

Accreditation in Higher Business Education in the Private Sector: The Case of Jordan

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Abstract

This study explores the development of a quantitative research designed to examine the accreditation system of undergraduate Business Administration program in private universities in Jordan, in comparison with the standards of the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) in the United Kingdom. The research has set out a description of Jordanian accreditation process of private universities and the QAA system of quality assurance. It has drawn out some distinctions in terms of similarities and differences. The findings suggest that although the current arrangements for accreditation in Jordanian private universities are making some progress in determining and assuring quality standards in the Business Administration program, however, they are still inadequate. Accreditation should apply to all institutions of higher education in Jordan. It is also important that the accreditation council in Jordan should be strengthened and its formation changed to incorporate universities, government, employers and professional bodies.

Keywords: Higher education, quality assurance, accreditation, standards, Jordan, Business Administration, United Kingdom, Quality Assurance Agency.

Introduction

At the beginning of the 21st century, higher education is facing unprecedented challenges, arising from the convergent impacts of globalization, the increasing importance of knowledge as a main driver of growth, and the information and communication revolution.

Moreover, international mobility of students and offering higher education courses across national boundaries have led to increased mobility of labor and to increased pressures for reciprocal relations in recognizing academic and professional qualifications (Dill and Sporn, 1995). But opportunities are emerging out of these challenges. One of these is that the role of education in general—and higher education in particular—in the construction of knowledge economies and democratic societies is now more influential than ever before. Higher education is indeed central to the creation of the intellectual capacity on which knowledge production and utilization depend. It is no less central to the promotion of lifelong learning practices necessary for updating one's knowledge and skills. At the same time, higher education institutions and new forms of competition are perceivable now, inducing traditional institutions to modify their modes of operation and

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delivery and take advantage of the opportunities offered by the new information and communication technologies. Therefore, in response to the momentous and converging trends in the global environment, countries have undertaken significant transformations of their higher education systems, including changes in patterns of financing and governance, growing institutional differentiation, the creation of evaluation and accreditation mechanisms, curriculum reforms, and technological innovation. But progress has been uneven, and sharp contrasts remain across and within higher education systems. In this regard, Holm-Nielson (2001) asserts that most developing and transition countries in particular, continue to wrestle with difficulties brought about by inadequate responses to pre-existing challenges. Among these unresolved challenges is the expansion of higher education coverage in a sustainable way, the reduction of inequalities of access and outcomes, the improvement of educational quality and relevance, and the introduction of effective governance structures and management practices. Even though higher education enrolments have grown significantly in virtually most countries in the developing world, the enrolment gap between the most advanced economies and the developing nations has become wider. Holm-Nielson (2001) argues also that in many developing countries financial resources have been insufficient to sustain the growth of enrolment and to improve quality. In addition, rigid governance models and management practices are preventing higher education institutions from embracing change and launching reforms and innovation in these countries. For this reason, developing countries are confronted with a dual task. On the one hand, there is a pressing need to overcome the coverage, equity, quality and governance problems, which have traditionally beset higher education systems. On the other hand, all nations are exposed to the new challenges arising from the construction of knowledge economies and democratic societies. A key concern is whether developing countries can adapt and shape their higher education systems to confront successfully this combination of old and new challenges.

In Jordan, as in other developing countries, while there has been rapid quantitative expansion of the higher education system, it has not yet been accompanied by a sufficient qualitative shift. 'Standards' have been a theme in the quality debate in Jordan over the past years. Although important legislation has been enacted to improve higher education in Jordan, yet discrepancies in the contents of these documents concerning the introduction of new standards of accreditation to private universities, but not public universities, provoked various reactions. This, in turn, raises important questions about the accreditation process in Jordan and the mechanisms used to guarantee quality in higher education. In view of that, it is convenient to apply a system of standardization of higher education which exists in leading countries of the world, such as the United States and the United Kingdom.

