

THE IMPACT OF ASSESSING TRAINING PROGRAMMES ACCORDING TO AUN-QA CRITERIA AT THE FACULTIES OF UNIVERSITY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES, VIETNAM NATIONAL UNIVERSITY - HO CHI MINH CITY

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Abstract: *The research describes an overview of quality assurance and accreditation of training programs in accordance with AUN-QA criteria. On that basis, the researcher analyzed the impact of assessing training programmes according to AUN-QA criteria on (1) revising the curricula, (2) improving teaching and learning activities as well as academic advising, and (3) enhancing the monitoring system, evaluation tools and support policy. Some recommendations are made to improve the effectiveness of assessing and improving training programmes according to AUN-QA criteria at the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University-Ho Chi Minh City (USSH, VNU-HCM).*

Key words: assessment, training programme, AUN-QA

1. Overview of AUN-QA

AUN means ASEAN University Network, an organization established in 1995 under an agreement between Ministers of Education in ASEAN. It currently has 30 members in 10 countries (including 2 Vietnam National Universities and Can Tho University of Vietnam).

The AUN-QA criteria at program level were first issued in 2000, with 18 criteria and 72 sub-criteria, and the second in 2011 with 15 criteria and 68 sub-criteria, and the third in 2015 with 11 criteria and 50 sub-criteria; and most recent version in August 2020 with 8 criteria and 53 sub-criteria with different groups of factors related to input, process and output, in a closed cycle the Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) which is intended to continuously improve and enhance the quality of training organizations.

Up to now, 9 training programs of the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, VNU-HCM have been officially assessed and met the AUN standards, namely Vietnamese Studies, English Linguistics and Literature, Education, Social Work, International Relations, Literature, Journalism, History, and Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL).

2. Research results

2.1. General information about survey results

In the 2012-2019 period, 7 faculties of the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, VNU-HCM participated in the assessment of their training programs

according to AUN-QA criteria; so we conducted the survey of all 168 lecturers of 7 faculties by questionnaire and collected 123 valid votes (accounting for 73.2%), in which the Faculty of Literature and Language has the highest number of respondents with 33 lecturers (26.8%). The faculties with the lowest number of respondents are the Faculty of Social Work and the Faculty of Journalism and Communication with 9 lecturers (7.3%).

Table 1. Statistics of survey questionnaire

No.	Faculty name	Number of lecturers	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
1	Vietnamese Studies	25	20.3	20.3	20.3
2	Education	10	8.1	8.1	28.5
3	Social Work	9	7.3	7.3	35.8
4	International Relations	14	11.4	11.4	47.2
5	Literature and Language	33	26.8	26.8	74.0
6	English Linguistics and Literature	23	18.7	18.7	92.7
7	Journalism and Communication	9	7.3	7.3	100.0
Total		123	100.0	100.0	

In terms of academic degrees, lecturers have mainly master's degree. In addition, one lecturer is a professor, doctor:

Table 2. Statistics by titles of lecturers

No.	Academic Title	Number of lecturers	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
1	Professors, PhD	1	0.8	0.8	0.8
2	Associate Professors, PhD	13	10.6	10.8	11.7
3	Doctor	27	22.0	22.5	34.2
4	Master	63	51.2	52.5	86.7
5	Bachelor	16	13.0	13.3	100.0
Number of respondents		120	97.6	100.0	
Number of lecturers who did not answer		3	2.4		
Total		123	100.0		

In terms of seniority, there are more than one-third of lecturers who have worked in the education sector for 20 years or more. This number is equal to that of lecturers who have less than 10 years of work, and the rest are lecturers with the working time of from 10 to less than 20 years.

