Foster institutional sustainability and innovation by developing plans and initiatives that address current and future institutional needs.”

Nine plans emanate from these three priorities; these plans cover a range of areas including the development of a campus facilities plan, increasing the safety and security of the campus community, developing and maintaining a plan for information technology, and increasing staff and faculty salaries and increasing opportunities for faculty and staff development.

As set out under standard 1.1, the peer group is not convinced that FUS' QA strategy is adequately incorporated within the institutional strategy and encourages FUS in articulating its QA strategy, and defining and implementing its institutional strategy, to ensure that the two are clearly linked and supportive of each other. As set out above, it is imperative that FUS develop a single document that clearly articulates the elements of and responsible participants in each of its quality assurance processes and demonstrates how they are linked to each other, as well as how the quality assurance system is incorporated within the institutional strategy. In connection with this, the institution must also set targets and identify KPIs and milestones for its short-, medium- and long-term goals that will allow it to discern whether its institutional and QA strategies are on track (see recommendation under standard 1.1).

As regards the institution's fulfilment of its mandate, the expert peer group is of the view that FUS' quality assurance system, though not formalised, allows for the effective assessment of the quality of its taught undergraduate programmes; however, in spite of the enthusiasm and dedication of faculty, staff and institutional leadership, it also finds that additional reflection and work is needed to ensure that quality assurance of its existing and planned research programmes is fully incorporated within the system. This is particularly important given FUS' plans to develop further its offering of programmes at both master's and doctoral level. Any considerations in this respect should encompass the quality assurance of those programmes that will be delivered collaboratively with partner institutions and should also have regard to the provision and supervision of adjunct faculty involved in the delivery of research programmes, including the training and CPD (Continuing Professional Development) provided to such staff in preparation for same (see further discussion under standard 3.1). As part of this, FUS must ensure that it has a detailed business plan in place for each planned programme. FUS should also be cognisant that its QA policy should also incorporate the QA processes of any partner institutions delivering collaborative programmes.

Conclusion

The expert group assesses standard 1.2 as partially fulfilled.

Condition 2: Franklin University Switzerland must extend its QA system to ensure that it can support all taught and research programmes envisaged in its strategic plan to facilitate the institution to fulfil its mandate of becoming a university.

Recommendation 3: To efficiently support the development of research programmes, the FUS QA system must include the training and CPD of its faculty, including the adjuncts, involved in research programmes.

Recommendation 4: As FUS' graduate programmes will be developed with institutional partners, the expert group recommends that, in line with ESG 1.1, FUS' QA policies and practices should include the QA processes of the partner institutions co-delivering these programmes.

Standard 1.3: At all levels, all representative groups of the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector shall be involved in developing the quality assurance system and in its implementation, in particular students, mid-level faculty staff, professors and administrative and technical staff. Quality assurance responsibilities must be transparently and clearly assigned.

Description and analysis

The peer group saw some evidence of a quality culture within the institution – albeit one in need of systematisation, formalisation, and clear communication (see standards 1.1 and 5.1). It was

clear from the self-assessment report and from discussion during the main review visit that assessment and its outputs are used to enhance provision, practice, and the internal QA framework.

Faculty and staff from across the institution participate in the QA system through their membership of institutional committees and those committees contribute to the development and enhancement of policies and procedures. It was also confirmed during the main review visit that all committees apart from the personnel committee and Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Committee (SLOAC) have students in attendance. As noted above, however, FUS' committee structure is a complex one – faculty frequently take on multiple service roles on committees in addition to their teaching responsibilities.

FUS constituents – including students – also contribute to the institution's QA system through their participation in the evaluation system. As set out in the SAR, this takes a number of forms:

- FUS assesses learning using the Evaluation KIT, its online student course evaluation platform.
- Faculty submit course assessment plans and major assessment plans to facilitate periodic and regular evaluation of their courses and programmes.
- A survey of student satisfaction is conducted annually through the Ruffalo Noel Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory, the results of which are discussed at an annual round table in staff and faculty focus groups.
- Faculty undergo a regular review process that encompasses the evaluation of their teaching, research and service.
- Faculty and staff prepare annual evaluations for their supervisors as part of a 360-degree review overseen by the VP and Registrar.
- The strategic plan is reviewed regularly, with all sub-strategies reviewed annually, (Although the review team saw very little documentation to support this assertion).

In spite of this detailed and multi-layered system, the peer group was not convinced that all constituents are meaningfully involved in the development of the institution's QA system – this is particularly so in the case of students. In this regard, the peer group heard that student members of committees feed back to the Student Government Association through weekly meetings; however, the capacity of students to effect change within the institution appeared to the peer group to be limited to the facility to make suggestions, rather than to participate as equal partners within the system – for example, the peer group heard that new questions on the student evaluation form were discussed with students, but it was unclear whether or how students had input into the final decision; the peer group did not hear evidence of how students feed into, contribute to, and take responsibility for areas of the QA system's development and enhancement. The peer group has made a recommendation in relation to this matter below.

The group heard that faculty and staff take on board feedback from students delivered in both informal and formal settings – the institution stressed that students are comfortable speaking with faculty members about any issues that they experience, and that the close relationship between faculty and students, coupled with the institution's small size, means that faculty can intervene and make changes quickly – this includes changes to modules, courses, and assessment of learning. Cognisant of the difficulties experienced by some first-year students in integrating into college life during the Covid-19 pandemic, the institution has established separate focus groups with students and faculty to allow students to speak freely about their experiences. Information gleaned from these focus groups informs improvements to supports offered by FUS – for example, to the career service. It is unclear, though, whether the broader student population – beyond the Student Government Association – are aware that such

improvements have originated from their feedback, i.e. that the feedback loop within FUS is satisfactorily closed.

As set out under standard 1.1, a clear diagrammatic representation would be helpful in ensuring that roles and responsibilities are transparently and clearly assigned – this should be accompanied by the documentation, clarification, and simplification of roles and responsibilities within the system and should include the roles and responsibilities of adjunct staff and of students.

FUS might also consider assigning responsibility for assessment to one individual to ensure oversight and centralisation of the assessment function. This is particularly important in light of FUS' pursuit of dual accreditation (Swiss and US). It would remove some of the associated burden from faculty and staff members who currently have multiple responsibilities in respect of teaching and service within the institution.

Conclusion

The expert group assesses standard 1.3 as largely fulfilled.

Recommendation 5: The expert peer group recommends that, in documenting its QA system, Franklin University Switzerland clarify how students are involved in the construction and assessment of the QA system.

Standard 1.4: The higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector shall periodically analyse the relevance of its quality assurance system and make the necessary adjustments.

Description and analysis

In the SAR and during the main review visit, the peer group noted evidence of how FUS has, on foot of its assessment activities and analyses, made changes to and within its QA system to enhance provision, practice and oversight of same. In the SAR, the institution notes that its main goal has been to achieve more “buy-in” on the part of faculty and staff on the benefits of assessment – to this end, it has simplified the templates and guidelines related to these processes. The SAR mentions the role of the former Dean of Library Services and Institutional Assessment, who worked in collaboration with SLOAC to conduct meta-analyses of assessment within the institution, and revise processes and practices where appropriate. As noted under 1.3, the peer group advises FUS to reinstate the previous practice of allocating responsibility for assessment to an individual member of staff to ensure centralisation of the function and the continuation of the former Dean's good work.

The SAR confirms that – in response to feedback received from the MSCHE accreditation team – the VP and Dean of Academic Affairs and SLOAC are considering opening a discussion with faculty to rethink the way they assess majors, noting that the current process of MAPs and CAPs involve significantly more work than simply articulating a plan. One solution proposed in the SAR is that SLOAC might devise a series of guided questions in the form of an annual report on the major. The peer group was also heartened to read in the SAR that FUS is also looking at how it can more fully involve adjunct faculty in the assessment process and encourages the institution to expedite these discussions to implement a system that would facilitate this in the near future.

The team is satisfied that the institution considers where improvements to its assessment system are required and – for the most part – implements the necessary changes to bring this about – for example, as above, the SAR includes detail of how FUS has simplified templates and guidelines for self-evaluations, course, and major assessment plans to encourage increased engagement from faculty and staff in the writing of assessment reports.

However, the group also noted that some adjustments made to institutional structures and the overall quality assurance system appear to be rather reactive and, in some instances, based on external pressures – for example, while the peer group is satisfied that the decision to move from a department-based structure to a divisional one will increase efficiency and will assist FUS in encouraging inter- and multi-disciplinary collaboration, it was not clear that this adjustment was sufficiently well grounded in outputs of the QA system, or that it was the result of consultation with any of the constituencies affected by the decision.

As far as meta-analysis of the QA system is concerned, the peer group is satisfied that FUS' self-assessment for the purpose of external reviews of QA for accreditation by MSCHE and AAQ satisfies this standard, but – as noted above – encourages FUS to vest responsibility for assessment matters in one individual.

Conclusion

The expert group assesses standard 1.4 as largely fulfilled.

Area 2: Governance

Standard 2.1: The quality assurance system shall ensure that the organisational structure and decision-making processes enable the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector to fulfil its mission and to achieve its strategic objectives.

Description and analysis

FUS notes in the SAR that it benefits from the input of its Board of Trustees, to whom the President reports. The President takes ultimate responsibility for administration on campus, and is advised by senior administration through three groups: the president's cabinet, comprising deans and vice presidents; the leadership group, a broader constituency comprising directors of key departments, the chair of faculty assembly and members of the cabinet; and the academic affairs committee, a trustee-driven committee that includes members from all constituencies within the institution.

The SAR confirms that the various groups and constituencies referred to above were all represented on the Strategic Planning Task Force that was convened between spring 2017 and autumn 2018. This task force was allocated responsibility for creating a new five-year strategic plan, and sought faculty and staff input to this process via elected members and by making draft versions of the plan available for comment on the internal shared drive. Student involvement in this process came through a Student Government Association forum in December 2017 – for future processes, the institution might consider involving student representatives at an earlier stage of the planning process, potentially as members of the task force. The SAR sets out that, for each of the primary points within the strategic plan, one person within the organisation has been assigned responsibility. Student participation in FUS' QA and governance systems is considered further under standard 2.3.

