

BRITISH ACCREDITATION COUNCIL INSPECTION REPORT

INTERIM INSPECTION (Independent Higher Education)

INSTITUTION: SBS Swiss Business School

ADDRESS: Flughafenstrasse 3
8302 Kloten-Zurich
Switzerland

HEAD OF INSTITUTION: Dr Bert Wolfs

ACCREDITATION STATUS: Accredited

DATE OF INSPECTION: 31 October 2019

ACCREDITATION COMMITTEE DECISION AND DATE: 30 January 2020

PART A – INTRODUCTION

1. Background to the Institution

SBS Swiss Business School (SBS/the Institution) is a privately-owned Institution which was established in 1998 as a private, limited-liability company. It provides bachelor, master and doctoral degrees in business. It is based in Kloten-Zurich, Switzerland, close to Zurich Airport. It has designed its educational offer as a mixture of American and European education, adapted to the Swiss legal educational requirements.

The mission of SBS is to provide students with a strong academic foundation and access to various specialised knowledge fields, so they become productive, competent professionals and responsible global citizens. The Institution aims to deliver flexible programmes, tailor-made around the timetable of the students, that are quality driven and supported by efficient and effective administrative services.

The Institution is governed by a Board of Directors, which meets several times a year. The daily management of the Institution is provided by the Vice-President and the Academic Dean, who are also the shareholders. The major role of the Board is to oversee the overall strategy of the Institution and the sustainability of its operations.

The senior management team, which consists of the Vice-President, Academic Dean, Registrar, Quality Manager, Recruitment Manager and Programme Managers (PMs), is responsible for the direct interaction with all stakeholders. SBS also has a Faculty Board, consisting of the Head of Faculty, the Dean, the PMs and student representatives.

Academic governance is exercised through a committee system which consists of a number of boards, including a Faculty Board which has the prime responsibility for academic decision making. In addition, SBS has a Research Board, which takes an overview of the applied research articles of SBS, proposes a research strategy and publishes the Journal of Applied Business Research (JABR). There is also a Business Advisory Board, made up of representatives from different industries and educational specialists. This board advises on the gap between industry requirements and the curriculum.

SBS is located within two floors of a modern, high-rise building which it rents from a bank which also shares the building.

There have been a number of changes since the 2018 accreditation inspection. One concerns the appointment of a Quality Manager to oversee the increasing amount of academic quality management associated with the Institution's various accreditation partners. The other concerns the development and approval of a new strategic plan to cover the period 2020 to 2024.

2. Brief description of the current provision

Currently, the Institution offers a range of educational programmes at undergraduate and postgraduate level. At undergraduate level, these are a Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA), with different majors, including International Management, Marketing, Entrepreneurship and Accelerated Adult Education (AAE). At graduate level, the Institution offers a full-time Master of Business Administration (MBA) with different majors, including International Management, Marketing, Entrepreneurship, Finance and Banking and Human Resources Management (HRM). It also offers an Executive MBA (EMBA) programme with International Management as a major. The MBA majors are also offered as an online MBA. SBS also offers a Doctorate of Business Administration (DBA) degree.

The programmes are recognised by the specialist business accreditation agencies. These are the Accreditation Council for Business Schools and Programs (ACBSP) and the International Accreditation Council for Business Education (IACBE). For quality and licensing purposes, the Institution is licensed by the Swiss body EduQua. SBS

has a number of strategic partnerships with Institutions abroad, to whom it franchises its degree programmes or with whom it provides dual degree programmes.

For the MBA programmes, applicants are expected to have a minimum of two years full-time work experience. For the EMBA, the requirement is five years' full-time work experience. Applicants who do not have any work experience can be considered for the Master of Science in International Business. A Flex-MBA route is available. This is a part-time version of the full-time MBA.