Table 3. *Statistics by teacher's seniority*

No.	Years of work	Number of lecturers	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
1	Less than 5 years	23	18.7	20.2	20.2
2	From 5 to less than 10 years	22	17.9	19.3	39.5
3	From 10 to less than 15 years	16	13.0	14.0	53.5
4	From 15 to less than 20 years	11	8.9	9.6	63.2
5	From 20 years or more	42	34.1	36.8	100.0
Number of respondents		114	92.7	100.0	
Number of lecturers who did not answer		9	7.3		
Total		123	100.0		

2.2. *The benefits and importance of evaluating the curriculum according to AUN-QA*

Considering the *benefits* of assessing the curriculum according to AUN-QA, it is generally agreed that the lecturers are an opportunity to review, improve and enhance the quality of training; the faculties can get support for the facilities; and the faculties can get more assistance from the university's Human Resource office or at least the faculty shall be financially supported by the university. It has also been suggested that the participation in evaluating the curriculum according to AUN-QA also helps lecturers better understand the issues related to the training program, understand AUN requirements, enhance the faculty and institution accountability, and getting access to the viewpoint of new educational approaches of foreign higher education institutions.

Table 4. *Faculty benefits in participating in evaluating the curriculum according to AUN-QA*

No.	The benefits in participating in evaluating the curriculum according to AUN-QA for the faculties	Frequency	Percentage
1	An opportunity for faculty to review, improve and enhance the quality of training	111	93.3
2	Getting university facility support	67	56.3
3	Getting university human resource support	46	38.7
4	Getting university financial support	34	28.6
5	Others (<i>help lecturers better understand the issues related to the program, know more about the AUN work, enhance the prestige of the faculty and the university, access the viewpoint of new educational approaches of foreign higher education institutions</i>)	4	3.2
Number of respondents		119	220.2

Regarding the importance of evaluating the curriculum according to AUN-QA, most lecturers agreed that it was “important” and “very important” (47 lecturers, 85.5%); no lecturers chose “not important” or “less important”. This shows that faculty’s lecturers appreciate the importance of evaluating the curriculum according to AUN-QA.

Table 5. Importance of evaluating the curriculum according to AUN-QA

No.	Importance of evaluating the curriculum according to AUN-QA	Number of lecturers	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
1	Not important	0	0	0	0
2	Less important	0	0	0	0
3	Relatively important	8	6.5	14.5	14.5
4	Important	31	25.2	56.4	70.9
5	Very important	16	13.0	29.1	100.0
Number of respondents		55	44.7	100.0	
Number of lecturers who did not answer		68	55.3		
Total		123	100.0		

2.3. The changes of the curricula after the assessment according to AUN-QA

The assessment of the curricula according to AUN-QA gives certain impacts on the changes of the curriculum of each faculty/department. The three main factors of the curriculum which have been changed include: expected learning outcomes, curriculum specification, and structure and the content of the program. Most lecturers affirmed that the elements of the program after the evaluation changed somewhat from 47.1% to 69.9% in which the most chosen were *the structure of the revised program* (86 lecturers, 69.9%), Next, *the program is modified based on the assessment data; and goals, training philosophy, expected learning outcomes are updated* (83 lecturers, 68.6%).

The most changed factors were *reviewed curricula* (54 lecturers, 44.6%); *course syllabus is adjusted, changed* (41 lecturers, 33.3%).

The factors that are considered unchanged and the least changed are *the training philosophy/core values of the department* (27 lecturers, 22.2%).