Evidence garnered during the main review, the self-assessment report and further documentation supplied to the review team present an organisational structure and QA infrastructure that – while effective insofar as it relates to undergraduate programmes – is somewhat fragmented. The peer group is satisfied that the recent change to a divisional rather than departmental structure will be helpful in assisting the institution to achieve its mission and strategic objectives as they pertain to undergraduate education; it is also evident that the structures and systems currently in place do support FUS in its delivery of undergraduate programmes and – for the most part – in the achievement of its strategic objectives in this regard. This includes the regular review of faculty teaching, research and service, and the annual review of both faculty and staff as part of the institution's 360-degree review process, both of which assist the institution in ensuring that senior officers, department chairs, teachers

and staff members are appropriately supported in working collectively towards the achievement of the institution's strategic objectives. The peer group advises FUS to consider devolving responsibility to support personnel recruitment, development and discipline to a Director of Human Resources rather than allocating it – as is currently the case – as part of the portfolio of the Vice-President of Finance and Administration.

While, as set out above, FUS' QA system does appear to support the institution in delivering on its mission in respect of undergraduate education, it is less clear how the QA system assists FUS in achieving its mission and strategic objectives in respect of graduate programmes. Given FUS' recent introduction of a second master's programme, its aspirations – articulated during the main review visit – to have a master's programme residing within each of the disciplines, and its plans to initiate delivery of a joint doctoral programme with a South Korean university, it is imperative that the institution ensure that its QA system is sufficiently flexible to accommodate and incorporate the quality assurance of graduate programmes. FUS must ensure that its goals in respect of graduate education and its delivery both alone and collaboratively with industry and other institutions, are more clearly articulated – and – as set out under standard 1.4 – the assessment structures and overall quality assurance system must incorporate both graduate and undergraduate programmes. The expert peer group has stipulated a condition in this respect under standard 1.2.

The peer group also views as crucial that FUS, when systematising its QA system to meet the condition stipulated under standard 1, ensure that it documents and presents how the system, as a coherent infrastructure, assures the quality of the full range undergraduate and graduate programmes delivered by the institution.

Conclusion

The expert group assesses standard 2.1 as largely fulfilled.

Standard 2.2: The quality assurance system shall systematically contribute to providing relevant and current quantitative and qualitative information on which the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector relies to make current and strategic decisions.

Description and analysis

The SAR lists a number of tools that FUS uses to produce the information that it uses to make strategic decisions. These include:

- the University Employee Satisfaction Survey
- Roundtables
- Departmental Assessment Plans, Annual Reports and Departmental Plans
- the Vital Signs Fact Book
- the Student Satisfaction Inventory
- Student course evaluations

The SAR proceeds to provide examples of improvements implemented by the institution on the basis of feedback garnered through these assessment tools – for example, on foot of survey responses, FUS has effected technological updates to its computer labs, replaced the cameras monitoring its Kaletsch Campus parking lot and commenced plans for a student centre in its new construction project.

FUS acknowledges in its SAR that, where it becomes aware that improvements are needed to the system, a discussion will take place at Cabinet level, subsequent to which responsibilities for the areas discussed will be assigned. The individuals/teams responsible are then expected to revert to the Cabinet with proposals or ideas to be discussed before a final position is taken.

The peer group notes ample evidence data gathered by FUS through its assessment and review processes alongside examples of how this data is used to enhance quality within the institution – the use of assessment reports, for instance, to support curricular changes that will support student learning, as detailed in the SAR; however, it could not discern from the documentation or during the main review visit, any evidence of how the institution sets KPIs or metrics upon which to base any strategic decisions and to evaluate whether it is meeting its strategic objectives.

The group heard that FUS does not rely so much on metrics as it does on a ‘process’ in tracking its strategic plan, with the plan being assessed at cabinet level annually. A report from each unit is sent to the president in spring, with a second update in August after the conclusion of the academic year. The president also presents a ‘state of the university’ report to the board of trustees at each of its meetings.

Additional documentation provided to the peer group after the preliminary visit included a tracking document that accompanies the institution’s strategic plan; however, by and large, this constituted a list of actions that had already been taken rather than setting out indicators that would permit the institution to determine whether it was on track to meet its goals. For example, the peer group did not see adequate evidence of preparation for the major institutional strategic goal of developing MA programs in each division, nor for the introduction of the divisional structure. Analysis and indicators must be provided to ensure that FUS can achieve its goal of developing three new graduate programmes in the years to come.

The peer group notes that the development of KPIs and metrics that align with FUS’ plans would allow the institution to measure at regular intervals whether initiatives taken in furtherance of particular strategic goals – for example, to increase enrolment – were effective, or in need of revision. The peer group has proposed a recommendation in this respect below. This recommendation should be read in conjunction with the condition set out under standard 1.1.

Conclusion

The expert group assesses standard 2.2 as partially fulfilled.

Condition 3: Franklin University Switzerland includes milestones, metrics and KPIs within its QA system that will allow it to measure its progress towards achieving its strategic goals, reporting on such progress annually.

Standard 2.3: The quality assurance system shall ensure that the representative groups of the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector have an appropriate participatory right and that basic conditions are in place allowing them to independently operate.

Description and analysis

FUS describes its governance model as ‘shared’, and notes that an understanding of this system “begins with an appreciation of the multiple constituencies that co-exist within a higher education institution” The document *Shared Governance at Franklin* describes the remit of each of the institution’s committees, as well as its composition: as set out above under standard 1.3, committees comprise membership from among FUS’ faculty and staff. The SAR also notes that it is hoped that the newly established divisions will “[ensure] a more equitable system of shared governance, giving faculty more responsibility and a voice in administrative divisions”.

Students are represented at both the Faculty Assembly and Curriculum Committee meetings through a member of the Student Governance Association, who – it is noted in the *Shared Governance at Franklin* document – “shares students’ opinions and gather information to share

during the SGA General Assembly meetings”. Students are also “invited to attend various committees and campus opportunities” (with the exception of the Personnel Committee and SLOAC, due to the subject matter of discussions at meetings of that committee). From this description, it is not apparent how students are facilitated to contribute to or participate in this aspect of the QA and governance systems as full and equal members. The peer group notes that there were no student members of the SAR steering committee, although the SAR notes that a student member served on the working group for one chapter of the MSCHE self-study, upon which the AAQ SAR draws – and that the “entire community” participated in the drafting, writing, and finalisation process for that self-study. The SAR also acknowledges that the steering committee, in the lead-up to the main review visit, worked to “inform the community at large” about the self-assessment process. FUS should consider incorporating the student voice – and student membership of any steering or drafting groups – more explicitly into future self-assessment processes. Similarly, although the peer group also heard during the main review visit that students were asked for their views on the new online student survey, it was not apparent to the peer experts how they participated in developing questions. This merits consideration for future amendments and enhancements to the survey.

During their discussions with students, however, the peer group noted that students do have the opportunity to make their views heard and suggest enhancements to the institution’s operation; the group heard, for instance, that student representatives attending the Food Service Committee have effected change to the cafeteria menu and that students were able to give input as to which facilities should be incorporated within the new building. In addition, students detailed how they can propose the establishment of a new student society and are supported in such endeavours by FUS – both financially and through mentoring from faculty members.

However, as set out above, from its perusal of the documentary evidence, the peer group was not easily able to identify whether or how student participation and contributions to matters of QA and governance are facilitated by FUS.

Conclusion

The expert group assesses standard 2.3 as largely fulfilled.

Recommendation 6: The expert peer group recommends that FUS render more visible the participation and contributions of students to the institution’s QA system.

This recommendation should be read in conjunction with the condition stipulated under standard 1.1 and the recommendation under standard 1.3.

Recommendation 7: The expert peer group recommends that FUS QA policies should actively motivate and support students to contribute to the governance and to the QA system, including the design of the programmes (ESG 2015, Std 1.2) and survey, as full and equal members.

Standard 2.4: The higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector shall give consideration to an economically, socially and environmentally sustainable development in the completion of its tasks. The quality assurance system shall ensure that the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector sets objectives in this area and also implements them.

Description and analysis

FUS prides itself on the focus it places on social justice and sustainability and its SAR notes that it placed within the top ten universities supporting ethical value and social responsibility in the World’s Universities with Real Impact Ranking for 2020. Part of its mission is to prepare its students to become “compassionate and responsible leaders”.

The SAR emphasises that one of the three institutional priorities is to “foster institutional sustainability and innovation” and sets out how FUS integrates economic, environmental and cultural sustainability within its programmes and various initiatives and projects in which it engages or plans to engage – these include:

Environmental sustainability

- the establishment of a Green Office on campus (autumn 2021);
- the inclusion of a concentration in climate action and a partnership with the United Nations in the graduate MSIM programme;

Economic sustainability

- the very recent establishment of new partnerships in Korea and China under the new Dean of Executive Education and Global Outreach as well as partnerships with US institutions, which, according to the SAR, “increase FUS’ visibility and opportunities for student exchange and new student enrolments“;
- Academic Travel and the upcoming launch of the ‘Zurich Program’, a semester-long programme for students that takes place in Zurich and offers experiential learning and cultural immersion, which is intended to offer students studying at FUS the opportunity to learn more about Switzerland and be attractive to those students who wish to study at FUS for only one semester.

Cultural Sustainability

- the provision of fully funded scholarship to refugee students through the Scholarships without Borders Program.

FUS also stresses in the SAR that its new and revised administrative structures, working committees and shared governance models are intended to “provide a stronger decision-making process, identify necessary resources and support, and ensure focus on strategic goals over the 2018-2023 Strategic Plan”.

FUS has had the good fortune to receive donations over the past two academic years, which have allowed it to proceed with its plans for a third building and to continue to subsidise its four-year students. The expert group was assured by FUS’ that the identities of the donors are known to FUS and that there are discussions ongoing about making these identities public. The group welcomes these clarifications and stresses the importance of maintaining transparency around such advancement, given potential implications for academic independence and autonomy.