During the current 2019 to 2020 academic year, the Institution has 148 students which comprise 25 on the BBA and five on the MSc. These are full-time students. The remaining 118 students are on the MBA and DBS programmes and are all studying part time. The largest groups of students are from Switzerland and Germany, which together represent a minority of the overall intake. In total, there are 44 nationalities represented in the current cohort, with students from countries such as the Lebanon, the United Arab Emirates, Russia, China, India and Qatar. Among the international intake at bachelor's level, many students are recruited from international schools in Switzerland. As a result, they are already familiar with the country. All students are at least over 18 years of age with an average age of 39 years, which is significantly skewed by the postgraduate provision. A small majority of the students are male.

Student enrolment takes place in September and January each year for the BBA and MSc programmes. For the MBA and DBS programmes, enrolment takes place monthly.

3. Inspection process

The inspection was conducted by one inspector over the course of one day. The inspection included meetings with senior management, academic and support staff, students and teaching staff. One teaching observation took place and a review of a wide range of documentation was undertaken. The Institution was wholly co-operative both before and during the inspection and all meetings were held in a collegiate manner.

4. Inspection History

Inspection Type	Date
Full Accreditation	13-14 July 2018

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

There are two significant changes. One has been the creation of a specific post for academic quality management. This post had previously been combined with that of Registrar. An academic with sound quality management experience has been appointed to this role and will assume overall responsibility for ensuring that the Institution meets the obligations placed upon it by its various accrediting organisations and academic partners.

The second significant change concerns the development, approval and implementation of a new strategic plan. This plan covers the period 2020 to 2024 and, as well as emphasising the Institution's aims and values, which have not changed, it outlines a change in strategy with regard to the Institution's overseas partners. In this regard it is seeking to liaise only with established partners so as to maintain and enhance the reputation of SBS. Another key element in the new strategy is the aim of achieving Swiss Federal accreditation which the Institution is currently working towards.

2. Response to actions points in last report

1.1 The role of the shareholders must be specified.

The roles of the two shareholders, the Academic Dean and the Vice President, have been clearly specified within the Academic Governance Framework document. This articulates the different functions of each individual and clarifies the role of the Academic Dean as the senior individual responsible for leading the Institution academically and for the Vice President whose responsibilities are related to organisational development and the commercial imperatives. This division of responsibilities clearly illustrates an understanding of the need to separate academic from commercial decisions.

1.2 A senior committee or group must be identified through which decision-making on academic matters is carried out.

This has been defined as the Faculty Board which is the senior committee with a responsibility for academic matters. It is chaired by the Head of Faculty and draws its membership from both academic and administrative staff and includes student representation. Whilst this group did meet previously, it was informal and the formal definition of this group as Faculty Board, with specific terms of reference and a constitution, has brought benefits to the Institution not least in ensuring that a record of is made of academic debate, the decisions that arise from it and provides for the monitoring of actions that are needed to address issues as they arise.

1.3 The Institution must draw up terms of reference for its various committees which clarify responsibilities, reporting lines and other accountabilities so that the link between governance and management is clearly articulated and documented.

The Academic Governance Framework document includes terms of reference and the constitution for all the Institution's committees including those concerned with general management which are the Supervisory Board and the Board of Trustees, and those concerned with academic governance which are the Faculty Board, the Research Advisory Board and the Business Advisory Board. The reporting lines and links between each board are clear. The Institution is thus benefitting from a more formal and structured approach to general and academic decision making. The Institution stated that students are represented on the academic committees but not all the committee constitutions explicitly states this.

4.4 Terms of reference, including inter-relationship with other committees within SBS must be drawn up.

The Academic Governance Framework document includes terms of reference and the links between each board are clear.

12.6 To ensure consistency and fairness for all students, a formal policy must be drawn up on the process for, and consideration of, appeals by students for consideration of mitigating circumstances in relation to assessments.

The Institution has developed and is implementing a Mitigation Handbook which clearly sets out the policy for appeals. The handbook also makes clear reference to the arrangements which can be instigated for students with disabilities or additional learning needs during the assessment process. There is, in addition, a separate Equal Opportunities and Diversity Handbook to support such students.

Whilst students confirmed that they are aware of the appeals policy and how to make an appeal, the Institution was unable to clarify precisely how students access this handbook and the others which have recently been developed and implemented.

