

BRITISH ACCREDITATION COUNCIL INSPECTION REPORT

INTERIM INSPECTION (Independent Higher Education)

INSTITUTION: American University of Culture and Education

ADDRESS: Badaro Campus
Tayouneh Roundabout
Omar Bayhom Street
Beirut
Lebanon

HEAD OF INSTITUTION: Dr Abdel Salam Naboulsi

ACCREDITATION STATUS: Accredited

DATE OF INSPECTION: 27 March 2019

ACCREDITATION COMMITTEE DECISION AND DATE: Abeyance, 23 May 2019

PART A – INTRODUCTION

1. Background to the institution

The American University of Culture and Education (AUCE/the Institution) is a private, non-profit independent provider of higher education with eight shareholders. The Institution was founded in 1983 and was legally established as a higher education institution in 2000. It was confirmed as a university by government decree in June 2009. The Institution is licensed by the Ministry of Education in Lebanon to deliver and award undergraduate and postgraduate degrees. The main campus accredited by the BAC is located in the Badaro district of Beirut. There are eight other smaller campuses in different locations across Lebanon which have not been visited. BAC accreditation applies only to the campus in Badaro.

The mission of AUCE is to improve and enrich its students' lives through education that dramatically engages students, research that capitalises on the power of collaboration, scholarship, active and creative learning and the promotion of a culture of global citizenship. Seven key objectives articulate the vision of the Institution including enhancement of AUCE's teaching and learning environment; attracting and retaining well qualified students and instructors; developing students' skills, competencies and knowledge through university experiences and lifelong learning; providing personal and professional support; promoting academic scholarship and research and continuously improving learning.

AUCE is governed by a Board of Trustees (the Board), made up of 11 members, four of whom are shareholders. The Board is responsible for the appointment of the President and other senior management staff but does not participate in the executive management of the Institution. The President, as the Chief Executive of AUCE, is accountable to the Board. The previous President left AUCE in July 2018 and has been replaced by the Chair of the Board of Trustees who is acting as the interim President. The President is supported by the Vice Principal Academic Affairs and the Vice Principal Administration who are members of the senior management team.

AUCE provision is organised into three faculties, the Faculty of Science and Literature, the Faculty of Arts, and the Faculty of Business, each managed by a Dean of Faculty, who in turn are supported by Heads of Department.

AUCE has established formal affiliations and partnerships with a number of academic institutions and commercial organisations, allowing for transfer between campuses, student placement and employment and research collaboration. These include both regional and international associations.

2. Brief description of the current provision

AUCE offers undergraduate degrees in English language, Business Administration with Banking and Finance, Business Administration with Accounting Management, Business Administration with Human Resource Management, Business Administration with International Hospitality Management, Business Administration with Management Information Systems, Business Administration with Marketing and Advertising Management, Computer Science, Graphic and Interior Design, along with a Masters' in Business Administration (MBA) and a Master of Science (MSc) in Computer Science. All the provision is delivered through class-based teaching supported by learning materials available through the student portal.

The Institution currently has 229 students studying on undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, a decline in number from the 405 full and part-time students studying in the 2017 to 2018 academic year. The majority of students are studying full-time and are drawn from across the Lebanon. A very small minority of students come from other countries including Palestine, Syria, Russia, Italy and the UK. The majority of students are aged between 18 and 24 years, with no students recruited under 18 years of age. There is a small majority of female students. AUCE continues to host three Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) students from one of its collaborative partnerships, whereby the students teach on the undergraduate computer science courses and, in return, they receive supervision for their PhD work from AUCE staff.

Student admission and enrolment to programmes takes place twice a year in September and October and in January and February. Students are also required to register on optional courses each semester in order to

qualify for credits.

3. Inspection process

The Inspection was undertaken over one day by a single inspector. Four meetings were held with senior managers, academic staff, administrative staff and students. The Inspector completed two teaching observations and reviewed a range of documentation. The Institution engaged very positively with the inspection and all requested evidence was provided in a timely manner.

4. Inspection History

Inspection Type	Date
Full Accreditation	15-17 March 2010
Interim	11 April 2011
Re-accreditation	19-20 May 2016 and 17 January 2017

PART B – JUDGMENTS AND EVIDENCE

The following judgments and comments are based upon evidence seen by the inspector during the inspection and from documentation provided by the institution.

1. Significant changes since the last inspection

The current interim President is a shareholder and the Chair of the Board, having assumed the role when the former president left in July 2018. The Chair of the Board of Trustees has a long association with the Institution having been a shareholder and a member of the Board for many years.