THEORITICAL BACKGROUND

Determining Quality

'Quality' and 'Quality Assurance' are recent imports into the university terminology from industry. Freed (1997) maintains that striving for high **quality** in higher education is not a new strategy. Institutions have always held academic excellence and high quality as the highest goals. Achieving these goals is an easy task when resources are available. Conditions have changed, and institutions are facing decreasing revenues while costs and competition for attracting students are increasing. For this reason, higher education institutions try hard to provide services of the highest quality. The quality principles were conceptualized and documented by different scholars (e.g. Crosby 1979 & Deming 1986) and were widely implemented in corporate America under the name

of total quality management (TQM). Juran (1988) contends that quality principle is a management approach for making higher education institutions more effective, in addition to creating an improved place to obtain a degree and a more enjoyable workplace. Hence, in the context of higher education, quality means a judgment of the level of goal achievement and the value and worth of that achievement. It is a judgment of the degree to which activities or outputs manifest desirable characteristics, according to some norm or against particular specified criteria or objectives. Ball (1985) refers to quality as 'fitness for purpose.' According to this definition, a course of study in a higher education institution is of satisfactory quality when it conforms to the particular standards or levels of achievement for the purpose it was designed. In the absence of any overall agreed standards in a higher education system, it is necessary for institutions to specify their mission, goals and objectives and then be evaluated accordingly. The main issues in the quality debate about higher education in many countries are the maintenance and improvement of levels of teaching, learning, research and scholarship; improvements in the quality and adaptability of graduates; methods of defining and measuring quality; the use of benchmarking and performance indicators; and ways of convincing governments and stakeholders that institutions are doing a competent job in ensuring quality outputs.

Various studies and papers produced over the past decade or so have documented key aspects of the quality debate in major geographic regions such as Western Europe and North America (e.g. Sizer 1990; Frazer 1991; Neave 1991; Williams 1997; Anwyl 1992; Craft 1992 & 1994; and Lindsey 1992 & 1994). Quality is also becoming a major issue in the higher education systems of developing countries, although considerable variations still exist about how quality issues are perceived and in the priorities that different governments and higher education systems are giving to tackling quality problems.

Quality and accountability thus have become key elements in the efforts of many countries to become and remain internationally competitive in a world where interdependence in trade is rapidly growing. Apart from this, there is more emphasis on quality associated with increased mobility of professional and skilled labor, and the greater need for recognition of qualifications across national boundaries. As Craft (1994, p viii) points out:

'Globalization' and international migration mean that academic and professional qualifications need to be 'portable' across national borders, and so both institutions and nation states are keen to learn more about each other's procedures for assuring the quality of tertiary education provision.'

The term **quality assurance** has been in use in higher education only over the past decade or so. While there are many definitions of quality assurance in the literature (e.g., see Ball 1985; Birnbaum 1994; and Lindsay 1992), in essence, as already noted, quality assurance refers to systematic management and assessment procedures adopted to monitor performance and achievements and to ensure achievement of specified quality or improved quality. For this reason some authors (e.g. Brennan, De Vries, & Williams (1997), prefer to use the term 'quality assessment' instead of the term 'quality assurance'. However, while a great deal of effort in quality assurance relates to quality assessment, quality assurance is a broader term which embraces not only assessment but also other activities including, for example, follow-up efforts aimed to achieve improvement. Quality and quality assurance have become key issues for higher education internationally in the 1990s (Kells 1992; and Craft 1994). In many countries, managers of higher education institutions are concerned about quality and how to implement appropriate quality assurance mechanisms. Governments are concerned about the costs of providing credible academic and professional awards and the need to ensure that standards are maintained at an appropriate level, while rapid increases in enrolment and

often falling financial support per student unit raise doubts about whether quality is being maintained.

Accreditation refers to a process of assessment and review which enables a higher education course or institution to be recognized or certified as meeting specified standards. Internationally, accreditation is often one of the main mechanisms of quality assurance which refers to processes of on-going review, assessment and monitoring that should apply to all recognized providers of higher education in order to ensure that courses and programs are of a high standard and that institutional monitoring of performance is effective. The term accreditation in higher education originally came from the United States, but over the years professional associations and government agencies have adopted many of the key ideas internationally. In the USA, accreditation holds a prominent position within the range of resources available to students, employers, government and the public in identifying quality education and training programs and providers. Accreditation serves to both evaluate and improve the quality of such programs through the establishment and publication of definitive standards, along with a reliable process for their application in evaluating institutions which voluntarily apply to seek accredited status. The American Council of Higher Education Agency (CHEA) (2003) defines accreditation as a process of external quality review used by higher education to scrutinize colleges, universities and educational programs for quality assurance and quality improvement. It indicates that in the U.S., accreditation is carried out by private, non-profit organizations designed for this specific purpose. Institutions and educational programs seek accredited status as a means of demonstrating their academic quality to students and to the public and to become eligible for federal funds. Hence, accreditation serves to assure academic quality to students and to the public, facilitate access of students for Federal Funds to get loans and other kinds of support, ease transfer of courses and programs among colleges and universities, and endure employers' confidence.