FUS might also consider further developing how it tracks the realisation of its mission to develop students into compassionate leaders. This is done in part by tracking alumni career pathways, but the tracking process tends to be rather informal and would benefit from formalisation. FUS told the expert group that it plans to evaluate periodically the realisation of its student outcomes, including those that pertain to sustainability – potentially in conjunction with the evaluation of the Academic Travel programme.

Conclusion

The expert group assesses standard 2.4 as partially fulfilled.

Condition 4: Franklin University Switzerland must connect more coherently the institution’s sustainability initiatives to the standard, by clearly integrating them with the QA system, setting

objectives, and monitoring how and when they are implemented.

Standard 2.5: To carry out its tasks, the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector shall promote equal opportunities and actual gender equality for its staff and students. The quality assurance system shall ensure that the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector sets objectives in this area and also implements them.

Description and analysis

FUS' SAR references the policies, procedures and principles that relate to equal opportunities and gender equality for prospective and current staff and students in the areas of:

- recruitment
- admissions
- evaluation
- dismissal

and confirms that all relevant policies are subject to regular review and updating.

Explicit reference is made on FUS' website to its compliance with obligations under both Swiss and US federal law in respect of equality and equal opportunity, and the SAR also confirms that both the Faculty Manual and Student Handbooks affirm FUS' adherence to the principle of equal opportunity. The institution's employment procedures (including its commitment to "fair, ethical and impartial practices in human resource management, in conformity with the university principles of equal opportunity and non-discrimination in employment and education") are outlined in the document *Hiring and Promotion Procedures and Employment Contracts*. The SAR affirms that FUS' faculty Personnel Committee has regard to gender parity and diversity when reviewing any shortlist of candidates for faculty vacancies. A bias incident reporting process has just commenced and any violations regarding gender equity or sexual harassment are brought to the Judicial Board campus committee – the relevant procedures and sanctions are set out in the Student Handbook.

During the main review visit, the peer group met FUS' ombudsperson, who is at the disposal of all FUS employees in the event of a conflict – the ombudsperson does not advocate for the employee, but – rather – assists in clarifying what the conflict is about and what the next steps in the process can be. The general approach is to recommend dialogue before escalating the grievance further, although it was acknowledged that this is not always possible. Expert peers heard that, in the event that a Title IX grievance is filed, they go to the Vice-President for Advancement initially, who decides whether it falls under Title IX; if it does, the grievance procedure is initiated, which includes counselling, discussion and is then adjudicated upon by a senior staff member – this is generally The Vice-President and Dean of Academic Affairs, but the ultimate authority is the President. The expert group heard that not many cases go past the initial mediation stage and that, when the ombudsperson is involved, this is usually sufficient.

It is noted in the SAR that, in the midst of the Black Lives Matter movement in spring 2020, following criticism of the institution by alumni on social media in relation to perceived faculty bias, the President established the Equity and Inclusion Task Force, comprising faculty, staff, alumni and students, with a faculty member chairing. Thus far, the task force has held two virtual workshops for faculty covering the equity and inclusion in pedagogy and classroom practices. Further, the peer group heard during the main review visit that a student-developed survey aiming to determine how well students feel FUS tackles issues of equity and inclusion both on and off campus had been conducted – it is planned that the co-chair of the task force

will speak to divisional chairs about faculty/student interactions and issues raised in the survey and that the task force is currently considering how best to make transparent the issues raised to the FUS student community.

The expert group received an impression of an institution in which staff, faculty and leadership care deeply about their students. During the main review visit, members of the group heard that the Office of Student Life is currently undertaking an equity and inclusion course and also heard of several instances where staff members have taken on personal initiatives aimed at supporting students (for example, the creation of a travel component for the careers course; the development of a co-programme with the European Colleges Association). FUS also provides supports to students with additional needs in the form of reasonable accommodations and assistance in terms of accessibility and tutoring from the Writing and Learning Center.

The group is, however, of the opinion that the QA system as it currently stands is not providing adequate support to FUS in this critical area. Ameliorating this issue goes beyond simply systematising the structures in place – it is far more a matter of ensuring that the institution is collecting and using the right data and ensuring that all feedback loops are closed. FUS currently does not have in place a sufficiently integrated, systematized, and tracked QA system.

The expert group noted from its review of the SAR and from discussions during the main review visit, that FUS' campus is a diverse one, with 55 nationalities represented. The Academic Travel programme fosters intercultural awareness and respect for diversity, and students whom the review team met were enthusiastic about their experience of the programme.

Conclusion

The expert group assesses standard 2.5 as largely fulfilled.

Recommendation 8: The expert peer group recommends that, in its efforts to promote equal opportunity and gender equity, FUS must provide formal evidence that it is collecting the right data, taking into account all feedback, ensuring that all feedback loops are closed, and meeting its own KPIs and measures for greater equity and diversity for all faculty, staff and students.

Area 3: Teaching, research and services

Standard 3.1: The activities of the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector shall correspond to its type, specific features and strategic objectives. They shall mainly relate to teaching, research and services and be carried out in accordance with the principle of freedom and independence within the limits of the mandate of the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector.

Description and analysis

As noted above, FUS' mission is one very much in keeping with the traditional North American liberal arts philosophy – at the time of submission of the SAR, FUS provided 17 BA degrees, had 22 minor areas of study, one Master of Arts degree and one Master of Science degree, with plans to provide a joint DBA/PhD in Responsible Management in partnership with a South Korean university. Although FUS has made relatively recent inroads into the provision of graduate programmes at master's level, including in the area of executive education, its strengths and core activity remain in its delivery of undergraduate programmes.

FUS faculty carry a relatively large teaching burden, with the expectation that each faculty member will deliver six courses per academic year, including one academic travel course; full-

time faculty are expected to maintain an active research agenda and to contribute to active service requirements of the university by participating as members of the university committee structure.

Undergraduate education (First cycle)

The SAR sets out the academic trajectory for the undergraduate Franklin student, which commences with Core Requirements and the First-Year Experience, extends to majors and minors, and culminates in a capstone experience. Core requirements include:

- the Global Responsibility requirement
- a Modern Language programme

The SAR details how students progress to an in-depth study of their chosen area of specialisation once they have completed their core requirements. This in-depth study also allows students to meet FUS' general student learning outcomes, which are incorporated across the curriculum and include *inter alia*:

- intellectual development
- scientific literacy
- digital literacy
- creativity

The capstone experience will, as outlined in the SAR, vary depending on the discipline, and may entail a capstone course, research seminar, internship experience or undergraduate thesis.

The SAR details how FUS' Honors Programme takes a "co-curricular approach to working within and across the disciplines" and provides "an opportunity to engage in interdisciplinary research and scholarship with expert faculty and other highly qualified peers" using an Oxbridge tutorial model alongside an interdisciplinary Honors seminar and year-long Honors thesis. The SAR also stresses that its strong partnerships and collaborations provide students with the opportunity to – in line with FUS' pedagogical ethos of providing a bridge between theory and practice – engage in internships, during which students will have both an on-site and on-campus academic supervisor.

FUS' signature Academic Travel programme allows students to "integrate experiential learning within a semester-long academic course" [SAR]. Students must complete four US three-credit travel courses as part of their core curriculum and – once they have fulfilled these requirements – may continue to take travel courses for general elective or major credit.

On the whole, the peer group noted with approval the well-rounded formation offered to students at undergraduate level in FUS – students detailed with enthusiasm their experiences of the Academic Travel programme, which, as noted above, fosters intercultural awareness and respect for diversity and provides students with the opportunity to visit a wide variety of countries and become better acquainted with their teachers and fellow students. However, the peer group also noted that FUS' requirements in relation to the Modern Language programme may contribute to a sense of isolation from the surrounding off-campus community in Lugano: As part of the Modern Language programme, referred to above, each student must take between two and five classes in one of the Swiss languages – French, German, or Italian – depending on their level of proficiency to achieve intermediate to advanced proficiency (CEFR B1-B2) – it is not mandatory that students take Italian. From conversations during the main review visit, the expert group learned that a lack of proficiency in Italian can – in spite of efforts to facilitate integration through various events and initiatives – have the effect of isolating students from the wider Lugano community. The institution might consider whether the current requirements in respect of competence in the Italian language are adequate to ensure that

students can benefit fully from their time as a student at FUS, including experiencing a more complete integration into the surrounding neighbourhood and culture. The expert peer group notes FUS' mission to ensure that its graduates are responsive and compassionate leaders, and considers to integration within ones immediate environment to form an element of this formation.

Graduate education (Second and third cycles)

The SAR details the recent review (autumn 2018) of the MSIM programme (Master of Science in International Management) under the joint leadership of the Director of the MSIM and the recently recruited Dean of Executive Education. The revised offering aims to respond to student dissatisfaction and low enrolment numbers in academic years 2016-17 and 2017-18 – in part through the provision of internship opportunities with the United Nations Institute of Training and Research (UNITAR) in Geneva. The SAR also notes that the ongoing assessment of Graduate Studies has uncovered further areas in need of improvement, including a strengthened focus on recruitment, robust assessment, and to student learning outcomes formulated specifically for Graduate Studies. The expert group were also told during the main review visit that it is FUS' ambition to see each of the institution's four divisions delivering a master's programme over the coming years.

The SAR makes only fleeting reference to FUS' plans to expand its scope of provision into the provision of doctoral education. There, reference is made to the potential development of a doctoral programme that would follow on from the MAPE. There are also long-term plans to collaborate with other institutions and provide opportunities for joint appointments for PhD students and post-doctoral fellows in the planned Center for Studies in Environmental Humanities and Sustainability.

In this regard, during the main review visit, the expert group heard from the President and from FUS' recently recruited Dean of Innovation and Impact that there are nascent plans in train to step into the space of doctoral education based on a strategy that is intended to bring FUS safely to the level where it can design doctoral programmes on its own; the group discovered that, in recognition of its status as a growing liberal arts university, FUS has chosen to partner with Seoul Business School (SBS), which already has a proven track record of delivering business programmes at graduate level. This plan has been approved unanimously by the Board of Trustees. It is planned that students enrolled on the programme – which FUS envisages will have its first enrolments in autumn 2021 – will complete a PhD with SBS and that FUS will take responsibility for a DBA programme, with full control and ownership over admission. The expert group was told that this 'step-by-step' strategy will allow FUS to 'learn the ropes' and better equip itself – at a later stage – to step independently into the PhD space. To finance its doctoral programmes, FUS hopes to partner with industry, which should provide access to grants and support for research and innovation.

