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Part-time executive programme, quality manual

AGRIMBA team

An MBA course with an international perspective, designed for those who wish to develop their careers in an agri-business environment.

Taught at weekends on a part-time basis, by an international team using both the Local and English language.

An interactive teaching style with extensive use of case studies that gives a real feel of the business environment in which we all operate.

History

The International MBA Programme in “Agribusiness Management and Commerce” was originally launched in 1993 by a group of teachers from well-known European universities and other Higher Educational Institutions in the 1990s. This group had emerged from an EU supported TEMPUS project that fostered multinational collaboration around teaching programmes in Agribusiness. The development of the MBA was supported by an EU PHARE-TESSA grant. The original programme was developed and run at the Warsaw Agricultural University in Poland, and was taken up soon thereafter by the Czech University of Agriculture in Prague. Since then, a variant has been approved for Debrecen Agricultural University in Hungary, and others fostered in Kiev and Moscow.

The partners very quickly recognised the need to formalize the activities of the developing network, and an International Board was established for that purpose.

The Board of the MBA Network

The full Board of the Network is made up of the Executive together with any other interested parties or their representatives.

The Executive Board is composed of a Chairperson, a Vice-chair person and representatives of the Institutions that operate MBA programmes under its guidance, and of the partner institutions. Other members can be co-opted as necessary.

The Board exists to achieve the following objectives:

- To foster contacts between international providers of MBA programmes in Agri-business management and associated studies.
- To provide the oversight and accreditation of International MBAs in Agri-business management for those who wish to receive such accreditation.
- To spread international collaboration in the field of Agribusiness and Commerce by encouraging participation in the Network.

The philosophy of the Board

Throughout, the Board has sought to encourage the development of the programmes under its accreditation. It has performed this by maintaining an approach to standards that set minimum requirements to which all must conform, and by instigating processes of Quality Management that ensure the progressive enhancement of the existing provision. Central to this organic process is the belief in local ownership and flexibility as the key to quality, together with the establishment of processes for reflective practice and self-development embedded in the accreditation, annual monitoring and periodic review standards that promote a culture of continuous improvement.

Operation

The Board meets annually to pursue its objectives. This meeting takes place at a different venue each year, hosted by one of the Board members.

At this meeting, the actions of the Executive on behalf of the Board are ratified and actions, in pursuit of its 3 objectives, for the year ahead are identified. The Board receives reports from groups of its members that have been tasked with various activities, from individual Board members who wish to bring matters to the attention of the Board, and from other parties invited by the Executive to take part. The agenda for the meeting is circulated 2 weeks before the meeting. Minutes of the meetings are posted on its website.

An important element of this reporting concerns accreditation and review of MBA programmes that wish to join or remain within the provision.

In addition, the Board receives Annual Reports from the MBA programmes that are being run under its accreditation and monitors their progression. The Board may designate actions that it requires of the programme providers as conditions under which the programmes can go forward, and it can withdraw accreditation where, in its view, any programme is in irredeemable difficulty.

Quality Assurance Processes

1. The Board approves an annual report of the validation, revalidation and annual monitoring of all its associated MBA programmes, which is subject to external scrutiny.
2. The Executive Committee prepares its annual report, summarising the reports it receives from its panels and sub-committees.
3. The Executive Committee constitutes a Panel(s) for the purposes to validate new proposals or reviewing and to revalidate existing programmes every 6 years. Such panels have a single remit and are made up of representatives of the Executive Committee (chair), of the wider Board (excluding any persons who have direct involvement in the programme under consideration) and of at least one External institution or organisation that is

- independent of the Board. This Panel undertakes the scrutiny of proposed or existing programmes to ensure that they conform to expected quality standards. The committee produces a report and recommendation to the Executive Committee.
4. The Executive Committee constitutes a standing Monitoring Sub-committee to receive and scrutinise annual reports from the various associated MBA programmes and submits recommendations to the Executive Committee regarding the health of those programmes.
5. New programmes prepare documentations for the Validation Panel regarding the proposed programme.
6. Existing programmes prepare annual reports and action plans for the Monitoring Sub-committee.
7. Existing programmes prepare review reports every 6 years for the Validation Panel.