Academic standards usually refer to students' performance and levels of achievement on a particular piece of assessment, in a certain subject, or by noting the total average achievement of each student on graduation. They represent a statement, which make explicit what is implicit in academic practice, of the generic intellectual qualities expected of a graduate generally or within a particular field or discipline. It is assumed that such standards can be represented on a scale that can distinguish pass from fail in addition to pointing out various classes of honors attainment. Standards may be expressed comparatively, that is norm-referenced; or in absolute terms, that is criterion-referenced. The terms 'inputs' and 'outputs' are frequently used when standards are being applied. Internationally, there seems to be a growing move towards assessing outcomes rather than inputs, which, understandably, are seen as less valid sources of indicators of standards. Between inputs and outcomes, there are processes those activities used to turn the raw recruits into high quality graduates. Chief among these are the measures for teaching, learning and assessing student progress.

Higher Education and Accreditation System in Jordan

Education has played a transformative role in the development of Jordan from an agrarian, subsistence economy to a predominantly urban, industrialized nation. With few natural resources at its disposal, Jordan has opted to develop its human capacity. To date Jordan's record of educational development has been impressive. Jordan's population has a very high literacy rate of 89 percent. Jordan invests 13 percent of public expenditure on basic and secondary education. The total enrollment rate for basic education is 90 percent and decreases to 70 percent for the secondary

cycle. Male enrollment is nominally higher in early childhood and basic education. Female students, however, comprise 55 percent of the secondary education population.

The structure of the educational system in Jordan consists of a two-year cycle of pre-school education, ten years of compulsory basic education, and two years of secondary academic or vocational education after which the students sit for a General Certificate of Secondary Education Exam -Tawjihi. The government has, as a matter of policy, provided every village and community with 10 or more school-going children with a school. As a result, the rapid spread of facilities enabled citizens in poor and remote areas to gain access to education. Currently almost one-third of all Jordanians are enrolled in educational facilities. Education is free for all primary and secondary school students, and compulsory for all Jordanian children through the age of fifteen.

After finishing their basic schooling, more and more Jordanians are opting to pursue higher education either at home or abroad. In 1988, the government launched a ten-year education reform package which cost approximately \$1 billion. The plan aimed to improve the quality and relevance of education by restructuring the curricula to focus on developing students' problem solving and critical thinking skills, and linking academic knowledge to real life. In 1998 the Ministry of Education has launched the second reform plan, for 1998-2002. This plan focused on upgrading teachers' skills, school administration, educational information systems, pre-school education and education for children with special needs.

The main problems which the Jordanian educational system is facing now are twofold. First, the country's burgeoning youth population demands the continued expansion of the educational system. Along with this quantitative expansion, Jordan seeks to improve the quality of its teachers, books, curriculum and facilities. In the area of higher education, the country has suffered from an imbalance between the university and community college systems. The Ministry of Higher Education is now actively promoting the development of Jordan's community colleges and encouraging enrollment in them, in order to better match the country's educational system with its labor market, which currently suffers from a shortage of mid-level vocational skills.

Higher education in Jordan started in 1951 with a one-year post-secondary teacher-training institute. Since then, investment in higher education has witnessed a remarkable rise. When viewed in proportion to Gross National Product (GNP), spending on higher education figures out the greatest in the Arab world. One third of educational expenditure is allotted to higher education. Since 1951, higher education has developed along two distinct lines, with traditional universities on the one hand, and non-university-level institutions (Community Colleges) on the other. At present, there are twenty-one universities in Jordan. For the most part, the Jordanian higher education system comprises public and private universities established under Government legislation. Graph (1) illustrates the development of public and private universities with the number of enrolled students during the period from 1991 to 1999.

The first public university "University of Jordan" was established in 1962 with 167 students. At present there are eight public universities that provide undergraduate as well as postgraduate programs of study. The first private university "Amman Private University" was established in 1990 with 1324 students. At present there are 13 private institutions of higher education. Ten of these universities provide only undergraduate programs of study, one provides graduate programs, and an open university for Distance Learning. Moreover there are currently twenty-one community colleges with 29,000 students. Higher education institutions in Jordan offer annually bachelor degrees to nearly 106,000 BA students and 6,670 MA and PhD students. The number of professors is estimated at around 4,600. Graph (2) illustrates the ratio of enrolment per 100 thousand in higher education in Jordan as compared to some other Arab countries.