The expert group did not feel that FUS had presented adequate planning documents to demonstrate that it was functioning as a university within the Swiss definition of a higher education institution. The U-Map is a good document for the definition of a higher education institution in the European Area, specially figure 1: http://www.u-map.eu/U-MAP_report.pdf Research indicators are peer-reviewed publications, doctoral production, budget allocation on research.

Based on the evidence presented by FUS there is currently only one Master's program (with a low number of students) and no doctoral production. There is little in the way of planning documents, calendars, budget set aside for the development of graduate programs. Therefore, FUS shows specific features and strategic objectives, but it only partially fulfils its type at present. See the related condition at the conclusion of this standard.

Research

It is noted in the SAR that, since FUS' last accreditation, research at Franklin has slowly but surely become part of university culture – this includes regular collaborations among Franklin faculty members and with colleagues at other institutions.

To support faculty in maintaining their research, FUS, when revising the Academic Travel course in 2014, reduced the overall course-load for faculty from six courses per year plus one academic travel course to five courses plus one academic travel course. As the Academic Travel programme increased from one credit to three credits, this did not lead to a substantial reduction in the number of credits each faculty member is expected to deliver annually, but – the SAR stresses – it did reduce the amount of work required of each faculty member, and increased the amount of time available for research. The institution has also implemented a policy of permitting all faculty members to request research leaves for a defined period – which may include a teaching offer at another institution. In addition, since 2016, FUS has provided the opportunity for full-time faculty to take sabbatical leave for a semester after that faculty member has completed six years of service. This has been availed of by six faculty members to date, and FUS noted a measurable increase in research productivity from each of those individuals. Financial support for conference attendance, conference planning and professional development is also available to faculty.

The institution has created the positions of Affiliate Scholar and Affiliate Professor with the aim of fostering research collaborations with other institutions – to date, two affiliate professors have been appointed, one of whom – the Affiliate Professor in Environmental Studies (who is a full-time faculty member in another university) – is engaged in collaboration with FUS faculty members from the Divisions of Environmental Sciences and Comparative Literary and Cultural Studies to develop a new research centre – the Center for Environmental Justice and Sustainable Studies (also referred to above).

During discussions in respect of FUS' plans to develop doctoral programmes, the expert group heard that accreditation is a key element of the strategy and was interested to hear how – to achieve this goal – FUS will seek to ground its planned doctoral programmes in academia. To that end, the very recently recruited Dean of Innovation and Impact has been working to group scholars together and find synergies to develop graduate studies – the first priority has been to redevelop and redesign master's programmes, as detailed above. The challenge now, the peer group heard, will be to highlight the research being undertaken by FUS faculty and integrate it into graduate programmes.

The peer group notes the impressive track records of many members of FUS faculty but agrees that further work is needed to incorporate the disparate research of individuals into FUS' provision. The expert group also notes that, currently, only one member of full-time faculty is involved in the delivery of graduate education at FUS – the majority of provision is by adjunct faculty. While students reported positive experiences with adjunct faculty at graduate level, and the expert group was assured by FUS representatives that adjunct faculty are actively engaged, the group is nonetheless concerned that this may lead to inconsistency of experience for undergraduate and graduate students.

This may be somewhat ameliorated by the presence of undergraduate faculty on the Graduate Curriculum Committee, and FUS is also working to integrate some of the courses from the MSIM programme into the undergraduate Business Division, but FUS might consider taking further steps to ensure greater integration and consistency across undergraduate and graduate programmes. It is noted in the SAR that the Graduate Curriculum Committee has not yet established regular interactions with the corresponding undergraduate committees – in this regard, FUS might also consider what steps it can take to ensure more fulsome communication

and collaboration between the Graduate Committee and the relevant undergraduate committees.

Service

The SAR sets out faculty obligations in respect of service – all full-time faculty members are expected to participate in a number of standing and ad hoc committees, and task forces. Faculty also take on a number of administrative and liaison roles in the regulation of undergraduate matters of governance and communication with other key bodies across the institution, including the Board of Trustees, staff and administration.

The SAR outlines that each faculty member will generally sit on one standing committee and one to several ad hoc committees per academic year. Faculty members are elected to committees at the beginning of each academic year and are expected to serve up to two terms. The committee structure is reviewed every so often by the Personnel Committee and VP and Dean for Academic Affairs.

The SAR comments on the “service fatigue” evident among faculty members and the sometimes uneven distribution of service load across the faculty. The expert group notes that the service requirement on faculty is considerable and has the potential to limit the time available to faculty members for research. This could have a significant and detrimental impact on FUS’ aims to place an increased focus on research and increase the amount of faculty research incorporated into its programmes. As set out above under standard 1, FUS might consider streamlining and consolidating its committee structure to reduce the burden on faculty members.

Conclusion

As FUS was initially accepted for candidature with the status of a university, it continues to be required to adhere to all requirements, including that of providing graduate education at both Master’s and doctoral levels, supporting research, and linking teaching and research. FUS must provide detailed planning documents for the implementation of sufficient future master’s and doctoral programs, including milestones, deadlines for delivery, full-time faculty-hiring plans, curricular development plans and business plans. Such plans should be part of strategic planning, and should be formalized via KPIs, responsibility of persons and departments, expected delivery dates, budget, etc. The recommendation set out under standard 4.1 is also of relevance in this regard.

The expert group assesses standard 3.1 as partially fulfilled.

Condition 5: Franklin University Switzerland must provide detailed planning documents for the implementation of sufficient future master’s and doctoral programs, including milestones, deadlines for delivery, full-time faculty-hiring plans, curricular development plans and business plans. Such plans should be part of strategic planning, and should be formalized via KPIs, responsibility of persons and departments, expected delivery dates, budget, etc.

Standard 3.2: The quality assurance system shall provide for a periodic evaluation of teaching and research activities, of services and of results achieved in these areas.

Description and analysis

FUS approach to assessment of teaching, research and service of its full-time professors, as detailed in the SAR, is set out in the introductory overview of quality assurance in FUS (see section 3 above). The approach is, according to the SAR, developmental in nature and based on an annual self-assessment by faculty, which is then discussed in a one-on-one meeting with the VP and Dean of Academic Affairs. Assistant professors are subject to additional, more

extensive three-year reviews – dossiers are submitted by those members of faculty up for promotion from assistant to associate level, and from associate to full professor. These dossiers include extensive documentation in respect of the faculty member's teaching, research and service in the preceding six years and are reviewed by the VP and Dean of Academic Affairs, the Personnel Committee and an external expert in the relevant discipline. Annual teaching evaluations are submitted by students – these cover the content and design of curricula and consistency of content with the stated learning goals.

Faculty research is evaluated based on the work produced in the ongoing year – regard is had to the quality and kind of publication relative to the faculty member's discipline and the extent to which they were able to achieve the goals set in the previous year.

Service is evaluated in terms of the faculty member's committee participation and general service to the university, which includes work with divisions, ad hoc committees, and student groups. As set out under standard 3.1, FUS is cognisant of a certain level of 'service fatigue' among faculty members and the expert peer group would advise considering how the institution can work to ameliorate this issue.

As noted above at standard 1.3, FUS' assessment infrastructure is complex and the institution might consider allocating responsibility for assessment to one individual to ensure oversight and centralisation of the assessment function. This point is particularly important in light of FUS' pursuit of dual accreditation (Swiss and US) and would remove some of the associated burden from faculty and staff members who currently have multiple responsibilities in respect of teaching and service within the institution.

Conclusion

The expert group assesses standard 3.2 as largely fulfilled.

Recommendation 9 : The expert peer group recommends that FUS charge a single person with overseeing and centralizing FUS's assessment plan, functioning, and closing of the feedback loop.

Standard 3.3: The quality assurance system shall ensure that principles and objectives linked to the European Higher Education Area are taken into consideration.

Description and analysis

Section 2 of this report details the institution's response to the recommendations and conditions arising out of the last accreditation process. One of the areas for improvement outlined in that accreditation report was that FUS' needed to ensure that faculty and students "have comprehension of the European Bologna Process".

The SAR outlines FUS' international outlook, which is supported by the diverse composition of its faculty, staff and student body, and is a thread running through its curricula. FUS' states as the first goal of its strategic plan that it aims to "support academic excellence by enhancing integrated, interdisciplinary, and international academic and co-curricular programmes" and – although FUS does not participate in the Swiss Mobility Programme – it notes that the strategic goal translates into its provision of its Academic Travel program, campus partnerships and collaborations, as well as the possibility for students to pursue a Leave of Absence to study abroad at another institution. Faculty mobility has also recently been embedded into FUS' administrative structures, and the Faculty Manual includes an explicit statement on the research leave policy (referred to above under standard 3.1).

The SAR acknowledges that – initially at least – being part of the European Higher Education

Area proved problematic because of the systemic credit differences between ECTS and semester credits. At the preliminary visit for this accreditation process, the expert group requested additional detail from the institution to clarify its understanding of itself as an institution operating within the European Higher Education Area. The supplementary documentation outlines that, in meeting the condition set out in the previous accreditation (i.e. to ensure that faculty and staff have comprehension of the Bologna process), FUS has *inter alia* established a semester credit hour system, which can be converted into ECTS upon request. Further, it has “adopted a system of easily readable and comparable degrees”, which includes the provision of diploma supplements (including a transcript that sets out the ECTS associated with the semester credit option), and the provision of up to 60 ECTS of transfer credits from specific secondary school experiences for incoming students (e.g. those who have achieved HL scores of 5 or higher for the International Baccalaureate), and the award of credits for passing grades on various school leaving certificate exams/college-level courses in US colleges or universities. Other examples provided include exchange and collaboration with international institutions and the incorporation of the European dimension within Academic Travel and various majors. The expert group was unable to find information in respect of the volume of ECTS awarded for master’s level programmes.