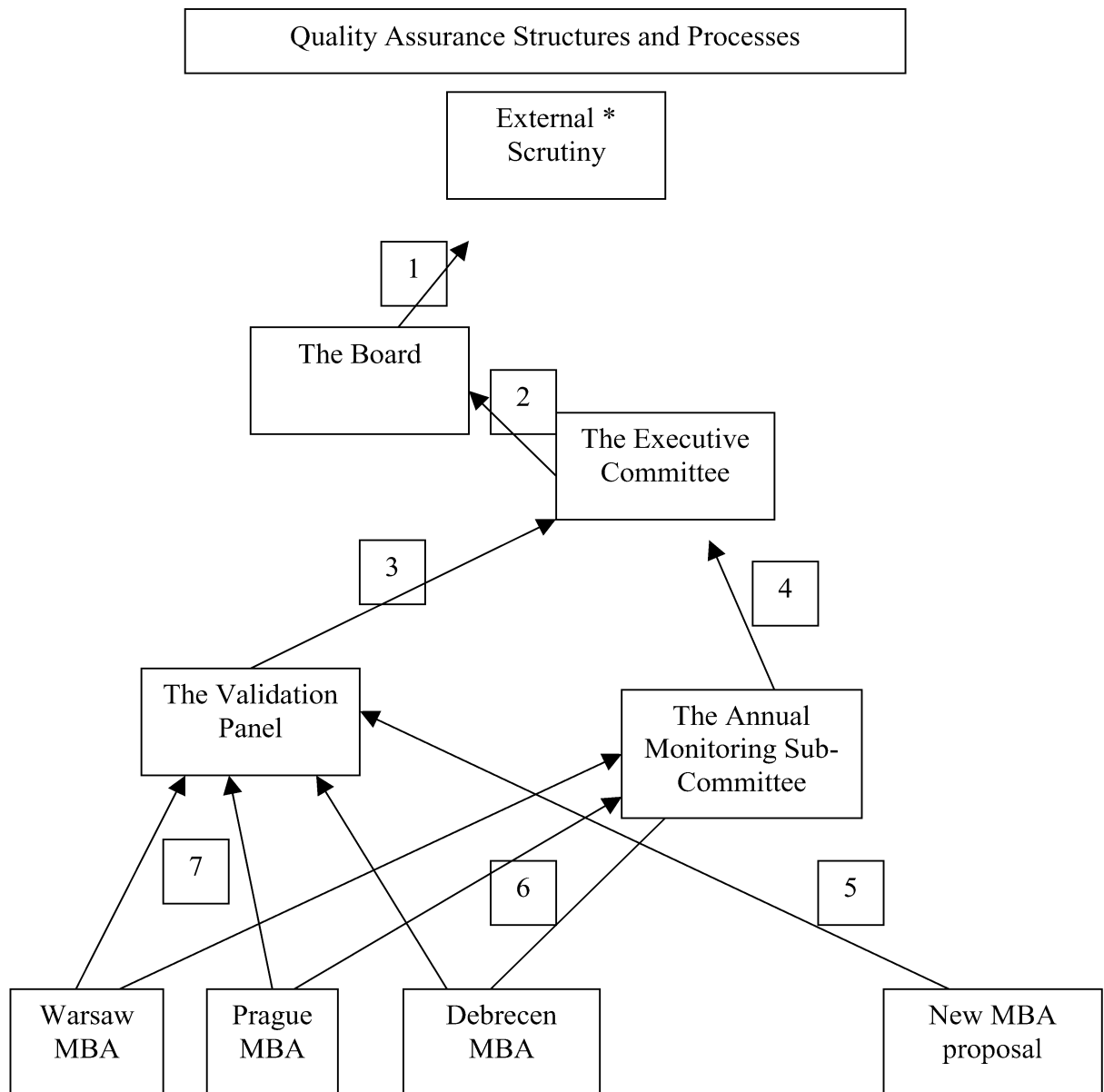


Figure 1: Quality Assurance Structures and Processes

Accreditation

Higher Educational Institutions are open to request recognition of the equivalence of their provision under the Board's portfolio of International MBAs in Agribusiness Management and Commerce. Applications (in English) should be prepared in writing by the MBA programme co-ordinator, accompanied by a letter of support from the relevant Higher Educational Institution, by a copy of the Course Handbook, by the Curriculum Vitae of the teaching staff and by an invitation for a Panel to visit the Institution (this invitation should indicate that all the associated costs of the visit will be born by the Institution).

When the Board is approached by such an educational provider wishing to offer an International MBA in Agribusiness Management under its umbrella, the Board will, through its Executive, constitute a Panel to examine the proposal on its behalf. It will subsequently receive the recommendation of the panel and formally acknowledge accreditation in writing.

The Panel will consist of a minimum of 2 persons appointed by the Executive from amongst the membership, one of whom (the chair of the panel) will be a member of the Executive, together with a person external to the Network who has a suitable background and experience to provide independent advice.

Accreditation will be given to programmes that satisfy the Board of their suitability. They will demonstrate such suitability by meeting the minimum requirements of:

having the support of their own institutions for running the course.

Such support will take the form of an official document of the Institution granting permission for the programme to be run within its jurisdiction. It is not a requirement that such approval takes the form of a validation of the MBA award, but neither does it preclude this.

- Having a Course Handbook that conforms to the Board's standards;
- The Board does not insist that a uniform set of regulations pertain to all programmes, but that each local variant addresses the key components for running such a programme, as manifested in the requirements of the Course Handbook. However, minimum standards are specified under some sections to ensure that any particular MBA programme is generically part of the Network provision.
- Hosting a visit of the panel to the course in operation, including attendance at a Course Management Meeting;