Table 6. *The change of the curriculum after the assessment according to AUN-QA*

The changes of the curriculum after the assessment according to AUN-QA		Remain unchanged	Very few changes	Some changes	A lot of changes	Total
Training philosophy/core values of the faculty are adjusted	Number of Students	14	13	73	22	122
	Percent	11.5	10.7	59.8	18.0	100
The content curriculum is updated and adjusted	Number of Students	4	8	76	35	123
	Percent	3.3	6.5	61.8	28.5	100
The structure of the program is adjusted	Number of Students	3	11	86	23	123
	Percent	2.4	8.9	69.9	18.7	100
The expected learning outcomes (students' knowledge, skills, attitudes after graduation) are adjusted	Number of Students	2	9	80	32	123
	Percent	1.6	7.3	65.0	26.0	100
The proportion of general knowledge and specialized area is adjusted	Number of Students	4	26	79	14	123
	Percent	3.3	21.1	64.2	11.4	100
The course syllabuses of the curricula are adjusted	Number of Students	1	8	73	41	123
	Percent	0.8	6.5	59.3	33.3	100
The curriculum is more frequently revised	Number of Students	1	9	57	54	121
	Percent	0.8	7.4	47.1	44.6	100
The curriculum is revised according to the feedback of stakeholders (students, lecturers, alumni, employers,...)	Number of Students	3	15	79	26	123
	Percent	2.4	12.2	64.2	21.1	100
The curriculum is revised on the basis of the National Qualification Framework (NQF)	Number of Students	3	24	77	18	122
	Percent	2.5	19.7	63.1	14.8	100
The curriculum is revised on the basis of the results of the benchmarking programs	Number of Students	4	25	74	16	119
	Percent	3.4	21.0	62.2	13.4	100

The curriculum is revised on the basis of the updated objectives, training philosophy, expected learning outcomes	Number of Students	1	15	83	22	121
	Percent	0.8	12.4	68.6	18.2	100

Through in-depth interviews and open-ended questions in the questionnaire, we found that the curricula in the faculties/departments were always revised and updated according to the stakeholders' comments after being assessed according to AUN-QA:

Our faculty has revised the curriculum according to the stakeholders' feedback, for example, we have renamed the following courses: "Southeast Asian Civilization" into "Southeast Asian Culture"; "Ethnic groups in Vietnam" into "Ethnic cultures in Vietnam"; "Religions in Vietnam" into "Religious beliefs in Vietnam"; "Vietnamese Archeology" is incorporated into the "Civilization of Southeast Asia"... In addition, we increase the number of credits of the courses in Vietnamese language skills - literacy from 4 credits/course to 5 credits/course, and abolish the requirement for after the certificate of English proficiency of level B (because Vietnamese is considered as a foreign language for foreign students) ... (Code PVS01, Assoc.Prof.Dr., VNS)

The revision of the main curriculum is one of the faculty's activities assessment by AUN-QA. As for the periodic review (of every two years) of the curricula and the requirement for reducing 147 credits to 120 credits, we based on the comments of the stakeholders including students. The Faculty attaches special importance to the surveys, result feedback from employers, graduates to adjust the content, the curriculum to meet the social needs and the labor market. (Code: PVS05, Assoc.Prof.Dr., FLL)

The Faculty has complied with the university regulations on the revision and finalization of the curriculum every two years. The faculty has redesigned the curriculum with a matrix that demonstrates clearly alignment of courses and the curriculum's ELOs, skills and knowledge that are integrated horizontally and vertically, as well as the use of the Bloom taxonomy verbs to formulate the learning outcomes of the skills and attitudes. (Code PVS06, BA, FIR)

The Faculty has applied the Modular System for the curriculum customization, as well as applied CDIO model, integrating KSA-C to enhance integrated teaching. (Code PVS 07, MSc, FJC)

Based on a 4-point scale, which corresponds to three levels of change, meaning that each gap is 0.75 points ($3/4 = 0.75$), we calculate three intervals with the average score below:

Change below average	= less than 2.50 points;
Change at average level	= from 2.50 to less than 3.25 points;
Change at good level	= from 3.25 to 4.00.

The results of the survey show that the overall assessment of the lecturers on the changes of the program after assessment in accordance with the AUN-QA standards is at average level, with a general grade point average for all changes related to the curriculum after being assessed according to AUN-QA is 3.04, with 9/11 items changing at an average level; 2/11 of the content of which have a *good* change in the syllabus "Lecturers' syllabus was adjusted, changed" (3.25 points) and frequently "revised curriculum" (3.36 points); no content is *below average*.