Access to higher education in Jordan is open to holders of the General Secondary Education Certificate who can then choose private community college, public community college or university. The credit-hour system has been adopted at universities; this entitles students to select courses according to a study plan. All post-secondary education is the of the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, which was established by the new higher Education Provisional Law, number (41). The Ministry comprises the Higher Education Council and the Accreditation Council. But while there has been rapid quantitative expansion of the higher education system in Jordan, it has not yet been accompanied by a sufficient qualitative shift. Al-Maani (2002) indicates that most Jordanian graduates lack practical knowledge, analytical skills, up-to-date knowledge, efficient computer skills and strong language skills (especially English language). Consequently, with the increase in international integration of different forms of education, the government and society as a whole started paying more attention to questions of higher education in Jordan. Nowadays, quality issues dominate the higher education debate in Jordan, as ministers, bureaucrats, employers and business interests became increasingly concerned with the output of higher education institutions and the efficiency of graduates to meet the needs of the employers. Many people inquire whether the society is getting real value from the output of higher education and urge the government to adopt mechanisms to achieve more control over the work that Jordanian higher education institutions do. Mahmoud (2003), for instance, asserts that Jordan's ability to reach its goal of becoming more competitive within the global economy will be largely dependent upon the orientation of its higher education graduates. For this reason, the Jordanian government has given great volume of attention to higher education issues in Jordan. It made it primary to address the challenges of meeting international standards in technology, education and production in order to grasp the benefits of globalization. The socio-economic transformation program, for instance, set in 2002, by the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation, works to improve the performance of public higher education institutions, strengthen the accreditation process with the aim of meeting international standards, and improving the reputation and standards of universities in the areas of research & development, computerization, information technologies, and English language teaching (Ministry of Planning). During the last two decades several laws/decrees have been issued to govern higher education in Jordan: Higher Education Act number (28) for 1985, Public Jordanian Universities Act number (29) for 1987, Private universities Act number (19) for 1989, and Higher Education Provisional Law number (41) for 2001 (Ministry of Higher Education, 2003). In this regard El-Gharaybeh (2004) warns that the vast number of laws and legislation issued on higher education represents a major problem to universities and concerned bodies. In addition, other strategies or position papers were presented on higher education in Jordan. Among these:

- Jordan Higher Education Development Project.
- Economic Consultative Council HRD papers.
- Human Resource Development Centre study (Vision 2020).
- The R.E.A.C.H initiative.
- Youth Entrepreneurs Association (YEA) position paper on education.
- Strategies for Higher Education 1997.
- Higher Education forum on Quality and Relevance, Research and Finance 1998.
- World Bank Report on Financing Higher Education in Jordan, 1998.

Although Jordan took the lead in the Arab world, in adopting rules and regulations concerning accreditation in particular, quality assurance and accreditation of higher education institutions and programs are new and are still under the control of the Jordanian government who views this responsibility as flowing from its responsibilities for education under the Jordanian constitution. In

1989, legislation number (6) has been enacted to improve higher education in Jordanian institutions. In 1996 a Council for Higher education was established as a national body for quality assurance and accreditation. Accreditation surfaced because the Ministry of Higher Education recognized the need to assure and promote quality, standards in private higher education institutions. However, because public universities still have the power to accredit their own courses, the activity of the Council has mainly been restricted to licensing and recognizing programs in private universities, but it did not extend to in-depth assessment of higher education leading to accreditation as usually practiced at the international level.

Jordanian Ministry of Higher Education applies two different standards of accreditation: general and specific. General accreditation refers to the process through which universities are evaluated as a whole in terms of the number of students and educational and scientific facilities. Under this scheme, each university is verified and accredited according to the year of establishment. Specialized committees pay repeated visits to universities to evaluate specific university programs and then report to the Ministry of Higher Education. The specialized committee determines if computer and science labs and teaching halls are sufficient in number and quality for student needs and for proper instruction. The committee also looks into the qualification or experience of the teaching staff of each program. Any program that has more than 20 per cent of instructors carrying Masters Degrees without experience is usually not accredited. Moreover, the committee assesses teaching plans, subjects of studies and libraries, specifically the sufficiency of library materials for each program. During this process if the committee discovers problems or irregularities, it recommends that the university concerned address the deficiencies before the end of semester. If the university fails to respond, then the Council issues warnings and takes disciplinary measures, including reducing the number of the students admitted to a program or terminating the program altogether. The reports issued by the Higher Accreditation Committee are studied, discussed and presented to the Higher Education Council for approval. During the last years, 48 committees carried out accreditation for around 140 different programs of study (Shdeifat, 2001). However, discrepancies in the contents of the accreditation law provoked different reactions. The accreditation process had been applied to private universities for the past eight years, by the Higher Education Council. It applied different standards on private universities from those for public universities which are self-evaluated through their boards of trustees. Internal quality assurance processes in Jordanian universities include: assessment of new courses and units of study; review of courses, units and departments; and student evaluation of teachers.