The Board prefers to accredit programmes that are running, rather than those that are simply proposals. It is much easier to get a feel for something that is running and that can be observed. The visit will look at learning resources, teaching and learning strategies as well as programme management.

The Panel may recommend one of three courses of action:

- accreditation;
- or accreditation subject to a set of specific actions;
- or non-accreditation (under circumstances where the provider is unable or unwilling to implement the panel's recommendations).

Re-accreditation

Every sixth year in any MBA programme a review year will be held. A Panel will be constituted as above and will scrutinise a Review Report, which will replace the annual report for that year – and which will be presented one month before the date of the Annual Board meeting.

The Review Report shall be deemed satisfactory if it conforms to the standards set by the Board. The Panel may request an opportunity to visit the programme provider. The Panel may recommend one of three courses of action:

- continued accreditation for a further 6 years;
- or continued accreditation subject to a set of specific actions with a time frame;
- or withdrawal of accreditation (under circumstances where the provider is unable or unwilling to implement the action plan).

Annual Monitoring

Every year, the Programme Manager for each MBA Programme will submit an Annual Report to the Monitoring Sub-committee of the Board, 2 weeks before the annual meeting. Like the Accreditation Panel, the Sub-committee will be appointed for the year ahead by the Executive, and will consist of a chair (a member of the Executive) and 2 other Board members. The Sub-committee will scrutinize all the reports to ensure that they conform to the standards set by the Board for Annual Reports and that the programmes themselves are in health. The Sub-committee shall make recommendations to the Board. The Board will officially receive the reports and the recommendations, and may require certain actions to be taken by any programme provider, which, in the view of the Board, are deemed necessary to enhance the quality of provision, and which will be reported upon in the next Annual Report.

Documentation

Standards of the Course Handbook

The course handbook shall have the following sections and minimum requirements:

- Introduction including Management Committee membership.