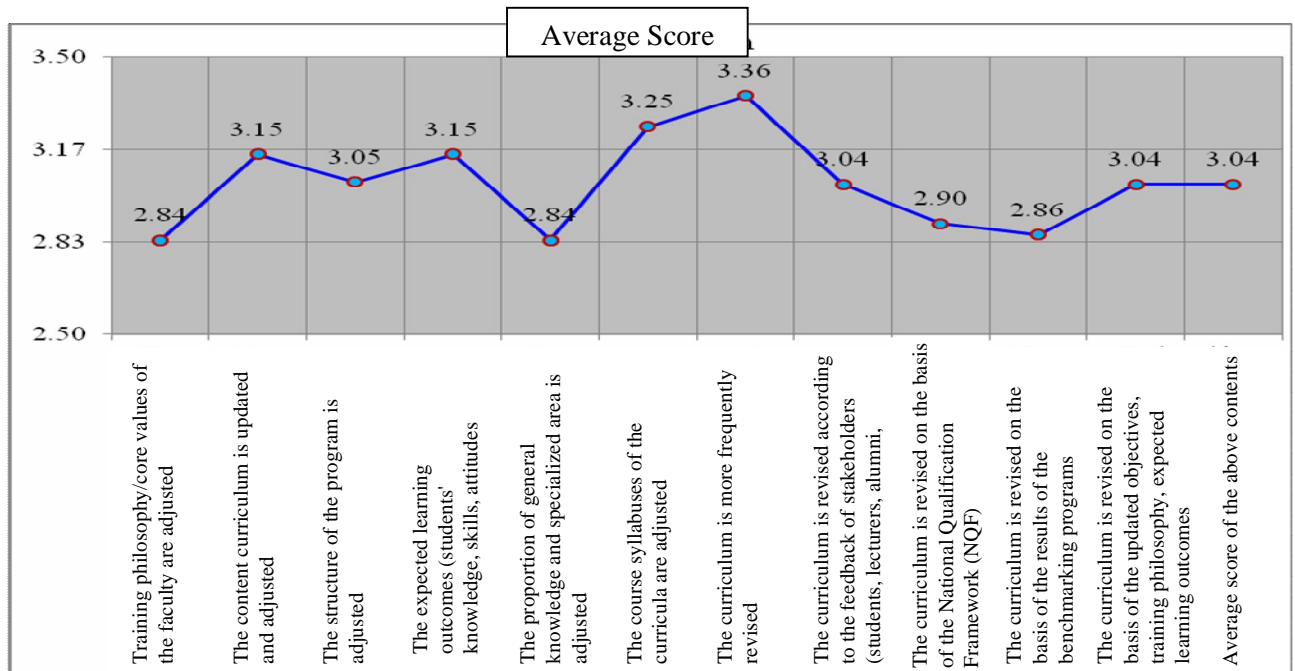


Figure 1. Average scores of lecturers' feedback on the change of the program after evaluation according to AUN-QA

2.4. The change in the teaching and academic advising activities of teaching and support staff

The participation in the assessment of curriculum according to AUN-QA has brought some implications for improving teaching, learning, assessment, scientific research, and counseling activities in support of students and colleagues.

In the four scale representing the change from the "unchanged" to the "much changed" of the six factors related to the teaching and consulting activities of the teaching and support staff, we get main comments from lecturers. The level of *partial some changes fluctuated* from 56.1% to 69.1%, in which lecturers commented that the most changed one was "adjusted teaching methods" (85 lecturers, 69.1%), and the least one is "Improve, support and services" (69 lecturers, 56.1 %).

The percentage showing average change ranged from 17.1% to 19.5%, with the highest percentage on "counseling for students in improving learning" (24 lecturers, 19.5%) and "active Scientific research of staff, lecturers are focused "(22 lecturers, 18.0%).

