ATHEA Accreditation Report

on

Business School Lausanne

Rte de la Maladière 21, 1022 Chavannes-près-Renens,
Swiss

https://www.bsl-lausanne.ch/

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Executive Summary

Established in 1997 by entrepreneur John Hobbs, Business School Lausanne (BSL) pioneered English-language business education in the Lausanne region. In 1996, it achieved the distinction of being the first European business school accredited by ACBSP for its BBA and MBA programs, later joining the Lemania Swiss Group of Schools in 1997. Accreditation has been pivotal in bolstering BSL's reputation as a dynamic and innovative private higher education institution. In 2020, a comprehensive revision of BSL's ISO accreditation marked a strategic move to broaden its accreditation scope, positioning itself as a credible alternative to established public universities.

BSL was granted ATHEA Candidacy Status by the Board of Commissioners in February 2023. The information is based on the Business School Lausanne Candidacy Application (self-study submitted 15-Aug-2023).

A site-visit team from ATHEA, comprising of an academic, an international higher education accreditation expert, and a student conducted an on-site visit at BSL campus in Lausanne on November 27th and 28th, 2023. The evaluators engaged with the institute's leadership, administrators, faculty, and students, examining documentation, and seeking clarification on items from the self-study report. The Board of Commissioners determined that BSL met all 10 accreditation standards, providing recommendations for improvement and commendations for exemplary performance.

During the visit, the chair of the meeting, conducted a review of BSL's finances. The relationship between BSL and Lemania was clarified during this discussion. Additionally, a letter was presented, affirming that BSL currently has no debt or financial concerns. Furthermore, another letter confirmed that Lemania is committed to providing financial support to BSL in years where there is a net loss. These documents collectively highlight the financial stability and support structure in place for BSL.

Section I - Introduction and context

Section 1.1. Institutional background and context

Business School Lausanne (BSL) was established in 1997 by John Hobbs, an innovative entrepreneur aiming to offer business education in English, a unique vision in the Lausanne area at that time. In 1996, BSL became the first business school in Europe to receive accreditation for its BBA and MBA programs from ACBSP. A year later, it joined the Lemania Swiss Group of Schools. Over the years, accreditation has played a vital role in enhancing BSL's credibility as a dynamic and innovative private higher education institution. The comprehensive revision of BSL's ISO accreditation in 2020 marked the beginning of a deliberate effort to broaden its level of accreditation, reinforcing its position as an alternative to recognized public universities.

Section 1.2. Accreditation Self-Study

The Accreditation Self-Study was provided by:

Dr. David Claivaz

Section 1.3. Members of the Site-Visit team

Site-Visit Chair – Dr. Nitesh Sughnani

Site-Visit Administrator – Ms. Camila Cepeda

Site-Visit Student – Ms. Puleng Tlhabanelo

Section 1.4. The site-visit

Site-Visit – Date: November 27-28, 2023

Section II - Assessment of each standard

Introduction

This section is limited to a summary of the findings from the Site-Visitor's report. See Section III for the recommendations and commendations made by the Board of Commissioners.

Standard 1 - Policy for Quality Assurance

Summary

The institution has a policy for quality assurance that is made public and forms part of the institution's strategic management. Internal stakeholders develop and implement this strategy through appropriate structures and processes, while involving external stakeholders. This strategy should be included in the institution's strategic planning process. All transnational activities of the institution including joint programs, partnership arrangements, branch campuses, etc. should also be included within the strategy for quality assurance.

Background information and analysis

BSL employs a comprehensive quality assurance manual accessible to all members via Google Sites, outlining processes based on their developed QA model. The institution has a defined accreditation roadmap for upcoming years, with QA responsibilities distributed among key administrative roles. Their unique approach incorporates ISO as a foundation, integrated organization-wide with support from stakeholders. The QA model involves actions through the General Academic Committee, reported to management and linked to the annual management report aligning with the school's strategy. Examples of improvements, partnerships, and changes made for QA in collaborations are highlighted, monitored through the Governance Committee, and reported in annual reviews. They were challenges with the previous institutional strategy, emphasizing a shift towards a business-centric approach from one that was focussed sustainability due to dissatisfaction among BBA students affecting enrolments. The new strategy, aligned with the ISO cycle and the institution's vision, prioritizes innovation and entrepreneurship.