During the main review visit, the expert peer group heard from students that attending FUS has opened their eyes to other cultures and experiences and that the opportunity to participate in the Academic Travel programme – although currently curtailed due to the Covid-19 pandemic – is much valued by students. Students also noted the differences they had observed between themselves and their US-based peers in terms of cultural awareness and knowledge of global current affairs. However, the expert group also heard – as already noted under standard 3.1 – that FUS students are not required to take Italian classes as part of the Modern Language Program, which may prevent them from fully integrating within the wider Lugano community. The expert group heard that, in spite of efforts to engage in community outreach, including events and initiatives during which students could meet members of the local community, it can be difficult for FUS students to establish a network beyond the walls of the FUS campus. The expert group advises FUS to consider how it can encourage students to develop greater competence in the Italian language to facilitate their integration within the wider community and take full advantage – both during and subsequent to their studies – of the mobility possible within the European Higher Education Area.

Conclusion

The expert group assesses standard 3.3 as largely fulfilled.

Standard 3.4: The quality assurance system shall ensure compliance with the criteria for admission, for the assessment of the student performance and for issuing final diplomas according to the mission of the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector. These criteria shall be defined, communicated and applied systematically, transparently and consistently.

Description and analysis

The SAR describes the FUS admissions process as competitive and notes that prospective students must supply a high-school diploma, letters of recommendation and a personal statement with their application. The 240-ECTS bachelor’s degrees are generally of four years’ duration for students coming from the US. As noted above in standard 3.3, FUS also grants up to 60 ECTS to students who have completed certain school leaving certificate exams – such students may then be able to complete a bachelor’s degree within three years.

The Registrar’s Office oversees FUS’ policies and procedures in respect of:

- evaluation and acceptance of transfer credits

- credits awarded through experiential learning
- prior non-academic learning
- competency-based assessment
- other alternative learning approaches

As part of its mission, the Registrar's Office aims *inter alia* to provide efficient services in relation to class scheduling and registration, graduation, transcripts and enrolment letters. It also ensures that relevant policies and procedures are implemented fairly and consistently and communicated effectively and maintains accurate academic records.

During the main review visit, students appeared satisfied with how FUS had dealt with their admission to FUS. From the Dean of Admissions and Enrolment Management, the peer group heard that admissions policies are communicated through a number of platforms. These include the FUS website, printed materials and customised webinars for prospective students coming from different backgrounds. These materials emphasise the academic and language requirements for admission and emphasise that the admissions committee welcomes students coming from all nationalities and backgrounds. FUS provided as part of the suite of documentation supplementary to the SAR examples of communications to prospective students – these set out in detail the application process and application deadlines and include information on *inter alia* deferred admission and transfer from other institutions.

The Student Handbook is a useful source of information for prospective and current students but does not include any general information on requirements in respect of graduation (although the procedure and process for involuntary withdrawal of a student is detailed) – however, the programme syllabi do set out in detail requirements in respect of assessment, learning outcomes and graduation requirements for each module and programme.

The expert group noted during the main review visit that FUS graduates fewer than half of the students that enrol. When asked to expand on the reasons for this figure, FUS observed that this issue pertains to retention and is a common problem for institutions who mainly attract students from abroad – as one-year and one-semester students do not qualify for US financial aid, they may enrol at FUS as four-year students in spite of the fact that they do not intend to complete a four-year programme. Further, FUS' location can be a disadvantage - bigger cities tend to be more attractive for US students who wish to study abroad.

However, the current retention rates are still lower than the 60% that FUS outlined during the main review visit as the greatest retention rate it could expect. When addressing the issue of quantitative evaluation of student feedback with administrative staff and support services, the group were presented with heartfelt responses from staff who clearly care deeply about improving the experiences of students – the peer group felt, however, that the responses were also quite ad hoc.

The expert group acknowledges that FUS is working on enhancing the second-year experience in order to improve retention, and further recognises that informal communication can be effective in small institutions such as FUS. It nonetheless advises FUS to consider how it can support the informal systems in place by using student feedback on areas of dissatisfaction to generate effective metrics against which it can determine where improvement is required and measure progress.

Conclusion

The expert group assesses standard 3.4 as entirely fulfilled.

Area 4: Resources

Standard 4.1: With its competent authorities, the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector shall assure that its personnel resources, infrastructure and financial means allow for operating on a going concern basis and for achieving its strategic objectives. The origin and allocation of financial resources and financing conditions shall be transparent.

Description and analysis

In the SAR, FUS refers to resources as “the single biggest challenge facing the university...[d]espite good progress in budgeting processes and advancement”. The institution acknowledges that its shrinking enrolment figures will prove an obstacle to FUS’ ability to meet all of its 2025 goals.

FUS’ SAR also acknowledges that one of the threats to the institution’s economic sustainability, is its declining enrolment numbers, given FUS’ dependency on tuition fees.

This was also noted by the peer group during the main review visit, during which they heard that one of FUS’ committees has enrolment as its remit – this committee meets three to four times per year to consider enrolment and enrolment management, but enrolment is not generally considered by the Board of Trustees. The group also heard that FUS has re-focussed from its previous goal of increasing enrolments to 500 students to a target of 350 students and is looking at developing further bespoke experiential learning as part of its USP, as well as expanding into the Asian market, which it has already begun to explore. Given the absolute importance of the achievement of enrolment goals to FUS’s long-term financial sustainability, and its centrality to the strategic plan, the Board should provide appropriate oversight in this domain.

From the Dean of Admissions and Enrolment Management, the expert group heard that FUS will continue its focus on undergraduate students and transfer students to contribute to further growth. To assist in this, the institution intends to focus on brand awareness and has already worked to change the marketing strategy for enrolment to focus on digital and social media, with real-time monitoring of enquiries and applications. Further, given that word of mouth is one of the most significant sources through which prospective students receive information about FUS, this has been harnessed in a new alumni programme, which now boasts 119 alumni, Board of Trustee members and parents working to promote the institution.

Covid-19 has proved a challenge for FUS, given its reliance on one-year and one-semester students – these students tend to provide the funding for financial aid for FUS’ four-year students. A potential continuation of quarantine measures and travel restrictions beyond academic year 2020/21 is a matter of considerable concern to FUS and its enrolment ambitions.

During the main review visit, the peer group also heard that, in order to find solutions for the challenging financial situation in which the institution currently finds itself, FUS is endeavouring to be as independent as possible by taking advantages of existing and new opportunities, including refocussing on the core undergraduate programme, expanding the offering at graduate level, entering into new partnerships, and expanding the scope of provision into science disciplines and executive education. However, the expert group did not receive detailed planning documents with timelines, deadlines, milestones, faculty-recruitment, curricular development and business plans for the implementation of graduate new programmes. The expert group suggests that a Board Enrolment Committee should provide stronger oversight of

the recruitment function, given its critical importance to FUS's equilibrium and financial position, requiring the setting of annual goals of that department, measuring progress throughout the year, and assess in attainment of such.

Financial resources

FUS describes its budgeting process in the SAR as considering immediate and long-term needs for resources outlined in the strategic plan. It regards the process – which, it notes, was simplified during the 2005-2006 budget cycle, with “major expenditure that is fixed and stable, direct feedback to and from administrative Department Heads, and the flexibility of making adjustments periodically to ensure a healthy financial outcome” – as being appropriate to an institution of its size. A Budget and Priorities Committee convenes throughout the year to analyse and prioritise ideas and input from FUS' constituencies.

The institution's Staff Handbook sets out that FUS follows a “zero-base budgeting” model, which sees divisions proposing all items for the next budget year, along with their rationale for these. The proposals are submitted to the Office of Finance and Administration alongside course enrolment projections and other predictors of revenue. The office then begins to generate iterations of the budget for the President, revenue parameters having been established prior to this in agreement with the President and the Board of Trustees.

FUS notes that administration can provide timely feedback to department heads if there are discrepancies since the process is a simple one. “Significant” requests are highlighted for discussion where there may be a deviation from FUS' mission or strategic plan. The Vice-President and Dean of Academic Affairs has responsibility for determining whether requests that relate to current or new academic programmes justify the grant of financial resources.

The budget, the SAR notes, is presented to the Board of Trustees at its spring meeting – although further refinements may be made thereafter as enrolment projections become clearer. The year-end process culminates with the sign-off of independent auditors, issue of the annual report, and other required filings.

FUS notes in the SAR that challenges to its planning process may involve changes in pricing from vendors, unexpected travel costs that occur as part of Academic Travel and any significant investment costs that need to be revisited due to unforeseen circumstances. As noted above, the reduction in enrolments in recent years is another challenge for FUS' budget, given its heavy reliance upon tuition fees. This issue, coupled with investments made by FUS for its future growth – including expansion into executive education, promotion of the revised MSIM programme and the implementation of scholarships for EU citizens – contributed to a significant deficit in 2018-2019. FUS regards these investments as having facilitated the positioning of the institution as a reliable partner for universities in the US and in Asia, and the SAR details several partnerships in train or recently launched, including two new EMBA programmes in Asian universities.

Reductions in students' FTE in 2019-2020 alongside the impact of the Covid-19 crisis, led to a reduction in income in that period; however, the potential deficit was balanced by a donation received in October 2019, and FUS closed the fiscal year with a surplus. The pandemic has continued to have an impact, and the current academic year has seen a decline in the number of FTE students (257 down from 290 in the last academic year). Several measures have been taken to mitigate the effects of reduced enrolment, including the indefinite postponement of the Dean of Faculty hiring process, elimination of one full-time faculty position and participation by Lugano-based staff members in Short-time Work Compensation. FUS also stresses in the SAR that it is working towards becoming less dependent upon tuition fees through its growth of new revenue streams, partnerships and development activities, many of which have been detailed above.

During the main review visit, the peer group heard that c. 52% of FUS' budget is devoted to institutional financial aid – a considerable proportion, but, according to FUS, a significant attraction for potential students and in line with what is offered by other similar institutions in Europe welcoming students from the US.