In 1999 Al-Hussein Fund for Excellence (HFE) a non-profit organization, was established by a group of twenty five chairmen of Jordanian banks and financial institutions with the mission of promoting excellence and innovation in academic, economic and social fields. HFE's first program was initiated in 2001 with the overall objective of setting up a formal system of continuous review and improvement of the quality standards of teaching programs in higher education. HFE's projects seek to improve the quality of targeted services, meet the demands of local market and promote a national drive towards excellence. Assisted by United Kingdom's Quality Assurance Agency for higher education (QAA), two pilot projects assessed the quality of computer science programs in 2002 and business administration program in 2003 at public and private universities. Yet, Al-Maani (2002) asserts that acute shortage of funds, low standards of graduates, non-relevance of programs, minimal accreditation standards, lack of quality control, slight emphasis on research, and governance are the most difficult problems facing higher education in Jordan.

Quality Assurance for Higher Education in the United Kingdom

There are over 180 universities and colleges of higher education in the United Kingdom (UK). These institutions cover a wide range of activity, have varied background, and operate in a climate of rapid change. They are autonomous and self-governing bodies and are not owned by the state. Most, however, are entirely reliant on government funding through higher education funding councils. Every institution is responsible for the standards and quality of its academic awards and programs. Each has its own internal procedures for attaining appropriate standards and assuring and enhancing the quality of its provision (QAA web site). In particular, institutions address their responsibilities for standards and quality through the assessment of students and their procedures for the design, approval, and the monitoring and review of programs. Most institutions carry out both regular monitoring and periodic review of programs. Monitoring considers how effectively a program achieves its stated aims and the success of students in attaining the intended learning goals. It is usually undertaken by the department providing the program and often involves a program team appraising its own performance at the end of the academic year. The process may take into account reports from external examiners, staff and student feedback, reports from any professional body that accredits the program and feedback from former students and their employers. It may result in adjustments to the curriculum or to student assessment, to ensure continued effectiveness. Periodic review in institutions is carried out, typically, every five years and normally involves external experts. It looks at whether the aims and intended learning outcomes set for a program are still valid and are being achieved. Institutions also have in place arrangements for the periodic review of the various services they provide to their students. From 2004, all higher education institutions in England are required to make available information on: the institutional context; student admission, programs and completion; internal procedures for assuring academic quality and standards (Higher Education and Research Opportunities (HERO) web site).

The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA)

The United Kingdom (UK) has a system for independent quality assurance of higher education that has government at arm's length and is conducted on behalf of the statutory funding councils by an independent agency with a substantial university representation (QAA web site). Academic quality audit in the UK was a form of enquiry covering all higher education institutions. It sought to establish how far an institution had in place adequate and effective overall procedures for the management of standards and quality. From 1991 to 1997, the former Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC) and its predecessor, the Academic Audit Unit, conducted the first round of audits. From 1998 to 2002 the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) undertook a second round, known as continuation audit. Continuation audit focused on quality strategy, academic standards, the learning infrastructure and communications. Later audit reports concluded with a view on the degree of confidence that could be placed in the way in which the institution was safeguarding its standards and quality. In 2003 Institutional audit replaced continuation audit, universal subject review, and institutional-level review (as set out in the Handbook for academic review). It aims to ensure that institutions are: providing higher education, awards and qualifications of an acceptable quality and an appropriate academic standard; and (where relevant) exercising their legal powers to award degrees in a proper manner.

QAA is one of the leading higher education quality assurance organizations in the world. It was established in 1997 to provide an integrated quality assurance service for UK higher education.

Before QAA took over the responsibility, reviews at subject or program level within institutions were carried out by the Higher Education funding councils (HEFCs).

The agency is an independent body funded by subscriptions from universities and colleges of higher education, and through contracts with the main higher education funding bodies. A Board, which has overall responsibility for the conduct and strategic direction of business, governs it. It employs and trains academic and professional specialists as its assessors. Teams visit departments and, use the institution's own aims and objectives as a starting point. The agency's responsibility is to safeguard the public interest in sound standards of higher education qualifications, and to encourage continuous improvement in the management of the quality of higher education. This is achieved by reviewing academic standards and quality, and providing nationally agreed reference points that help to define clear and explicit standards.