Recommendations for quality improvement

Currently BSL has a temporary situation in which the Acting Dean is also the CEO of the parent company. BSL is recommended to split existing dual roles to avoid many risks. The end of the interim function of Acting Dean will strengthen the processes of the organization by allowing a dedicated person to focus solely on the role of Dean. The commercial and academic responsibilities will continue to be shared by the Dean and the Chief Academic Officer. It is also recommended that BSL develop and implement a robust succession plan for critical leadership roles, including the Dean and Chief Academic Officer. This plan could identify and develop internal talent, providing a structured framework for leadership

transitions. This plan should identify and develop internal talent, providing a structured framework for leadership transitions.

By adopting these recommendations, the organization can mitigate the risks associated with role conflicts, enhance leadership stability, and establish a framework for effective succession planning, ultimately contributing to the long-term success and resilience of the institution.

Standard 2 - Design and Approval of Academic Programmes

Summary
The institution has processes for the design and approval of their academic programs. The programs are designed so that they meet the objectives set for them, including the intended learning outcomes. The qualification resulting from a program is clearly specified and communicated and referred to the correct level of the national qualifications framework for higher education and, consequently, to the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area

Background information and analysis

A systematic approach to developing programmatic objectives and intended learning outcomes has been implemented through a dedicated process in Business School Lausanne's Quality Assurance, known as Process 6 B2B/B2C development. The process revolves around the weekly Academic Direction meeting, which includes the Chief Academic Officer, UGG Deputy Directors, and the Executive Education Director. Agenda topics cover curriculum revision, assessment practices, academic honesty policy, and monitoring business education evolution. The result is the BSL Program Updates Change Tracker, summarizing changes applicable for the upcoming academic year.

The European Qualification Framework principle, as outlined in the Business Education Philosophy, distinguishes programs and qualification levels. BBA, MIB, MBA, and DBA are differentiated based on four levels of proficiency and impact. Programmatic objectives are separately defined for each level, and specific course outcomes are detailed in program syllabi. Business School Lausanne (BSL) is in the process of fully integrating these levels into the registrar system, involving a revision of program objectives and learning outcomes wording.

Recommendations for quality improvement

None

Standard 3 - Student-Centred Learning, Teaching, and Assessment

Summary
The institution's academic programs are delivered in a way that encourages students to take an active role in creating the learning process and the assessment of student learning reflects this approach.

Background information and analysis

Students at Business School Lausanne (BSL) follow individualized Study Plans, monitored by Deputy Academic Directors for flexibility. This flexibility encompasses retakes, route changes, program transitions (full-time to part-time, and vice versa), and breaks in the case of DBA students. All courses are taught in Dual-mode format, allowing online participation in real-time alongside on-campus students. Professors have pedagogical freedom, emphasizing lectures, discussions, group work, and presentations. Active learning is encouraged, involving real-life projects, student projects, and experiential learning opportunities such as Business Innovation Week, entrepreneurial projects, and internships.

Small class sizes, with a maximum of 24 students, at BBA, MIB, and MBA levels facilitate direct access to faculty. BBA and MIB classes are scheduled in half-day blocks, allowing time for one-to-one discussions during breaks and lunch. The General Academic Committee has a plan for systematic feedback collection during the term. MBA classes, scheduled over three days, provide multiple opportunities for one-to-one discussions, including meals with faculty. Professors have access to comprehensive teaching resources, including Perlego for additional readings.

BSL provides a comprehensive DBA manual outlining all phases for students undertaking the program, with one assigned supervisor throughout their studies. Evaluation of students' work is conducted by a Thesis Review Committee comprising the supervisor and three faculty members. The institution organizes a DBA Acceleration week, open to all program participants, featuring classes and workshops. Faculty members supervise 1-7 students with 60 allocated hours, often involving online follow-up.

Recommendations for quality improvement
None

Standard 4 - Student Admission, Progression, Recognition, and Certification

Summary
The institution consistently applies pre-defined and published regulations and policies covering all phases of the student "life cycle" including student admission, progression, recognition, and certification.