While FUS is fortunate to have received generous donations to support it in achieving a balanced budget in 2018-2019 and to partly finance its new building (discussed in the next sub-section), the peer group notes that reliance on such donations is not a sustainable model. The donation of substantial financial support from anonymous donors may also be considered to lack sufficient transparency – as noted above, this may also raise questions in relation to academic freedom and independence. This issue was addressed during the main review visit, and the expert group heard that FUS is aware of the identity of the anonymous donor and it is hoped that their name will be attached to a building and made public in the future.

Infrastructure

The SAR notes that the Real Value for FUS' properties is approximately CHF 56 million, with an indicative market value of CHF 45,800,000.

FUS is cognisant of the need to expand its campus to accommodate its target of achieving enrolment of 350 FTE – planning for a third building in Sorengo is already well underway, funded by a \$4 million donation by an anonymous donor. The building will allow FUS to discontinue rental payments and provide accommodation for 69 students – bringing in additional revenue to the institution – and house a student centre and office spaces. There will also be two levels of underground parking, classroom spaces, an auditorium and a fitness centre. It is planned that the new building will open in January 2022, and the SAR notes that it is envisaged that the indicative Market Value for FUS' properties will, with the addition of the third building, grow to CHF 67,000,000.

During the main review visit, the expert group heard that the pandemic has necessitated substantial investment in retro-fitting classrooms with cameras to facilitate remote learning. The group also heard, however, that FUS' IT systems are relatively old (for example, the accounting system has been in use for almost 20 years) – FUS maintains that the systems work well and are well connected, but acknowledged that it is considering other, less cumbersome possibilities. A new broadband contract, which will see available speeds increase from 1GB to 2 GB, will increase the institution's capacity to facilitate remote and blended learning and reduce spend by CHF 50,000.

Personnel

As noted above, the decline in enrolments and accompanying reduction in tuition fees over the past six years has led to the elimination of one full-time faculty position at FUS. The Vital Signs statistics shows that employee numbers have essentially remained static over that time period in spite of the decreasing number of students.

The SAR notes that FUS is considering further reducing its faculty in order to garner further savings and that this path is supported by the US MSCHE accreditation team – retirements and consolidation of positions are planned for 2021. The expert group advises FUS to ensure that it has a clearly documented strategy that it implements in a systematic manner to ensure that this plan is successful.

Nonetheless, the expert group notes that FUS' move into executive education and planned expansion into doctoral education may lead to the need for additional expertise and skillsets. As noted above under standard 3, FUS' graduate programmes are currently largely delivered by adjunct faculty, leading to a disconnect between programmes, students and faculty at

undergraduate and graduate level, and – potentially – inconsistency in the supports provided to students at those levels. FUS must ensure that its plans to diversity its provision are adequately supported by sufficient and appropriately qualified personnel (see recommendation under 4.2 above in respect of the hiring of a sufficient number of full-time faculty to support the development and delivery of graduate programmes).

During the main review visit, the expert group broached the issue of stagnation of staff salaries and the potential impact on attracting potential faculty members. They heard that the salary scale is reviewed periodically by the Personnel Committee – there had been a freeze on raises for a number of years, but this has now been removed and that the committee is working with the VP for Finance and Administration as the institution moves to rolling contracts. FUS also emphasised that there are reasons beyond salary that attract new staff to FUS – these include a passion for the liberal arts, good working conditions, and working as part of a close-knit community.

Conclusion

The expert group assesses standard 4.1 as largely fulfilled.

Recommendation 10: The expert peer group recommends that Franklin University Switzerland ensure that sufficient resources – in particular, full-time faculty – via documented planning processes be allocated to any new programmes, including MA and PhD, as well as any revenue-generating auxiliary programs, envisaged by the institution.

Recommendation 11: The expert peer group recommends that FUS's future strategic planning should continue to include a focus on enrolment and the long-term, reliable financial sustainability that it provides, with strong Board oversight of target-setting, projections, and monitoring of progress toward budget goals, gradual lessening of the discount rate, and development of viable revenue-generating programmes.

Standard 4.2: The quality assurance system shall ensure that the entire staff is qualified according to the type and specific characteristics of the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector. To this end, it shall also provide for its periodic assessment.
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Description and analysis

The SAR notes that FUS documents clear job descriptions and responsibilities for each position at the university. The expert peer group were given sight of FUS' administrative job descriptions as part of the evidence inventory accompanying the SAR. Information is also provided to staff through the Staff Handbook, which is periodically updated and is available to all employees on an accessible drive.

Staff reviews take place annually in June – this involves the completion of a self-evaluation by staff members, review by the department head, and a shared reflection between staff member and departmental head to consider accomplishments and potential improvements. Completed and signed evaluation forms are submitted to the Vice President for Finance and Administration and the President. The past few years have seen enhancements to the evaluation form, including a focus on opportunities for professional development and the elimination of ratings in 2015 – FUS confirms that these changes were made in order to develop the review process into a more engaging, developmental and forward-looking process. Since 2018, FUS' mission has been included in the form. Mid-year performance assessments are held in January to ensure that goals are being progressed and to identify any issues.

As noted above under standard 4.1, FUS' faculty numbers have not changed over the past

number of years despite a marked decrease in enrolments and steps have been taken to commence their reduction. However, the SAR sets out that several areas of Franklin administration are, conversely, insufficiently staffed – one such area is human resources. As noted above under standard 2, the HR function currently falls under the remit of the VP for Finance and Administration. Human resources is, as acknowledged by the SAR, a challenging area for FUS, as, with employees based in both Switzerland and the US, it is required to comply with the employment regulations of both countries; additional resources are also required in relation to visas and work requirements for the considerable number of employees who are not Swiss citizens. The SAR notes that staff and faculty feedback supports the creation of a role dedicated to the management of human resources, and this proposition is also supported by the review team. The SAR also sets out further key areas that are lacking personnel or rely on remote employees, including: information technology, marketing, student financial aid, and campus security. FUS emphasises that it frequently employs a hybrid model where employees are based in the US and that this model has proven effective.

It has already been outlined under standard 3.1 that FUS relies to a great extent on adjunct faculty to provide its graduate programmes. The expert peer group notes the benefits that experienced industry professionals bring to graduate programmes – this includes access for the institution and for students to applied expertise and networks of contacts – indeed, during the main review visit, students detailed positive experiences with adjunct faculty members, who – in some cases – had facilitated contact to industry contacts and assisted in setting up internships. FUS faculty and administration also noted with appreciation the background and knowledge of practice that, alongside theory, adjunct faculty bring to its graduate programmes. However, as set out above, FUS might consider in greater detail whether a disproportionate reliance on adjunct faculty leads to inconsistency of experience for graduate and undergraduate students – or even for individual graduate students – and what supports and development opportunities FUS might provide to adjunct faculty to mitigate against this. The expert peer group notes the role already played by the Graduate Curriculum Committee and student evaluations in this regard. The peer group is also heartened to see that a system of evaluation for adjunct faculty members will be implemented by the VP and Dean of Academic Affairs in collaboration with Division Chairs in academic year 2021-2022.

Conclusion

The expert group assesses standard 4.2 as largely fulfilled.

Recommendation 12: The expert peer group recommends that FUS' QA infrastructure ensure that, in the context of the strategic plan for MA and PhD programmes required for Swiss accreditation, there are sufficient full-time faculty available to support further graduate and doctorate programmes. The strategic plan should also include curricular, hiring and business plans, with KPIs and deliverables.

Standard 4.3: The quality assurance system shall ensure that the higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector supports the career development of its entire staff, particularly the new generation of scientists.

Description and analysis

The SAR comments only briefly on this standard (although it also refers the reader back to commentary and analysis on the same topic under standard 3.3). It provides details of the research funds that it makes available to faculty members through its Faculty Development Funds – allocation is based on quarterly reviews by the Personnel Committee. Further, it notes that FUS holds regular workshops during and prior to each semester to support staff in relation to pedagogy, curricular reform and training.

It is worth mentioning that one of the nine plans arising from FUS' three strategic priorities is “to

increase the salaries of staff and faculty, and to increase opportunities for faculty and staff development”. As set out in the SAR – and this report – under standard 3.3, FUS also supports staff development and mobility through the funding of research leave. The SAR sets out that – in doing so – the institution aims “[afford] faculty a way to expand their research agendas and make networked connections”.

The SAR further notes that FUS aims to ensure that its faculty evaluation process is “engaging, developmental and forward-looking”, with integrated opportunities for faculty members – supported by their supervisors – to reflect on opportunities for professional development – including in respect of research endeavours. The SAR outlines that assessment of research and engagement with Division chairs for the purpose of implementing a shared review process will commence in spring 2020.

The SAR outlines that the institution ensures that employees participate in appropriate mandatory training (e.g. ‘Title IX training’, referred to above at standard 4.3) and that they have the opportunity to participate in other training, development and initiatives of relevance to their role. During the main review visit, for example, the peer group heard that the Office of Student Life has currently engaged in an Equity and Inclusion course; regular training for faculty in the use of Moodle is also offered by FUS, but – the SAR acknowledges – these are not always well attended or received.

FUS intends that its newly established divisions will also contribute to the cross-fertilisation of research and nurturing of interdisciplinary collaborations between faculty members. Chairs of the new divisions are charged, according to the SAR, with ensuring that all faculty “have the support and incentive needed to continue building their research agenda”.

During the main review visit, as noted under standard 3, the peer group heard that FUS is cognisant of the need for undergraduate faculty to become more involved in graduate programmes to ensure that their research output contributes to the enhancement and further development of these programmes. The peer group encourages FUS to continue to consider how it might best achieve this and work with undergraduate faculty to implement resulting plans.

Conclusion

The expert group assesses standard 4.3 as entirely fulfilled.

Area 5: Internal and external communication

Standard 5.1: The higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector shall make public its quality assurance strategy and ensure that the provisions corresponding to quality assurance processes and their results are known to employees, students and if necessary external stakeholders.

Description and analysis

The SAR confirms that the mandates and tasks of each of FUS’ QA structures and committees are clearly defined and available to all employees; further, the SAR outlines, students and external stakeholders may request access to this documentation. Employees are updated at regular intervals on the work of each group at Faculty and Staff Assemblies and also have access to the meeting minutes of all committees on campus. Communication of the QA strategy and actions with students are through their direct involvement and participation in selected committees or through reports at faculty assemblies, which are always attended by a student representative.