- The Committee should meet at least annually and the minutes should appear as an annex in the Annual Report.
- Rationale
- This should make reference to the local recruitment market and career positions of prospective participants.
- It should also set down the minimum entry requirements to include a Bachelor's degree in any subject or its equivalent and an ability to communicate in English.
- Ideally, participants should also be post-experienced.
- Course Aims and Objectives
- Assessment
- This should include statements regarding the frequency and mode of assessments.
- There should be a minimum of one assessed presentation per year, excluding the defence of the dissertation.
- It should also give guidance upon retrieval of failure, extenuating circumstances causing absence or poor performance and appeal procedures.
- Attendance requirements
- Precise attendance requirements may be determined locally, but the minimum for any programme should be 400 contact hours (or equivalent) over two years.
- Minimum standards of attendance on taught elements should be set locally.
- Learning Methods

A statement regarding the mix of learning methods should include reference to use case-studies and to emphasise self-directed study.

There should be an international study tour.

- Resources
- The handbook should give clear guidance on students' access to learning resources, including internet and other Information and Communication Technologies that will be provided or required.
- Course Structure including Unit descriptions
- The course should be broken down into a number of Courses to be studied during the programme, and the Modules or Units into which they are sub-divided.
- It should indicate a minimum of core courses that must be studied (Economics, Finance, Marketing, Operational Methods and Management), the structuring and timing of optional elements or local requirements (including prescribed combinations).
- There must be a final dissertation that forms a significant element of the programme.
- Timetable
- Staff and Student responsibilities and rights

- It is desirable that a learning contract is available, but at the least there should be a statement of entitlement setting out the minimum support available to the student, and a statement of responsibility outlining minimum behavioural requirements of the student, including equal opportunities, harassment and health & safety regulations.
- Teaching staff
- This should include all staff who will teach in the programme, with their designated subject areas and a thumbnail description of their achievements.
- International teachers must be included in this list.

Standards of the Annual Report¹³

The Annual Report shall have the following sections:

- Review of Last Action Plan
- Every Annual Report should begin with a summary of the key issues that the report raises, together with a plan to address them, presented in a simple, tabular format.
- It follows that the first section of the Annual Report should detail the progress on the previous year's action plan.
- Curriculum – changes to content and organisation
- Teaching & Learning – enhancement of methods and staff development
- Assessment & Progression – student performance
- Learning Resources – acquisitions and new materials
- Quality Management & Enhancement – data gathering activities and responses to the issues identified
- Action Plan for the year ahead

The evidence upon which the issues discussed in the report are based should be provided in Appendices. Primary amongst these will be Student Evaluative feedback and Programme Management Committee minutes.

Standards of the Review Report

The Review Report shall have the following sections:

- Critical Review of the Provision – highlighting the themes contained in the 5 Annual Reports and the successes of managing the programme
- Proposed Changes with justification – potentially covering all aspects of the programme
- Resources – Teaching Staff's Research & Scholarship, library acquisitions and e-learning development.
- Quality Systems – the operation of continuous improvement over the previous 5 years.

¹³ Action Plan – what needs to be done in order to enhance the provision of quality in the year ahead (e.g. changes to teaching methodology, staff development, curriculum, student support etc.)

Appendices

Report to the Board of the MBA Network on behalf of the Validation Panel

The Members of the Panel recommend that overall: (title of award & Institution)	Accredited 	Accredited subject to conditions 	Not accredited
The Panel found the provision to have the described standards against the following Criteria:	Good	Satisfactory	Requires attention

Programme Management

Recruitment and Admissions
Course Aims and Objectives
Assessment

Attendance requirements

Learning Methods

Learning Resources

Course Structure including Unit descriptors
Timetable

Staff and Student responsibilities and rights
Teaching staff

Internal Processes for Quality Assurance

Signed Panel Chair Person

Date.....