The withdrawal of the Freshman Programme which is no longer recognised by the Lebanese Ministry of Education has had a significant impact on the level of student recruitment. The Freshman Programme provided students with the opportunity to gain the credits required to meet the undergraduate programme entry requirements. English language courses continue to be offered for those students whose proficiency requires improvement in order to meet the higher education provision entry requirements.

2. Response to actions points in last report

25.5 AUCE must develop and put in place a procedure for compiling an overview report on its whole institutional performance. This must be considered on an annual basis by the senior management, the University Council and the Board of Trustees.

An institution overview report is produced by the President at the end of each academic year, drawing on reports from the two Vice Presidents, Faculty Reports and reports from the Director of Quality Assurance and other department heads. The report is shared with the University Council as the senior academic committee, and the Board, and is effective in reviewing the overall performance of the Institution. This in turn informs strategic and operational priorities.

3. Response to recommended areas for improvement in last report

It is recommended that AUCE makes formal, recorded, risk assessments. Action points to address risk areas, together with key responsibilities, should be identified in the resulting record or report.

Management of risk assessment is undertaken by the senior management team which includes the President and Vice Presidents. The President produces a report for the Board which outlines key risks faced by the Institution, and this is evaluated and approved by the Board. Operational management of risk is also undertaken by senior managers as part of regular meetings. However, there is little formal ongoing risk assessment documentation to enable the transparent identification of risks, evaluation of actions and associated responsibilities.

AUCE should make information on the overall review of institutional performance available to the Board of Trustees, for consideration on a periodic and systematic basis.

The President provides updates on the Institution's performance for each Board meeting against key performance indicators including student recruitment, retention and achievement, student feedback and student attendance and engagement. This ensures that the Board is effectively kept fully aware of institutional performance in a clear and systematic manner.

It is recommended that the minute-taking procedures for meetings of the main university committees be reviewed and a standard approach agreed. This might usefully include a brief outline of the agenda topic, the outcome of discussion, and identification of any actions to be taken and persons responsible.

The Institution has introduced clear and consistent formats for the recording of committee meetings and associated agendas. Action points and progress evaluation are recorded within minutes which are shared between committees as part of the deliberative structure. The format used for the recording of minutes is appropriate and supports the clear communication of progress against action points and priorities.

The newly introduced appraisal system is a positive feature and the University will need to ensure that it is applied to all areas and categories of staff over a period of time.

The formal appraisal system has yet to be fully implemented. Performance reviews are undertaken by managers using documentation which varies between departments. Implementing the appraisal system for all staff will support the identification of professional and personal development priorities and identify and support the sharing of best practice.

The University is strongly encouraged to further develop the use of data in informing its management decisions, using the new management information system to its full potential and embedding this in its wider practice. For instance, in course evaluation.

The data management systems provide managers with access to data to inform their reviews of department, faculty and institutional performance. Academic performance data is regularly reviewed and updated by Deans of Faculty and informs the review of programme performance. Data is also used to identify areas for improvement based on student engagement, feedback and achievement.

AUCE should ensure that all staff files include the up-to-date documentation including staff appraisal documentation and employment contracts.

Staff files are maintained by the Human Resources Department and regularly updated with key information including amendments to contracts and professional development activities. Records are kept in hard copy in a secure area. Appraisal documents do not form part of individual files at present but will do so once the formal appraisal system is formally implemented. This will support the consistent review and recording of staff performance and development needs.

AUCE should work towards the full implementation of the student portal for all its programmes, so that students can upload their assignments and readily access course materials uploaded by the instructor.

The student portal ensures students from all programmes can access study related materials, handbooks and other sources of information, including online resource links. Assignments are e-mailed to the appropriate lecturer who tracks submissions and ensures students receive their grades and feedback within 72 hours. Students and staff report that this system works effectively.

To ensure consistency in assessment policy, AUCE may wish to make it a requirement that for all written work the student receives written comments as feedback, perhaps through a standard grading format.

Students confirmed that they receive written feedback on all summative assignments along with their grade, and that the feedback is clear, constructive and timely. Grading formats are standardised across undergraduate and postgraduate provision, and students receive clear guidance on assessment and grading criteria through assignment briefs, the programme syllabii and handbooks.

AUCE is recommended to ensure that external moderation is in place for final assessment in all its degree-level programmes.

External moderation has been introduced for all degree provision, drawing on expertise from other institutions in Lebanon. External moderators complete a standard form which provides brief but clear confirmation of standards management and appropriateness of assessment strategies.

While it is recognised that AUCE has only a relatively small number of international students, it is advised that relevant information for international students be added to the University's website, so that such students can review it prior to arrival.