The Agency explores the quality of provision in six core areas and each department is scored on each with a four-point scale:

- Curriculum design, content and organization;
- Teaching, learning and assessment;
- Student progression and achievement;
- Student support and guidance;
- Learning resources; and
- Quality assurance and enhancement.

To achieve its mission, the Agency works in partnership with the providers and funders of higher education, the staff and students in higher education, employers and other stakeholders, to safeguard the student and wider public interest in the maintenance of standards of academic awards and the quality of higher education; communicate information on academic standards and quality to inform student choice and employer understanding, and to underpin public policy making; enhance the assurance and management of standards and quality in higher education and promote a wider understanding of the value of well-assured standards and quality; promote a wider understanding of the nature of standards and quality in higher education, including maintenance of common reference points, drawing on UK, other European and international practice. The four main activities of the QAA are:

1. Institutional audits of internal quality assurance processes to ensure that these are sufficient for meeting stated institutional missions.
2. Discipline or subject reviews of university departments run on a five year cycle which assesses teaching against the department's own stated objectives.
3. Development of benchmark standards in each discipline intended to inform employers about what every graduate in that discipline can do.
4. Overseeing the national qualifications framework.

The Agency also administers for the government the law in relation to the use of protected terms including university and degree, and assesses institutions aspiring to university status. In addition to reviewing UK institutions' offshore operations, the QAA is developing a strategy to monitor events overseas that may have relevance for its functions in the UK. In particular it works to support an overseas audit, to learn from overseas experience, to keep a watching brief on international developments that may have implications for UK universities, and to brief international visitors. Moreover, the QAA is involved in international quality assurance initiatives. This includes membership of the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education and the European Network for Quality Assurance.

Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) Subject Reviews in Jordan

Assisted by the Quality Assurance Agency for higher education (QAA), Al-Hussein Fund for Excellence (HFE) initiated two projects to assess the quality of education of two academic programs at public and private Jordanian universities. The first project was initiated in 2002 on computer science program and the second was initiated in 2003 on business administration program. The main features of the review methods were: Review against aims and objectives (intended learning outcome). Review of student learning experience and student achievement captured within a core of six aspects of provisions: Curriculum Design, Content and Organization; Teaching, Learning and Assessment; Student Progression and Achievement; Student Support and Guidance; Learning Resources; and Quality Management and Enhancement. Jordan University of Science & Technology (public) and Philadelphia University (private) shared the award of the first project and the University of Jordan (public) and University of Applied Sciences (private) shared the award of the second one.

The QAA initiated review visits based on QAA's published subject review process, adapted to meet national requirements, with element from QAA's current academic review and developmental engagement processes. The HFE provided workshops to assist participating universities in the preparation of self-evaluation documents (SED) and program specifications. All the universities provided an SED together with program specifications as a basis for the review visit to each university. Review teams, introduced by the QAA, consisting of three experienced peer reviewers of which one was a review coordinator, conducted the site visits and prepared the review reports. All of the reviewers were academic and professional peers. Most are current members of staff of UK universities. Others are also specialists in the field and are review coordinator in the UK employed by the QAA as team leaders. All reviewers are QAA trained and are widely experienced in the review process in the UK and overseas. In addition, the HFE provided briefings for the reviewers on the projects, the self evaluation documents, the program specifications and the logistical arrangements.

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of the study from which our examples here are drawn was to investigate the similarities and differences between the Jordanian accreditation system and QAA quality assurance for the undergraduate business administration program in private universities. The choice of the QAA was specifically made because Al-Zaytoonah Private University of Jordan participated in the undergraduate business administration assessment program carried out by the Agency and Al-Hussein Fund for Excellence in 2003. Both authors of this study were directly involved in the assessment program and in preparation of the required documents for the reviewers of the program. The study took the greater part of a year to complete. Following a pilot exercise and extensive interviewing, a draft questionnaire was circulated for comments to the academic network involved, and was finalized after revisions. Local academics participating in this research undertook the translation of the QAA standards into Arabic where necessary. Numerous individuals in universities, Ministry of Higher Education, and professional associations assisted with the project. Academics predominated the 50 individuals of the sample (88%), the remainder (12%) being members of the Higher Education Accreditation Council in Jordan. However, the demographic variables of age, gender, and education were statistically controlled in the study to remove the possible effects of the over-representation of certain age, gender or educational categories.

Sample

The sample comprised:

- Twenty-seven members (54%) of the academic staff from different public and private universities who participated in the QAA subject review of the business administration program in 2003 and were all familiar with the QAA system.
- Twenty-three individuals (46%) who are familiar of the Jordanian accreditation system. Those included 6 members of the Jordanian accreditation council and 17 academic staff from different Jordanian universities.