The SAR outlines that external stakeholders “if necessary and appropriate” can also access reports and meeting minutes of the various university committees and groups, but it does not

clarify how such access is granted.

The SAR also details FUS' approach to communicating with prospective students. As detailed above under standard 3, the institution provides admissions information through a variety of platforms. According to the SAR, the admissions process and general admission requirements are clearly articulated to prospective students. Information provided in this regard includes detailed information about academic programme options, the availability of financial aid and loans, as well as "a range of other administrative policies, procedures and deadlines". Further information aligning with Franklin's mission and vision are provided to incoming students.

When asked to articulate its QA strategy during the main review visit, the expert group heard that FUS views its QA strategy as beginning with the strategic plan and how its assessment is working – this involves considering faculty, staff, and academic programmes among other elements. The institution feels that it does assess effectively what faculty and staff are doing and that it communicates clearly to students what is happening and where they can access information. The institution views the process around QA strategy and its assessment as one that is constantly evolving, with feedback from the Board of Trustees effecting change where necessary – it sees the process as filtering down into all aspects of the institution's provision to allow for recalibration and progress across the university. Driving all of this are the US and Swiss accreditation processes with their diverse requirements, which can be difficult to marry to one another – FUS will endeavour to make communicate all of this more clearly on the new website.

The peer group examined the existing website as part of their preparation for the main review visit and, in doing so, found a multitude of information about FUS' study programmes and activities on its website; it was more challenging, however, to locate a comprehensive overview of FUS' QA architecture and processes. The group broached this topic with the Director of Marketing and Strategy, who provided an overview of the institution's plans to overhaul the website. These plans include the creation of an easily accessible QA section. It is also envisaged that content management will be simplified, making it easier for the institution to ensure that appropriate and accurate information is supplied in a timely manner. The expert group heard that content is approved for publication on the website by means of a discussion between the Director of Marketing and Strategy with the cabinet – the outcome of this discussion is communicated back to the relevant office, who decide what will be communicated. The process is often an iterative one, and further discussion with the cabinet may be required.

One of the external groups with whom FUS communicates is parents and guardians, and the peer group heard that the institution also holds monthly Zoom calls with parents – the subject matter addressed during such calls does not relate solely to QA but, FUS stressed, QA is referenced.

The SAR outlines that internal communication has posed some issues for the institution, having been, in the past, perceived as "slow and incomplete". It is noted that the situation came to a head during the Covid-19 pandemic, given the importance of clear and swift communication of the emerging situation – learnings from the period have resulted, according to FUS, in adaptations and improvements to its regular communications processes. Enhancements include weekly community updates to the internal community, timely web updates and hybrid-learning guidelines for faculty and students. The average student satisfaction rating awarded to pandemic communication in the Student Satisfaction Survey is given as 5.58 (out of a seven-point scale). During the main review visit, the expert group heard that the new website will facilitate more effective communication of the results of FUS' assessment process within the university community. The institution also uses Moodle, which was most recently updated in January 2021, to communicate with staff, faculty and students.

Students who met with the expert group during the main review visit outlined how student representatives interact with administration, faculty and staff and communicate information to fellow students. The Student Government Association meets every week and nominates student representatives to attend relevant committees (Faculty Assembly and the Curriculum Committee) and other taskforces; these representatives then report back to the Student Government Association on what was discussed.

While the expert peer group acknowledges the efforts made by FUS to communicate its quality assurance strategy, system and the relevant outputs both internally and externally, it notes that improvement to external communication is urgently required to meet the requirements of this standard. The review team is heartened to hear that planning for enhanced external communication of quality assurance through the new website is already underway but nonetheless stipulates a related condition of accreditation below.

Conclusion

The expert group assesses standard 5.1 as partially fulfilled.

Condition 6: Franklin University Switzerland must make its QA strategy and the results of its assessment legible and public.

Standard 5.2: The higher education institution or other institution within the higher education sector shall regularly publish objective information about its activities, its study programmes and the qualifications awarded.

Description and analysis

The SAR confirms that FUS provides current and prospective students with up-to-date information through a number of different channels on a variety of areas including programmes, faculty, activities, courses, testing, transfer credit policies, financial aid and scholarships.

All programme information is listed on a number of types of media – both print and online. The FUS App was launched in January 2019 and provides a further way for the institution to communicate internally with students. During the main review visit, students commented very positively on their experience of the app itself and on FUS' responsiveness to any requests from student representatives for enhancement of the app. Students noted, however, that the transition to the app was ongoing – previously one of the most popular platforms for communication between and with students had been Facebook, and some students still prefer to use that platform. Students also commented that – to date – the app does not facilitate chat between students and the peer group understands that this request for improvement has been communicated to FUS.

The SAR sets out that FUS adheres to a broad range of policies to promote sound ethical practices and respect for institutional values to ensure that the individual offices responsible for communicating information (and for the quality of that information) do so with honesty and integrity.

As detailed above under standard 1, a student satisfaction survey is conducted annually, and student evaluations are conducted in respect of each module. Students commented that they were aware that feedback given through student evaluations has helped some professors change their teaching style and adapt to hybrid learning. However, as already noted above, communication of enhancements on foot of this feedback tends to be somewhat ad hoc – students noted that they don't generally receive formal communication that suggestions arising from the evaluations have been implemented but may hear informally from faculty members if they have them in the following semester.

As already noted, FUS has recently published a new online catalogue that contains all relevant information in respect of programmes of study and the associated awards – the SAR emphasises that this catalogue is easily searched and referenced, representing an improvement on the existing print and single PDF catalogues. Further, according to FUS, a well-established workflow is in place for updating graduation rates, retention rates, student and faculty demographics and programme demographics each semester – these statistics are published annually in the institution’s Vital Signs report and on the website.

The peer group, in its survey of FUS’ website prior to the main review visit, found it difficult to locate objective information about progression and graduation information – for example, the percentage of freshman students that graduate within four to six years, gender distribution of graduates and so on). As noted above, as part of FUS’ plans to update its website, it envisages that content management will be simplified, making it easier for the provision of timely, accurate and appropriate information by the appropriate units. The review team welcomes this development and encourages FUS to ensure that this improvement is implemented as swiftly as possible. Such reporting is an expectation of Swiss accreditation and should be rendered visible and public as soon as possible.

Conclusion

The expert group assesses standard 5.2 as largely fulfilled.

Recommendation 13: The expert peer group recommends that FUS align US and ECTS credits, providing a ‘bilingual’ accounting of all awarded credits in all official instances, such as course catalogue, website, and print materials, as well as the official transcript.

5 Outline of the strengths and challenges of the system and its overall assessment

Strengths

Size

FUS’ small size lends it agility and allows it to respond swiftly and efficiently to emerging situations – this was particularly evident during the move to online and hybrid learning during the Covid-19 pandemic. The expert peer group heard that, following a week’s break during the Academic Travel period to allow constituents time to prepare for the transition to remote learning, FUS commenced remote classes, providing both synchronous and asynchronous options to students in light of the fact that learners were based in locations across several time zones. The institution has also retro-fitted classrooms to facilitate remote classes, which involved soundproofing classrooms, purchasing additional tablets, installing cameras and so on.

Dedication of faculty and staff

As highlighted throughout the report, the peer group found noteworthy the dedication and enthusiasm of all of the faculty and staff whom it met during the main review visit. This commitment was also evident in the group’s conversations with students, who expressed their gratitude for the efforts of faculty and staff – students were particularly grateful for the time and energy invested by faculty in the Academic Travel programme, and the work of staff in providing supports tailored to FUS students, such as career courses and the new FUS App. Learners also noted with enthusiasm the mentoring provided by faculty to students interested in establishing new clubs and societies.

FUS’ size also lends itself well to the use of informal communication with and between faculty, staff and students, and the expert peer group heard from students that they felt comfortable approaching teachers and staff members with any issues that they encounter. Similarly, during the main review visit, the peer group heard from FUS administration how informal means are

used to track alumni and harness alumni networks to promote the institution to prospective students.

Undergraduate curriculum

FUS' undergraduate curriculum is a considerable strength. FUS' mission is to provide “cross-cultural, multinational learning and living environment that prepares students to become compassionate and responsible leaders in a changing world”, and the expert group notes with approval the well-rounded formation provided to FUS students at undergraduate level, which goes a long way towards helping them to achieve this goal. Particularly commendable aspects of the undergraduate curriculum include the integration of research and the Academic Travel programme, which is dealt with in more detail below.

Liberal arts culture

FUS' culture of liberal arts is rooted in the strong North American culture and ethos evident within the institution. The expert peer group notes that FUS' growth in the space of graduate education continues to be grounded by the liberal arts approach – during the main review visit, FUS confirmed that it has endeavoured to integrate this approach into the MSIM programme – this includes the existing research work and publications of FUS faculty. The expert peer group is heartened to observe this and encourages the institution to continue to consider how this foundational element of the institution may continue to find expression across all disciplines and levels of study.

Investment in new building, facilities

The expert peer group commends FUS' farsightedness in investing in a new building. This will provide students with a central point for facilities, create a further 69 on-campus accommodation spaces, and free up revenue that is currently tied up in rental property.

Academic Travel

FUS' Academic Travel was rated very positively by the students with whom the expert group met, who valued the opportunity to experience a diversity of cultures, ground theory in practical experiences, and become better acquainted with fellow students and their professors. FUS has successfully established this programme as one of its signature courses. The Covid-19 pandemic has proved an obstacle to its continuation, but the peer group heard that FUS, its faculty and students have demonstrated flexibility in adapting the programme to these new circumstances, and that students are able to participate in a version of the programme in spite of the pandemic.

Challenges

Informality

As noted under the list of strengths, FUS' size allows it to be flexible and agile and to use informal communication effectively with all constituents of the institution – including in respect of its QA and governance systems. However, the peer group stresses that formalisation of the more informal elements of FUS' QA, governance and communications systems is needed to ensure consistency, efficiency, responsibility, and systematisation across all institutional instances. For example – as per the condition stipulated by the peer group under standard 1 – FUS must formalise roles and responsibilities within the QA system and ensure that it is clear how processes interconnect with each other. It must also make the results of Quality Assessment public.