Very little change was rated by lecturers in "improved service, staff support service" (29 lecturers, 23.6%), the least change was "adjusted teaching methods" (12 lecturers, 9.8%).

Table 7. *Changes in the teaching and consulting activities of teaching and support staff after the assessment of the curriculum according to AUN-QA*

Changes in the teaching and consulting activities of teaching and support staff		Remaining unchanged	Very few changes	Partial some changes	A lot of changes	Total
Qualifications, professional knowledge and skills are enhanced	Number of Students	6	16	80	21	123
	Percent	4.9	13.0	65.0	17.1	100
Adjusted teaching methods	Number of Students	4	12	85	22	123
	Percent	3.3	9.8	69.1	17.9	100
Appropriate methods of assessing and evaluating learning outcomes	Number of Students	4	20	78	21	123
	Percent	3.3	16.3	63.4	17.1	100
Counseling and support for students in improving learning	Number of Students	2	20	77	24	123
	Percent	1.6	16.3	62.6	19.5	100
Improved services for students	Number of Students	4	29	69	21	123
	Percent	3.3	23.6	56.1	17.1	100
Research activities of staff, lecturers are focused	Number of Students	6	22	72	22	122
	Percent	4.9	18.0	59.0	18.0	100

Through the in-depth interviews, we noticed a change in the teaching and consulting activities of the teaching and support staff in the specialized units after participating in the evaluation of the AUN-QA program:

The faculty has created favorable conditions for lecturers and support staff in the faculty to perform professional work. Specifically, we always support our lecturers to participate in conferences, seminars as well as training programs. The Faculty also regularly organizes academic activities so that lecturers and experts can exchange and improve knowledge and skills,... The faculty also encourages lecturers, staff to learn foreign languages and later use them more fluently. (*Code PVS02, Assoc.Prof.Dr., FSC*)

Teaching and advising activities of the support staff and lecturers have been improved. The faculty also attaches great importance to and continuously fosters management skills, leadership, knowledge of QA for the permanent staff. (*Code PVS04, PhD, DELL*)

At least once a month, we organize the academic exchange program and the training program for improving teaching methods and assessment (on the basis of the Bloom taxonomy, the faculty has strict regulations and training for lecturers on: Levels of

skills for each academic year, levels of attainment for each subject in each year, level of attitude toward each course in each year must be presented in the syllabi/curriculum). Based on that, the faculty clearly specifies the forms of examination according to each course or essays, quizzes or tests. Lecturers are required to update the student's monitoring records, including annual performance and student work. Lecturers are encouraged to participate in workshops abroad with high quality research projects and funding. (Code PVS06, BA, FIR)

We design and apply online feedback system of 24/7 (link on faculty website) about attitudes, quality of service of support staff; Enhancing internal training for lecturers and students on CDIO model; we also organized 3 internal training courses on teaching and learning strategies; send support staff to attend classes on office operations, information technology application, use of high-tech equipment; Organize in-house training and workshops on media research every three months from 2016-2017. (Code PVS07, MSc, FJC)

The general evaluation of the lecturers on the changes in teaching and consulting support staff of instructors-trainers after AUN-QA assessment is on *average*; with GPA of all 6 contents is 2.95 point. In the teaching and consulting activities of the support staff - lecturers, there are no contents that lecturers have seen the change as quite good as well as lower than average.