Measurement

The questionnaire consisted of ten main items that intended to measure the availability/unavailability of ten main standards developed and used by the QAA for assessment of quality assurance in different academic programs inside and outside the UK. These standards correspond also to the standards of the New England Association of Schools & Colleges (NEAS&C). Table 1 provides a description of the ten main items.

Insert Table 1 here

The ten main standards provide 145 statements with which respondents were invited to agree or disagree, in accordance with their own perceptions, on a six-point scale: 5= to a very great extent, 4= to a great extent, 3= somehow, 2= little, 1= very little, 0=not available. (See annex 1.) Responses have been grouped into the ten items of the questionnaire discussed above.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In analyzing the data, a scale analysis was not carried out, as the sample size for each group was small, when compared with the number of parameters. We therefore had to be content with item analysis. Table 2 provides means and standard deviations of the two groups' responses, those familiar with the Jordanian accreditation system and those familiar with the QAA system, on the ten main items of the questionnaire.

Insert Table 2 here

Table 3 provides means, standard deviations and t-test results of responses that show significant differences between the two groups on certain statements of the questionnaire.

Comparing Jordanian Accreditation System with the Quality Assurance Agency

In the following comparison of the two groups (those familiar with Jordanian system and those familiar with QAA system), it will be noticed that there is considerable convergence of views between the two groups, but there are also some significant differences. It should be noted, however, that differences are sometimes a matter of degree, rather than contradiction (Trompenaars and Hapden-Turner, 1999). Graph 3 shows means of responses on the ten main standards of the questionnaire.

Mean scores and standard deviations shown in Graph 3 indicate that there is a general agreement between the two groups, with higher tendency from QAA group, on the necessity of Mission and Purpose, Programs and Instructions, Faculty, Scholarship and Research, Library and Information and Physical Resources for accreditation and quality assurance of higher education. However, mean scores and standard deviations of Planning and Evaluation, Organization and Management, Supportive Services and Public Disclosure, indicate that QAA gives more importance to these standards than the Jordanian system. Against that background, the responses to statements describing the nature of each standard in Table 2 show some significant differences between the

two groups. The discussion will follow the order in which items appear in Table 2. Moreover, Graph 4 illustrates some statements where the QAA gives more importance and Graph 5 illustrates some statements where the Jordanian system gives more importance.

Mission and Purpose both groups saw this item as essential for accrediting and quality assurance of the institution. The view that the mission should be stated to the public and all concerned parties, however, was less strongly supported by the Jordanian group. Only 39% of them agreed on this statement in comparison with 85% of QAA group with difference significance (17.95). In their views on how **Planning and Evaluation** be used to sustain quality, the QAA group was strongly in favor of this item. They also significantly stressed the necessity of interaction between planning and evaluation (17.19), cooperation between staff to achieve objectives (21.08), setting plans in light of threats and opportunities (20.68) and setting work plans according to objectives (27.96). QAA group placed more emphasis on the importance of **Organization and Management**. This item significantly indicated the importance of institutional responsibility to establish channels of communication with society (15.74) and set effective programs and attract qualified staff (31% of the Jordanian group agreed in comparison with 85% of the QAA group on both items). Statements on **Programs and Instructions** showed that both groups agreed, with varying degrees, on the necessity of programs being consistent with objectives (56% of Jordanian group agreed in comparison with 97% of QAA group). The highest significant differences on this item were mainly on pastoral guidance (42.64), student support, and guidance (36.45), and distribution of grades (52.18). **Faculty** seems an important item in the Jordanian system as the means of certain statements (2, 3, 6, 8, 9, & 19) show significant differences with regards to percentage of faculty and laboratory staff to students and faculty and laboratory staff qualifications. 90%, 85%, 86%, 91 %, 87% and 69% of the Jordanian group agreed on these statements respectively. For the QAA system the means show it is significantly more essential for faculty to render support to students, assign special time for their guidance, following developments in their fields of study, and submitting suggestions for additions to the library (statements: 16, 17, 20, & 21). 91%, 99%, 96%, 92% have agreed on these statements respectively. **Scholarship & Research** also show some differences between the two groups. QAA system assigns more importance to patent and evaluation of textbooks for accreditation as teaching materials. **Supporting Services** also show that QAA system assigns more importance for providing support to students from outside the country (89% agreed in comparison with 34 of the Jordanian group), providing faculty with private e-mails (89% compared with 35%), and availability of booklets and brochures (statement 7). Both groups agreed on the necessity of **Library and Information**, taking patent into consideration and cooperating with outside libraries with QAA group stressing slightly more on these items. **Physical Resources** are also important in both systems. QAA and Jordanian group assigned importance for the availability of computer labs, private computers to staff, up-to-date software, and computer technicians. The Jordanian group significantly assign more importance to the availability of computer labs, and workshop rooms for students. Finally **Public Disclosure** seems to be significantly more important in the QAA system than the Jordanian. The institution is being responsible to set plans for communicating with outside society, making information available to the public, encouraging staff to interact with outside community, and creating links with local and international institutions.