14.4 The Institution must publish a clear policy on processes for dealing with complaints of abusive behaviour.

SBS has developed and is implementing a Harassment and Bullying Handbook which clearly sets out its policy and procedures in this area. In particular it sets out the procedures through which staff and students can raise relevant complaints.

15.4 The Institution must seek to identify options for alternative programmes of study elsewhere that might be suitable for students who are not progressing satisfactorily.

SBS has sound arrangements for monitoring the progress of its students. For undergraduate students this includes formal personal development meetings with the relevant programme manager where discussions take place about progress. This provides an opportunity for both to agree action where students are struggling and this includes the option for the consideration of alternative programmes of study elsewhere. For postgraduate students, the relevant programme manager monitors progress through the consideration of grade profiles and through information provided to them by faculty. Through this process, there is also the opportunity to advise postgraduate students accordingly if alternative programmes of study should be considered.

15.8 The Institution must include an explicit question about whether the applicant wishes to declare any special education needs or disabilities on its application form.

The Institution has revised its application form to ensure that it specifically requests information which enables it to appropriately advise applicants with any additional needs or disabilities during the application process. This also ensures that any relevant adjustments can be made to support the student once they are on their programme. The Equal Opportunities and Diversity Handbook also sets out the Institution's arrangements for such students. The development of this handbook has provided an opportunity for SBS to review its premises to satisfy itself that they are fully accessible for students, staff and visitors with disabilities.

21.4 Appropriate health and safety information must be displayed prominently in the building.

The Institution's Health and Safety Handbook effectively underpins its approach to health and safety. In particular it has ensured that a notice is prominently displayed in all rooms of the building which alerts staff, students and visitors to relevant safety information.

24.4 A simple system for recording books loaned, that does not rely on front desk staff being present, must be introduced to increase the hours at which signing out of library materials can take place.

The Institution has increased the opening hours of the library and ensures that a member of staff is available at all times to oversee the signing out of materials. This includes opening at weekends when the postgraduate

students are at the Institution. Students confirmed that their access to learning resources, including those from the library, is wholly satisfactory.

26.3 The Institution must establish formal procedures to report back to students on actions taken in relation to issues raised by their representatives.

The Institution has significantly enhanced the ways in which its students' views can be sought, recorded and acted upon. The formalisation of the Faculty Board is now critical in this regard. Student representatives are members of the Board and are able to raise matters drawn to their attention by their peers. Formal membership of the Board means that they are privy to the monitoring of any required actions and feed back to their peers on the progress of actions being taken. Students confirmed that they are now made aware of the outcomes of issues they raise with the Institution.

27.1 SBS must introduce formal procedures for consideration and approval of proposals for programme content. These should fall within the terms of reference of its committees that are to be drawn up.

The Faculty Board, as the primary committee for the consideration of academic matters, has within its terms of reference, the responsibility to consider proposals for programme content. Such proposals can emanate from a number of sources including the Business Advisory Board and faculty.

3. Response to recommended areas for improvement in last report

Current management structures place significant reliance on two key individuals and it is recommended that consideration is given to contingency and succession planning, as part of the risk management process.

SBS is addressing this recommendation and, through its application of its risk management processes, has made specific reference to the potential risks posed by the relatively small senior management team. For example, particular care is taken to ensure that at least one of its members is on site at all times and that both do not travel on Institution business simultaneously. In addition, the Institution is ensuring that the expertise and skills of its staff generally are being developed to aid succession planning.

The Institution should consider ways in which it can appropriately support and encourage staff in the area of research.

The Institution has taken a number of measures through which it aims to enhance its research profile. The formalisation of the Research Board and the appointment of a specific chair together with the development of the Research Handbook has strengthened its management of research generally. Staff are encouraged to engage in research and there are financial rewards for those who publish their work. However, not all faculty members are fully aware of the Institutions' arrangements for support.

It is recommended that a suitable replacement for the specialist service which has been providing personalised careers advice and guidance sessions to the students, is put in place.

SBS has reviewed its approach to the provision of careers advice and guidance. Students are now able to seek this from the programme managers who provide personalised advice and guidance. In addition, students are required to attend at least one of the external careers fairs. Postgraduate students are able to use an online career development tool. Students reported their satisfaction with the extent of careers support and guidance provided to them by SBS.