The Institution continues to recruit a very small number of international students and provides students with helpful information at the enquiry or application stage. Information provided includes guidance on living in Lebanon, visa requirements and fees. However, no information aimed at international students is included on the website.

It is also recommended that AUCE develop and implement a standardised checklist approach to the induction that is provided for international students, so that it can be ensured that all such students receive the necessary information in a consistent way.

A clear induction checklist for international students has been introduced, to ensure that they receive all essential information including resources, facilities and sources of support. Lists are completed and checked by the admissions team.

AUCE should make more provision for networked systems in some of the classrooms so that online resources can be used by instructors to support the learning.

All classrooms are networked and equipped with projectors, which allows staff to use prepared slides and presentations, and to access online information as appropriate. Staff can connect their laptops or tablets to a projector or to the internet as needed, and students are also able to access the internet in class through building wide wireless connectivity.

AUCE should consider establishing a systematic mechanism to report to students on the actions taken in response to their feedback.

Students confirmed that they receive clear information on actions taken in response to their feedback, through the student portal and noticeboards situated in circulation areas, as well as from their lecturers. The student portal provides a clear platform for the communication of messages to students.

AUCE is recommended to make an explicit identification of key performance indicators for programmes and by the definition of a formal procedure for the review of such indicators, including comparative aspects.

Whilst programme reports include consideration of data, specific key performance indicators are not consistently utilised across programme areas. Comparative analysis would be facilitated by the development of a programme template with explicit data sections to ensure that all programmes are reviewed using the same key performance indicators.

4. Compliance with BAC accreditation requirements

4.1 Governance, Strategy and Financial Management (spot check)

The standards are judged to be:

Met

Partially Met

Not Met

Comments

The Institution has an appropriate organisation chart and committee structure with clear remits and membership. The responsibilities of senior staff and committees are made available through the Quality Assurance Guide. The Board, the senior management team and the University Council maintain effective oversight of the strategic and operational management of the Institution, including consideration of internal and external risks.

A clear Strategic Plan is approved by the Board. The Strategic Plan sets out the key objectives for the development of the Institution including the establishment of new partnerships and provision to support

the expansion of student numbers. The Strategic Plan is clearly communicated to staff and reflects input from internal and external stakeholders.

Financial Management systems are clear and appropriate. The Board approves the annual budget which is managed by the Director of Finance and regularly monitored by the senior management team. Financial management systems comply with the requirements of the Lebanese Ministry of Education and include the external audit of accounts.

4.2 Academic Management and Administration (spot check)

The standards are judged to be: Met Partially Met Not Met

Comments

Academic management and administration systems are clear and appropriate. A well-defined structure sets out relative levels of responsibility. Duties and responsibilities are further articulated through job descriptions and person specifications which are checked at the recruitment stage.

Policies and procedures governing expectations of staff are set out in the Staff Handbook which all staff receive as part of their induction. Committees are supported by clear terms of reference and meet regularly to discuss management issues and to review performance against targets.

Performance of staff is monitored and reviewed by line managers and staff confirmed that regular meetings take place to review individual performance. Academic staff have regular teaching observations at least once every semester. An appraisal system has been developed to formalise performance reviews, but this has not yet been fully implemented. Its implementation would support the coherent identification of the personal and professional needs of staff. Information management systems support the safe storage of data and its availability to inform management reviews at programme, department, faculty and Institution level.

Online systems, including the student portal, support the clear communication and dissemination of policies, procedures and information to internal stakeholders.

Admissions systems are effectively managed, and clear information is provided on the entry requirements for individual programmes through the programme descriptors available on the website. Students are able to access advice and guidance from the admission team, the members of which ensure that students' prior qualifications are checked, and that English language proficiency is tested.

Academic staff are encouraged and facilitated to undertake research and scholarly activities to support their currency of knowledge and teaching delivery. All teaching staff have a time allowance which enables them to develop and publish at least two papers each year.

The information produced by the Institution is managed by the marketing department and informed by syllabus information. Effective systems are in place to ensure the currency and accuracy of information provided to students and other stakeholders, which is checked by the Director of Marketing and approved by the senior management team.

As a result of the Foundation Programme losing recognition by the Ministry of Education, it has been withdrawn by the Institution. However, information about this programme currently remains on the Institution's website

4.3 Teaching, Learning and Assessment (spot check)

The standards are judged to be:

Met

Partially Met

Not Met

Comments

All academic staff are qualified to at least Masters level and have appropriate subject knowledge and experience to teach at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Teaching follows clear schemes of work which are part of the syllabus, and sessions are supported by detailed lesson plans approved by heads of programme. The student portal provides an effective platform for providing students with access to learning materials and handbooks.