Enrolment strategy

As noted under standard 4, the marked decrease in enrolments at FUS present a significant issue for the institution, given its reliance on tuition fees and heavily discounted ones at that for continued financial viability. The peer group advises FUS that it will need to reframe its strategy in this area and ensure that it sets out specific and measurable goals to allow it to continue on the path upon which it has already embarked in focussing its energies on partnerships – for both undergraduate and graduate programmes with other institutions and with industry – and executive education. The Board should monitor goal-setting, projections and progress made.

Graduate education and research ?

While FUS has a well-established suite of undergraduate programmes that are well and appropriately supported by its QA system, the peer group feels that evidence is lacking that FUS will be able to develop a suite of MA programs and at least one PhD program. It advises FUS to improve the clarity of its strategic goals as they relate to master's and doctoral programmes, and to develop a set of imbricated plans--curricular, hiring, business—with clear deadlines and responsibilities. Further, as outlined above under standard 3, the institution must ensure that graduate programmes are incorporated within its assessment system.

Resources

Linked to several other areas that pose challenges to the institution, the peer group notes that financial resources continue to pose an issue for FUS and that the institution has had to rely heavily on generous last-minute donations to balance its budgets. While the peer group acknowledges the generosity of the donors, it cautions FUS against being dependent upon such donations, which can be unpredictable, and may lead to issues for FUS in respect of institutional autonomy and independence. As outlined above, FUS has already begun to refocus on partnerships with other institutions – in the US and in Asia and to move into the area of executive education. The peer group is heartened by these initial steps but urges the institution to ensure that all new areas of provision and above all research and graduate programmes are adequately supported by appropriate faculty hiring and the quality assurance system and that they are implemented in such a way that allows for tracking of progress using the relevant data against appropriate KPIs.

Conditions of Accreditation

Condition 1: Franklin University Switzerland must systematise the articulation between its quality assurance management tools, roles, and strategies.

Condition 2: Franklin University Switzerland must extend its QA system to ensure that it can support all taught and research programmes envisaged in its strategic plan to facilitate the institution to fulfil its mandate of becoming a university.

Condition 3: Franklin University Switzerland includes milestones, metrics and KPIs within its QA system that will allow it to measure its progress towards achieving its strategic goals, reporting on such progress annually.

Condition 4: Franklin University Switzerland must connect more coherently the institution's sustainability initiatives to the standard, by clearly integrating them with the QA system, setting objectives, and monitoring how and when they are implemented.

Condition 5: Franklin University Switzerland must provide detailed planning documents for the implementation of sufficient future master's and doctoral programs, including milestones, deadlines for delivery, full-time faculty-hiring plans, curricular development plans and business plans. Such plans should be part of strategic planning, and should be formalized via KPIs, responsibility of persons and departments, expected delivery dates, budget, etc.

Condition 6: Franklin University Switzerland must make its QA strategy and the results of its assessment legible and public.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: The expert peer group recommends that, Franklin University Switzerland ensures that the QA strategy sets out clearly how it ensures that the feedback loop in respect of each process is closed.

Recommendation 2: The expert peer group recommends that, Franklin University Switzerland optimise its QA system, increasing its readability, ensuring its systematization and annual tracking and documentation, and reducing the workload for the benefit of its research activity.

Recommendation 3: To efficiently support the development of research programmes, the FUS QA system must include the training and CPD of its faculty, including the adjuncts, involved in research programmes.

Recommendation 4: As FUS' graduate programmes will be developed with institutional partners, the expert group recommends that, in line with ESG 1.1, FUS' QA policies and practices should include the QA processes of the partner institutions co-delivering these programmes.

Recommendation 5: The expert peer group recommends that, in documenting its QA system, Franklin University Switzerland clarify how students are involved in the construction and assessment of the QA system.

Recommendation 6: The expert peer group recommends that FUS render more visible the participation and contributions of students to the institution's QA system.

This recommendation should be read in conjunction with the condition stipulated under standard 1.1 and the recommendation under standard 1.3.

Recommendation 7: The expert peer group recommends that FUS QA policies should actively motivate and support students to contribute to the governance and to the QA system, including the design of the programmes (ESG 2015, Std 1.2) and survey, as full and equal members.

Recommendation 8: The expert peer group recommends that, in its efforts to promote equal opportunity and gender equity, FUS must provide formal evidence that it is collecting the right data, taking into account all feedback, ensuring that all feedback loops are closed, and meeting its own KPIs and measures for greater equity and diversity for all faculty, staff and students.

Recommendation 9 : The expert peer group recommends that FUS charge a single person with overseeing and centralizing FUS's assessment plan, functioning, and closing of the feedback loop.

Recommendation 10: The expert peer group recommends that Franklin University Switzerland ensure that sufficient resources – in particular, full-time faculty – via documented planning processes be allocated to any new programmes, including MA and PhD, as well as any revenue-generating auxiliary programs, envisaged by the institution.

Recommendation 11: The expert peer group recommends that FUS's future strategic planning should continue to include a focus on enrolment and the long-term, reliable financial sustainability that it provides, with strong Board oversight of target-setting, projections, and monitoring of progress toward budget goals, gradual lessening of the discount rate, and development of viable revenue-generating programmes.

Recommendation 12: The expert peer group recommends that FUS' QA infrastructure ensure

that, in the context of the strategic plan for MA and PhD programmes required for Swiss accreditation, there are sufficient full-time faculty available to support further graduate and doctorate programmes. The strategic plan should also include curricular, hiring and business plans, with KPIs and deliverables.

Recommendation 13: The expert peer group recommends that FUS align US and ECTS credits, providing a 'bilingual' accounting of all awarded credits in all official instances, such as course catalogue, website, and print materials, as well as the official transcript.

6 Accreditation proposal of the expert group

Based on the self-assessment report of Franklin University Switzerland of 21 December 2020 and on the on-site visit that took place from 25 to 26 March 2021, the expert group proposes that the agency grant Franklin University Switzerland accreditation subject to the following conditions:

Condition 1: Franklin University Switzerland must systematise the articulation between its quality assurance management tools, roles, and strategies.

Condition 2: Franklin University Switzerland must extend its QA system to ensure that it can support all taught and research programmes envisaged in its strategic plan to facilitate the institution to fulfil its mandate of becoming a university.

Condition 3: Franklin University Switzerland includes milestones, metrics and KPIs within its QA system that will allow it to measure its progress towards achieving its strategic goals, reporting on such progress annually.

Condition 4: Franklin University Switzerland must connect more coherently the institution's sustainability initiatives to the standard, by clearly integrating them with the QA system, setting objectives, and monitoring how and when they are implemented.

Condition 5: Franklin University Switzerland must provide detailed planning documents for the implementation of sufficient future master's and doctoral programs, including milestones, deadlines for delivery, full-time faculty-hiring plans, curricular development plans and business plans. Such plans should be part of strategic planning, and should be formalized via KPIs, responsibility of persons and departments, expected delivery dates, budget, etc.

Condition 6: Franklin University Switzerland must make its QA strategy and the results of its assessment legible and public.

The expert group envisages a time horizon of 24 months for the fulfilment of the conditions; the review is to take place within the framework of a shortened on-site visit of 1 day with 3 experts.



Section D

Position statement of Franklin University Switzerland

5 October 2021





FRANKLIN UNIVERSITY SWITZERLAND

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

Sorengo, October 5, 2021

Dr. Christoph Grolimund
Director
Schweizerische Agentur für Akkreditierung
und Qualitätssicherung (AAQ)
Effingerstrasse 15
Postfach
3001 Bern

Subject: **FUS Position statement for AAQ accreditation proposal**

Dear Dr. Grolimund,

Franklin University Switzerland (FUS) thanks the expert team and AAQ for their careful consideration of the institution and of its quality assurance system. Franklin's Board of Trustees has unanimously voted to accept AAQ's proposal for accreditation of FUS as a University Institute ("universitäres Institut"). The Board's mandate for the institution is thus to maintain both the institution's name as Franklin University Switzerland as per Art.29 of the HEdA and its institutional accreditation as a University Institute within the Swiss higher education sector as per Art.30 of the HEdA.

Franklin welcomes AAQ's four conditions regarding its quality assurance system. Further progress has already been made in the directions indicated. The committee structure in academic affairs has been reorganized to better articulate its role in quality assurance of curriculum, teaching, learning and assessment and standards for students and faculty, while freeing up more faculty time for research and scholarship activities. Additionally, students have been engaged to advise on ways of further strengthening the student voice in the institution's quality assurance processes through the institution of three specific Life Long Learning Scholarships in this area. Regarding Condition 3, the university will resume use of a revised version of the annual Institutional Effectiveness Report (IER) that include milestones, metrics and KPIs within its QA system that will allow it to measure progress towards achieving its strategic goals, reporting on such progress annually. With reference to Condition 4 (regarding standard 1.4), the task force on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion has been transformed into a university-wide committee and will contribute to integrating sustainability initiatives within the institution's quality assurance system.

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In response to the Board's mandate, Franklin has initiated the creation of at least one PhD program for enrollment within three years' time. This means students will be enrolled in the program by the academic year of 2024-25. Franklin also commits to completing the creation of at least two levels of study—c.g., Bachelors and Masters programs—in each of its academic divisions by the end of the seven-year accreditation review period, and to fully integrate graduate programs and research into the institution's quality assurance processes, as per Condition 2 of the accreditation proposal. As a further move in that direction, the Masters of Science in International Management and the Master of Arts in Responsible Arts Management and Cultural Heritage will now be connected to the academic division of Business and Economics, which already hosts the Masters of Arts in Political Economy of Money and Development, in order to fully integrate these programs into Quality Assurance processes in Academic Affairs.

Franklin proposes that the period for fulfillment of the conditions be extended to 36 months in order to allow the institution to report on progress both towards the creation of programs at the graduate level as well as towards meeting the conditions concerning quality assurance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. Warden', is written over a horizontal line.

P. Gregory Warden
President

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Postfach
CH-3001 Bern

www.aaq.ch