Research Limitations

Although measures were taken to reduce measurement error through the use of native-language instruments and the persons who administered the survey, distortions of the findings due to convenience sampling are likely. Thus, the results reported here represent the respondents and not their country. Another limitation is that the study was designed using existing and established standards to assess quality constructs that quite possibly have some situational aspects not captured here. However, the use of internationally recognized standards could be considered one of the strengths of this study since it helps to develop arguments between management practitioners in different cultures. Finally, the sample for this comparison is relatively small, and the authors do not claim it to be representative of all individuals who are familiar with the Jordanian accreditation system nor the QAA's standards for quality assurance. However, our intention was exploratory, and it is accepted that further research will be needed to verify our findings.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This research aimed to assist in developing an improved national approach to both quality assurance, identify opportunities for synergy, drive continuous improvement and benchmarking of practices in higher education institutions, by means of the formal and structured process of searching for those practices which lead to excellent performance, the observation and exchange of information about those practices, the adaptation of those practices to meet the needs of one's own organization, and their implementation (Meade, 1998). Hence, the findings of the study are of importance and apply to Jordanian and other international institutions of higher education. The study has set out a description of Jordanian accreditation process and the QAA standards for quality assurance. It has drawn out some distinctions in terms of similarities and differences. Both set out to provide institutions with a framework for self-assessment. The findings suggest that although the current arrangements for accreditation in Jordan are making some progress in determining and assuring quality in higher education, and particularly in business administration program in private universities, however, they are still inadequate. Jordan needs a more rigorous quality assurance and accreditation system to promote and improve quality processes and outcomes as well as disseminate good practices.

The review also showed that accreditation in Jordan is not carried out by professional associations; rather it is mainly a process of review or assessment conducted by the government to enable a Minister or approved authority to recognize and approve a higher education institution or course.

The Higher Accreditation Council also still mostly appear to focus more on inputs—curriculum content, student staff ratios, contact hours, resources and equipment and so on—than outcomes. Yet, emphasis on university student input should be minimized as long as they satisfy admission criteria and maximize emphasis on university student output by tying it to university eligibility for financial incentives and making it an integrated part of the accreditation criteria. It is also obviously desirable that Jordan should have an overall consistent and robust approach to both quality assurance and accreditation.

While the standards and criteria used in the assessment of institutions and courses should inform quality assurance mechanisms, there is no clear reason why the accreditation council in Jordan should be responsible for both accreditation and quality assurance. It is desirable that the accreditation council be strengthened and its formation changed to incorporate all concerned parties: the universities, the government, employers, and professional bodies. Al-Hussein Fund for Excellence should also be supported as an independent national quality assurance body. It is also

important that accreditation be applicable to all institutions of higher education (public as well as private), and financial aid to public universities be tied to excellence and compliance with accreditation standards. It is also vital for each institution to offer good quality education and to ensure the achievement of appropriate standards. Hence, there should be internal and external evaluation. Universities and programs should be ranked and the ranking should be revealed to the public. Besides, funds available for research and development should be increased and research should be directed to serve development plans and solve national problems. Universities should also be rewarded for quality and relevant research.

Despite the fact that the QAA model is widely criticized in the academic community as being complex and costly and for various aspects of its implementation, yet it is effective (QAA web site). Besides, there is almost universal acceptance of the principle of an external and independent agency with the authority to investigate systematically quality assurance at the institution level and processes and outcomes at the level of subjects.

The QAA Model provides a system of strategic audit and accreditation. It is the Agency's role to provide public assurance that standards and quality within higher education are being safeguarded and enhanced. It does this mainly through a peer review process of audits and reviews. These are conducted by teams of auditors and reviewers, most of whom are academics but with some members drawn, where appropriate, from industry and the professions. Yet, in Jordan it could be argued that one of the major issues confronting the implementation of large-scale quality assurance enterprises resides in the lack of sufficient numbers of qualified faculty members able to perform the tasks needed both for self-assessment and for accreditation.