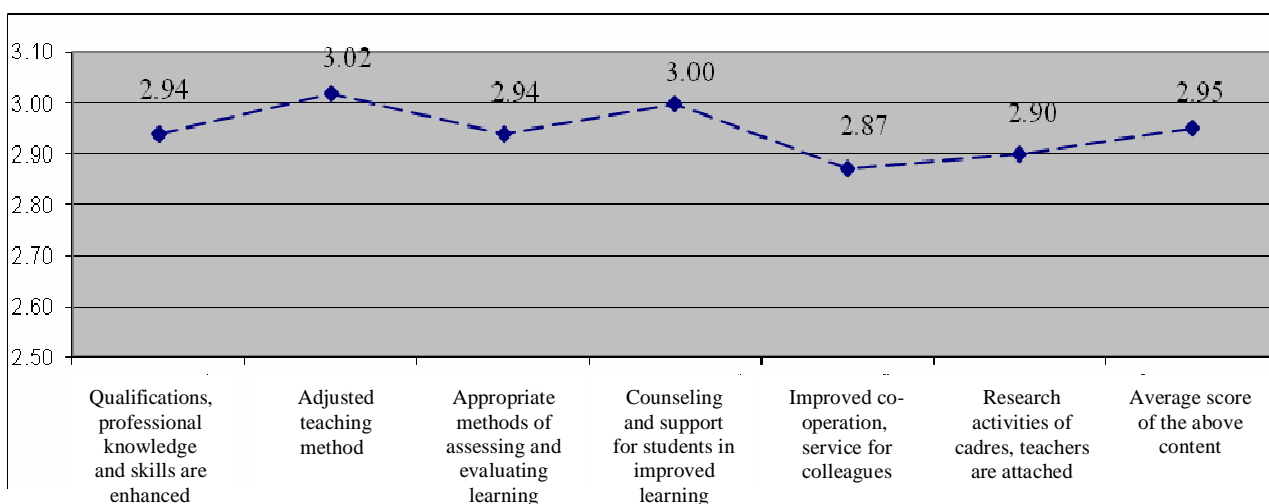


Figure 2. Average scores of teacher feedback on the changes in the teaching and consulting activities of support staff - lecturers

2.5. Changes in monitoring systems, evaluation tools and reward policies

The assessment of the curriculum according to AUN-QA has positively changed the following contents (i) evaluation tools, (ii) monitoring system, and (iii) reward policy.

Regarding the 4 scales showing the gradual change from “*the unchanging*” to “*a lot of changes*” level of the 6 factors related to the monitoring system, assessment tools and reward policy, lecturers mainly selected the level of *partial some changes*, ranging from 43.9% to 55.3%, of which the highest is the “planning, working schedule

is clear” (68 lecturers, 55.3%), followed by “data archiving and information system is updated” and “core activity processes and procedures are completed” (66 lecturers, 54.1%), and finally “rewarding policies (for personnel, scientific research,...) are improved” (56 lecturers, 45.5%).

The level of *unchanged* and *very few changed* are most noted in the “rewarding policies (for personnel, scientific research,...) are improved” (56 lecturers, 45.5%); the second is “improved facilities and equipment” (55 lecturers, 44.8%); and thirdly, “policy support for professional enhancement is focused” (50 lecturers, 40.7%).

Table 8. *Changes in monitoring systems, evaluation tools, and reward policies*

Changes in the monitoring system, evaluation tools and reward policy		Remaining unchanged	Very Few changes	Partial some changes	A lot of changes	Total
Internal rules, internal communication (working hours, communication channel,...) are updated	Number of Students	7	36	60	20	123
	Percent	5.7	29.3	48.8	16.3	100
Planning, working schedule is clear	Number of Students	7	32	68	16	123
	Percent	5.7	26.0	55.3	13.0	100
Data archiving and information system is updated	Number of Students	1	22	66	33	122
	Percent	0.8	18.0	54.1	27.0	100
Core activity processes and procedures are completed	Number of Students	4	30	66	22	122
	Percent	3.3	24.6	54.1	18.0	100
Criteria for performance appraisal (KPIs) are made clear	Number of Students	9	35	57	14	115
	Percent	7.8	30.4	49.6	12.2	100
Improved facilities and equipment	Number of Students	12	43	54	14	123
	Percent	9.8	35.0	43.9	11.4	100
Policy support for professional enhancement is focused	Number of Students	14	36	59	14	123
	Percent	11.4	29.3	48.0	11.4	100
Rewarding policies (for personnel, scientific research,...) are improved	Number of Students	14	42	56	11	123
	Percent	11.4	34.1	45.5	8.9	100

The lecturers’ overall assessment on the change in the monitoring system, assessment tools and reward policy following the AUN-QA assessment *was moderate*, with a common average of all 8 items of 2.73 points. In this field, there are no contents that lecturers have selected quite *good change* as well as *change below average*.