Students are provided with access to their assessment briefs both through the portal and in class. Academic staff explain assessment requirements and provide additional guidance as needed. Materials to support study and assessment are made available through the student portal and reading lists are supported by texts in the library.

Students are provided with clear and constructive feedback on their summative assessment, normally within 72 hours, which represents good practice in enabling students to understand how to improve their work. The lecturers provide copies of results to the appropriate Faculty Office for entry into the data management system.

4.4 Student Recruitment, Support, Guidance and Progression (spot check)

The standards are judged to be:

Met

Partially Met

Not Met

Comments

Students have good access to academic tutors and to pastoral support, details of which are set out in the Student Handbook. Students are provided with e-mail contacts to make appointments with tutors for individual support sessions. Student Services provide advice and guidance on pastoral matters, and students confirmed that they are able to access staff as needed.

Tutors track individual student progress and where student attendance or progress falls below expectations, students are contacted and progress review meetings arranged.

Students receive appropriate information on complaints and appeals procedures through the Student Handbook and as part of induction, and students confirm that they are clear about the procedures.

International students receive clear information on living and studying in Beirut and visa requirements. To ensure clarity of support, students have access to speakers of their own first language. No accommodation is arranged for students, and this is made clear to students at the recruitment stage.

A programme of social and sporting events is organised for students which supports the integration of new students. Students confirmed that they are also able to suggest events, trips and activities, and receive a good level of support with the organisation of events from Student Services staff.

4.5 Premises, Facilities and Learning Resources (spot check)

The standards are judged to be:

Met

Partially Met

Not Met

Comments

The campus building is owned by the Institution and can accommodate more than 600 students at any one time. Security staff ensure that entry to the building is restricted to staff and students who must show their identification cards, and that visitors are registered at reception. Security cameras are used to monitor security throughout the building.

The building is maintained to a good standard. Classrooms and computer rooms are of an appropriate size, with some classes able to accommodate large numbers of students, including for examinations. Students have access to computer rooms for private study and research. Clear signage and health and safety information is effectively displayed.

A large and well stocked library is located in the basement of the building. Private and group study areas are available as well as access to computers to facilitate online research. However, students' use of the library is low.

Small rooms are available for private meetings and tutorials.

4.6 Quality Management, Assurance and Enhancement (spot check)

The standards are judged to be: Met Partially Met Not Met
Comments

Student surveys take place at the end of each module and inform programme evaluation reports. Actions taken in response to broader student feedback including that provided as part of semester reviews, is clearly communicated through the use of notice boards and the student portal.

The Quality Assurance Guide provides detailed information on procedures, responsibilities and the management of assessment, and has been reviewed and approved by the Ministry of Education. Staff confirmed that the guide provides clear information which supports the consistent management and evaluation of provision.

Semester evaluation reports are produced by programme managers and reviewed by the Deans of Faculty and the University Council. Faculty reports draw on programme evaluations, as well as student surveys and attendance and achievement data, to provide clear and consistent information to the senior management team against performance indicators. Deans meet with the Vice President Academic Affairs to review overall programme performance and key development priorities.

Internal audits of work inform the evaluation of administrative support and the effective monitoring of performance and identification of areas for improvement. These are also informed by staff and student feedback.

4.7 Compliance Declaration

Declaration of compliance has been signed and dated. Yes No

PART C – SUMMARY OF STRENGTHS AND ACTION POINTS

STRENGTHS

The timely and constructive written feedback received within 72 hours effectively supports students to improve their future performance.

Additional support provided to students by lecturers enables them to complete their assignments through flexible access to academic staff as required.

ACTIONS REQUIRED

The Institution must ensure the implementation of appraisals for all staff.	<input type="checkbox"/> High	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Medium	<input type="checkbox"/> Low
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The Institution must remove reference to the Freshman Programmes from its website.	<input type="checkbox"/> High	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Medium	<input type="checkbox"/> Low
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RECOMMENDED AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT (to be reviewed at the next inspection)

The Institution is recommended to develop a formal risk assessment document to facilitate the consistent management and evaluation of risk.

The Institution should consider including information for international students on the website, to make clear programme requirements and the assistance that can be provided.

It is recommended that the Institution develops a standardised programme template with explicit data sections to ensure that all programmes are reviewed using the same key performance indicators.

To improve students' use of the library, the Institution should consider the use of assessment activities based on library resources.

COMPLIANCE WITH STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS - FURTHER COMMENTS, IF APPLICABLE