To increase transparency, it is recommended that the Institution includes maximum times for each stage of its complaints policy to be completed.

Timelines for the consideration of formal and informal complaints have now been established.

The Institution should ensure that the minor issues relating to the new premises are resolved by the landlord in a timely fashion.

This recommendation related to minor issues apparent at the time of the last inspection when the premises were newly built. All issues have now been resolved.

The Institution should encourage the comprehensive use of the virtual learning environment (VLE) as the medium for the submission of assessed coursework and for maintaining the video meetings held with students who are studying remotely so that it provides a single and readily-accessible record of the work and assessment of students.

SBS continues to provide for the submission of student assessments either directly to faculty or online. The VLE maintains the video meetings held with students studying remotely. Students were clear about the arrangements for assessment submission.

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 arrangements for governance, strategy and financial management mirror those in place at the time of the last inspection and are effective. Significant enhancements have taken place particularly with regard to the transparency of governance through the publication of the Academic Governance Framework. This means that staff, students and external stakeholders are well aware of the governance arrangements.

A new strategic plan has been developed to cover the period 2020 to 2024 which commits the Institution to student success and to upskilling and reskilling the organisation. The new plan was informed by feedback from staff and students through the Institution's annual satisfaction survey. External stakeholder views were sought via the Business Advisory Board.

4.2 General and Academic Management and Administration (spot check)

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

Comments

SBS continues to be managed and administered through a small but highly effective management and administrative team. There is now a published organisation chart which clearly indicates the key roles and their reporting relationships. This is augmented by the publication of detailed Task Charts for each manager which clearly illustrates the delineation of responsibilities.

Of particular note is the formalisation of the committee system which is enhancing the reporting and monitoring of decisions and their outcomes. This is being facilitated through the practice of storing meeting minutes as shared documents.

Two posts are critical to the smooth running of programmes and the support of students. These are the programme managers for undergraduate and postgraduate programmes respectively. Faculty and students were highly complimentary about the support of these postholders.

Whilst internal moderation takes place for all assessed student work, the only external moderation which takes place is for the master's level theses which are moderated by an external examiner from the University of Zurich. There is no external moderation for other modules on the postgraduate programmes nor for any of the undergraduate modules. This means that for the majority of the provision there is no

process through which student work is moderated to ensure fair and transparent application of assessment criteria and to ensure that standards are equivalent to those elsewhere in the higher education sector.

4.3 Teaching, Learning and Assessment (spot check)

The standards are judged to be:

Met

Partially Met

Not Met

Comments

One key strength of the Institution's approach to learning and teaching lies in the calibre of its faculty. They are well qualified and are clearly dedicated to their role as facilitators of student learning. In particular, students appreciate and benefit from the extensive professional experience of faculty and the real-world scenarios which they bring to the classroom.

Students were highly complimentary about the learning styles which they experience through a wide variety of teaching methods. The focus is most definitely on action learning through discussion and group work and the VLE provides effective support. For undergraduate students, the inclusion of mandatory internships and the way in which experiences from these are used in the classroom is particularly valued by students who see this as an element of personalised learning. Postgraduate students, many of whom have significant managerial positions in a wide range of different organisations and industries, particularly benefit from sharing the experiences of their peers and faculty encourage students to bring their own managerial situations to the classroom.

The Institution's approach to assessment continues to enable students to achieve their potential and to improve on their academic performance. Assessment is staged throughout modules and this, together with formative assessment, enables the monitoring of student progress. A variety of assessment modes are used including assignments, examinations and presentations. Students are assessed not only on the completion of formal assessments but also on their contributions in class. Students reported that the feedback they receive on assessments is clear and helps them to not only understand the reason for the grade but also recognise what they need to do to improve their grade in future.

Students were complimentary about their access to learning resources which includes the library at SBS, a wide range of online resources and access to the University of Zurich library.

4.4 Student Support, Guidance and Progression (spot check)

The standards are judged to be:

Met

Partially Met

Not Met

Comments

Students clearly benefit from a supportive environment through which they are provided with academic and pastoral support. They are well aware of who to approach for a variety of support needs and were highly complimentary about the easy access they have to faculty and to the programme managers.