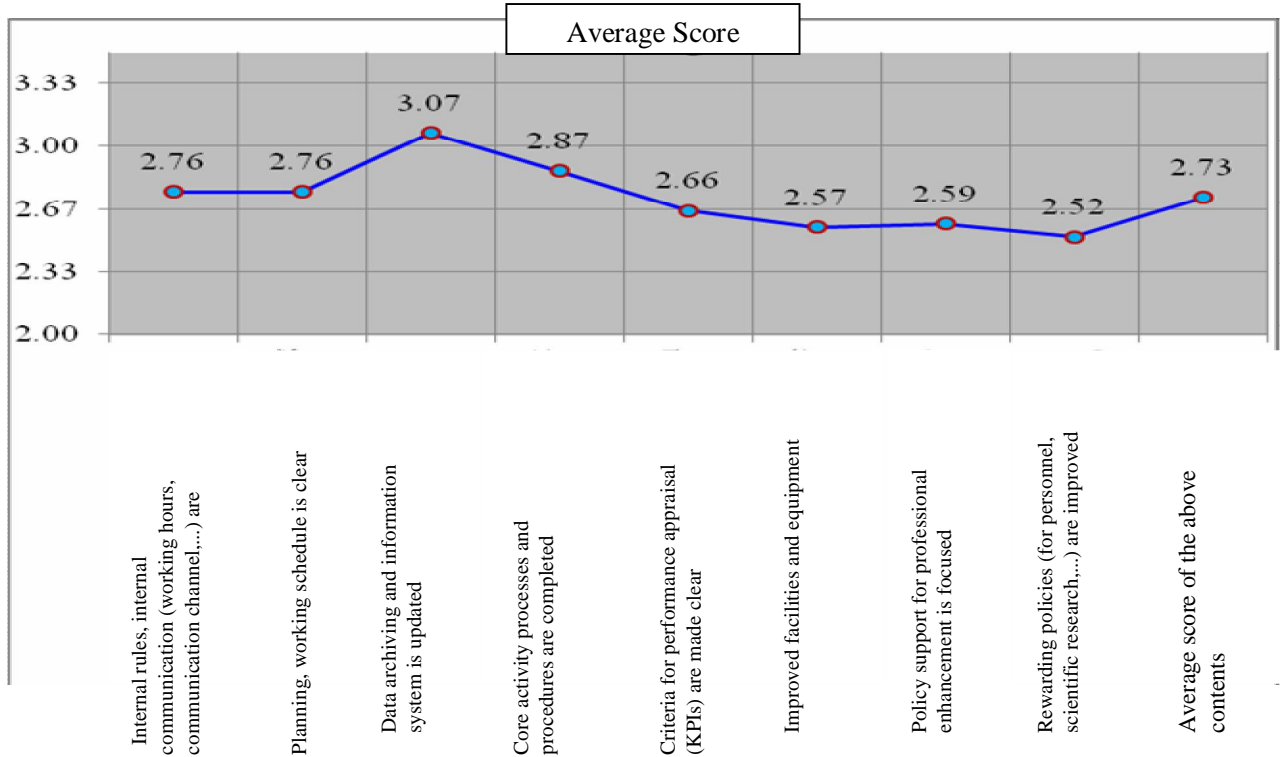


Figure 3. Average scores of monitoring system contents, evaluation tools and reward policy

After being assessed according to the AUN-QA, the monitoring systems, evaluation tools and rewarding policy are paid much attention to and improved, which are reflected in the following comments:

