



Mission Report

Type of mission	Study Visit
Subject	Quality Culture in practice in institutions
Location	University of Edinburgh, Scotland
Date	5-6 October 2017
Authors	Chafic Mokbel, Hania Nakkash

General Context

(Bullets)

- C. Mokbel and H. Nakkash, two Higher Education Reform Experts (HEREs) from Lebanon participated in the study visit organised by SPHERE in University of Edinburgh, Scotland, on October 5-6, 2017 about quality culture in practice: case of Scotland and in particular the University of Edinburgh.
- The Scottish case is of particular interest because of the enrooted quality culture in the different institutions and at the system level. The involvement of actors at the system level provided the participants with a better understanding how the system can accompany the institutions in their project of development of the quality culture.
- While discussing matters related to quality in higher education is a recurrent subject of interest, this study visit occurs in an adequate timing since the HEREs were preparing the TAM on “Rethinking Higher Education” which induced in-depth reflection about the development of the higher education system in Lebanon. Quality is an issue in the local context where high awareness exists and large and various developments exist in the institutions while development at the system level are mainly observed in Erasmus+ project like the TLQAA+. The study visit provided the team with argument and examples of good practices which guided the part related to quality assurance of the work conducted on strategic needs in the sector.
- The needs in the Lebanese institutions in this field are large and various. The observation in situ of the developments taking place in Edinburgh, one of the top universities worldwide, is important for the HEREs and allow them to better disseminate and advise when is needed.
- The University of Edinburgh has a student centred approach and involve the students at different levels. It is important for the HEREs to measure up how beneficial and sensitive is to

involve the students in the different aspects of the academic life including the governance and quality processes.

Discussions

(Bullets)

Discussions in working groups allowed to project what have been presented in different contexts and to clarify several points. The approach adopted, i.e. discussing the topics according to the axes of the study visit and then report back to the whole group was successful and yielded active discussions. There has been a global consensus that the University of Edinburgh has gone a long way towards establishing a culture of quality and having a meaningful, significant and constructive involvement of the students. The role of the system in supporting and fostering further development is very positive. The trust among the different stakeholders permits to nurture this culture of quality. Diversity was also a point of discussions. A gap exists with the different contexts of the partner countries and large efforts seems to be necessary to reach an equivalent culture.

HERE contribution

(Bullets)

- The two HEREs have actively participated in the discussions in the working groups
- The HEREs have reacted after the presentations at several occasions
- There has been a contribution on the SPHERE virtual discussion groups before the visit
- The HEREs have participated in the social activities and reinforced their networking

Lessons learned

(Bullets)

- Building the **culture of quality** is an **ongoing process** that requires the involvement of all the stakeholders
- The progress towards the culture of quality comes often with **devolved set of procedures and processes** where units manage their quality system in a **decentralized** way
- The **involvement of students at all levels**, not only in the quality processes but also in academic matters such as teaching and learning and governance is essential. This is another progressive process that needs to be managed with care altering training and empowering of student bodies
- A **support system** is useful **at the institution level** (continuous professional development programs to instructors to enhance their teaching, training and awarding systems to instructors, support to students, ...) and **at the system level** where we have witnessed an enhancement support role and tools developed by QAA Scotland. The shift from pure external evaluation to more enhancement support after the establishment of the quality culture is a very interesting lesson learned from the visit. The Enhancement Themes of the QAA is an

engaging process that allows collective reflecting upon themes of actual interest for enhancement. The support of SPARQS to students in their role in the quality process is also very beneficial.

Ideas for exploitation

(Bullets)

- The need for support mechanisms seems to be clear. Discussions must be engaged within the Lebanese Higher Education to define the kind of possible support
- It is also crucial to find a process that allows a progressive engagement of students in the quality processes both at the institutional level and at the system level
- Building a quality culture needs more than just defining quality procedures. It requires trust and involvement of all stakeholders in the continuous improvement process
- Decentralized quality assurance can be a target after succeeding a first phase of establishing the culture of quality in the Lebanese institutions
- The previous elements have been included in the reflections conducted within the TAM on “Rethinking Lebanese Higher Education”