Monitoring of student progress is undertaken by programme managers who use assessment and attendance data to raise any issues with students as necessary so that any relevant support can be provided as necessary. The link between attendance and performance is further stressed through the practice of each module having a small percentage of its grade for participation in class. This means that there are few attendance issues and attendance is generally high. Students are well aware of and appreciate the steps which SBS takes to motivate them to succeed.

The student body is multinational and multicultural. Students commented favourably on the support they can rely on as international students and on the positive environment within SBS which is fostered through this ethnic and cultural mix.

4.5 Premises, Facilities and Learning Resources (spot check)

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

Comments

SBS is now in its second year at its brand-new premises which provide a spacious, safe and effective place to work, study and learn. It has secure tenure on these premises and does not use any external premises for any purpose.

The location of SBS near to Zurich airport is particularly helpful to its postgraduate students who travel for the weekend study blocks from various countries around the world.

Classrooms are well resourced and provide an effective learning environment for students. These rooms are well furnished and include access to relevant technology to support learning and teaching.

The library is well stocked with relevant books although all students are provided with their own copies of the core texts for each module. Increasingly, students are relying on the online resources which enable them to study at home or away from the Institution. In spite of this, students appreciate the newly-extended opening hours of the library.

4.6 Quality Management, Assurance and Enhancement (spot check)

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

Comments

SBS continues to implement a range of quality assurance procedures to sustain academic standards and to enhance the quality of its provision.

Student feedback is key to the Institution's aims of ensuring a quality learning experience for its students. It places importance on the end-of-module survey which enables it to gather critical data about the delivery of modules. The outcomes of this feedback are collated and analysed and students are alerted to actions taken through student representation at the Faculty Board. Students were keen to say, however, that they are encouraged to raise issues as they arise and commented that SBS is highly responsive to any urgent matters which are then addressed.

The Institution clearly monitors its provision on a day-to-day basis and it reports formally as required by its accrediting bodies. It does not, however, implement a systematic process through which module and programme reports are completed annually. There is therefore no formal process through which SBS can reflect on its provision in a critically retrospective and holistic manner. As a result, it does not formally consider issues across the whole provision nor does it, at Institutional level, develop an action plan through which it can ensure that issues requiring attention are addressed and which can guide the Institution in the subsequent year.

4.7 Online, Distance and Blended Learning (spot check)

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

Comments

SBS delivers its MBA programme both face-to-face, online and in a blended mode. This delivery is underpinned by the same policies and procedures which apply to its face-to-face provision.

It has significant experience of delivering online provision and staff are well qualified in this learning and teaching mode.

4.8 Compliance Declaration

Declaration of compliance has been signed and dated.

Yes No

PART C – SUMMARY OF STRENGTHS AND ACTION POINTS

STRENGTHS

The emphasis placed on research and, in particular, the formalisation of its approach to research through the work of the Research Board and the development and implementation of the Research Handbook.

The calibre of its faculty, the practical professional experience they bring to the classroom and their clear dedication to student learning and student success.

The variety of learning methods deployed with the emphasis on active learning, interaction and the use of real-life scenarios.

ACTIONS REQUIRED

The Institution must implement an external moderation system for postgraduate modules which are not subject to the current arrangements and for all undergraduate modules.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> High <input type="checkbox"/> Medium <input type="checkbox"/> Low
The Institution must establish and implement an annual monitoring process which requires the completion of module and programme reports which are informed by relevant data and feedback.	<input type="checkbox"/> High <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Medium <input type="checkbox"/> Low

RECOMMENDED AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT *(to be reviewed at the next inspection)*

The Institution should ensure that where student representatives are members of a committee that the relevant committee constitution explicitly indicates this.

The Institution should ensure that it informs students of how they are able to access the Mitigation, Harassment and Bullying Handbooks.

SBS should ensure that all faculty are aware of the support available to them to engage in research.

COMPLIANCE WITH STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS - FURTHER COMMENTS, IF APPLICABLE

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