At present, the Faculty has 16 core processes. Most of these processes have been established since its opening to the time of program assessment in 2015. The assessment team has commented on the process that did not meet the require. If necessary, each faculty should follow the common university-wide processes to avoid. The evidence system of the Department is very clearly established with the soft files and hard disk ... (Code PVS02, Associate Professor, PhD, SCF)

The Faculty has reviewed and supplemented the missing processes as well as added the training improvement process and the exam appeal process. After getting recommendation after the internal assessment, the Faculty has regularly updated and archived scientifically which are easily accessible ... (Code PVS03, Msc, DELL)

Additional procedures for reviewing, updating training programs, assigning lecture time; Process for recording data are improved. (Code PVS04, PhD, DELL)

Criteria for evaluating lecturers' results has been expanded comprehensively in all three areas: research, teaching and community service (Code PVS06, BA, FIR)

However, in terms of rewarding policies for units outside the AUN, some lecturers say that the university needs to give “*more reward*”, “*increase financial support*”, give more “*investment in facilities, equipment for teaching and learning*”, “*allowances and incentives for AUN qualified faculty*”,...

3. Conclusions and recommendations

3.1. Conclusion

Through the research process of studying the theoretical background of quality assessment of program level, the author has carried out the research tasks of the topic. Based on the research methodology, the scope of the research, the target group of the research, the research has studied and responded to the following research questions:

1. How has the AUN-QA standard assessment changed the Faculty's curriculum?
2. What has the AUN-QA standards changed the Faculty's teaching and support staff?
3. How has the University's Board, Board of Deans changed the monitoring system, evaluation tools and reward policy?

Answering the three questions listed above, the results of the study show that the assessment of the curriculum according to AUN-QA has positive changes with the *average* positive change in order from high to low on the three main activities of the Faculty, namely (1) the curriculum, (2) the teaching and consulting activities of the support staff - lecturers and (3) monitoring system, assessment tools and reward policy.

3.2. Recommendations

The Faculty Deans and office managers, members of the Scientific and Training Council of the Faculty, Quality Assurance Team of the faculty/lecturers... should regularly improve their knowledge of the construction and design of curriculum, syllabus, teaching activities, curriculum standards, etc. to actively participate in improving, improving/enhancing the quality of education and training.

Each academic unit should encourage lecturers to be willing to make improvement on the basis of the comments of the external assessors to improve the quality of teaching. Units have to monitor the self-assessment, timely find out difficulties to overcome, inform self-assessment result to students to encourage them to participate in curriculum improvement, show students plans and/or make improvement on the basis of feedback from students and the results of external evaluation, periodic review - update the curriculum through the Employer Conference/Former student and expert opinion, the Scientific Committee, Academic Council need to improve the curriculum in order to meet the requirements of society / labor market.

Each faculty should build self-assessment road map according to AUN-QA; it is possible to do it step by step (each year some criteria with evidence portfolio) and to implement each improvement plan before and after the assessment, to implement a continuous QA.

The teaching team, in addition to improving the knowledge of professional knowledge, knowledge on the development of the curriculum, teaching content and syllabi, lecturers need to regularly receive feedback. In addition to adjusting teaching, improving pedagogical capacity and scientific research (through exchanges with colleagues, training, seminar participation, self-study, self-study online,...). Lecturers can have a number of initiatives that contribute to quality improvement, from very small and specific tasks through interaction with students, alumni and colleagues, with parents, with employers.

Teaching staff can have many flexible roles: teaching, consulting, controlling, management,... Lecturers and staff also need to build teamwork habits, and skills in their own unit, contributing partly to the self-assessment and external assessment with effective coordination within their units and with other units, sharing experiences or ideas for the development of your unit.

The Academic Advisory Board makes it clear that students' responsibilities and rights in responding to surveys conducted by the university or faculty, responsible for the development of lifelong learning skills; this is an important requirement of the AUN-QA.

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