Background information and analysis

The admissions process is personalized, utilizing staff expertise in various markets to tailor the approach. Admissions and student services work collaboratively, with admissions primarily handling onboarding, while ongoing student support remains under student services. Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) are prioritized, monitored weekly, and closely supervised by the CEO, mirroring the strategic importance of this area alongside marketing in the organizational structure.

Swiss legal framework for higher education, outlining distinctions between Federal/National accreditation and Canton approvals. The institution in focus, BSL, currently holds Canton approvals from Canton De Vaud and has outlined a roadmap for obtaining national accreditation. It addresses potential issues with qualification recognition within Switzerland, which are communicated to students upon admission. Additionally, the text touches upon the benefits (subsidies, scholarships, visas) and obstacles (research expectations, faculty profile) associated with national accreditation. They provided a draft teach-out agreement from the ASIPES group, comprising top Business Schools in Switzerland, aimed at securing teach-out provisions and student support in case of issues within a member institution.

In discussions with six students from both the Master of International Business Finance and the BBA program at BSL, positive sentiments prevailed, with many favouring the institution's smaller, boutique style for personalized attention and faculty access. The internship component in both undergraduate and master's programs was highlighted as attractive and well-supported. Some students, especially those in an accelerated 2-year undergraduate program, appreciated the flexibility it offered. The active student council, funded by the institution, empowered students to organize events and clubs. While there were concerns about lengthy classes and food arrangements due to shorter breaks, students felt included and voiced their opinions through surveys and the weekly student council meetings. The council facilitated various events, supported by student services, addressing cultural, networking, and collaborative initiatives between bachelor and master's students from BSL and other universities. Admissions and student services were readily available for continuous support, directing concerns to the relevant channels.

Some of the positive comments from the post graduate students include the flexibility of the program, the quality of the professors, the ease of access of information and the accessibility of the school's management.

Recommendations for quality improvement

Submission of the final teach-out agreement signed with ASIPES.

One area of concern regarding the DBA program is that for working professionals, due to demanding nature in terms of deliveries and deadlines, the duration of studies will very often exceed three years. It is recommended that the length of time for the DBA indicates a more explicit mention of the range of 3 to 6 years. Currently the website does mention a possibility of extension up to 6 years, but it is unclear if this an extension to the three years or to the entire range up to 6 years… which could imply 9 years. The brochure that was submitted currently has the statement, "The duration of the program is generally 3 years, however there is a possibility of extending this up to a total of 6 years […]". We recommend that it would be clearer to simply state in both locations: "The duration of the program is 3 to 6 years, depending on the area of studies and your vocational commitments".

Standard 5 - Teaching Staff

Summary
The institution ensures that its teachers, are appropriately qualified and competent to teach the assigned courses. The institution applies fair and transparent processes for the recruitment and development of the teaching staff. The institution performs research appropriate to the institution's mission

Background information and analysis

BSL fosters both informal and formal meetings, including quarterly faculty gatherings, to address course, curriculum, assessment, and student feedback improvements. Engaged in a Doctoral partnership with the Korean institution aSSIST, BSL primarily contributes through course delivery. Student feedback is actively sought through end-of-course evaluations, direct interactions with small class sizes, and the assessment of learning outcomes. Notably, feedback from students led to constructive changes, concerns about course repetition were discussed and rectifications implemented to enhance the overall learning experience. This collaborative approach ensures a continuous feedback loop, promoting a responsive and adaptive educational environment at BSL.

BSL is actively improving the qualifications of its faculty by emphasizing the recruitment of individuals with either PhDs or DBAs, coupled with practical work experience. The institution is intensifying research activities on campus, promoting workshops among faculty, and organizing research conferences with the participation of international universities. To encourage research, BSL provides funding and support through a formal process, assisting in the communication and dissemination of faculty-published articles.

Recommendations for quality improvement

BSL has to proactively assess the faculty-to-student ratio, taking into account the potential growth of the DBA program. A careful expansion plan for faculty recruitment should align with the institution's commitment to providing a superior educational experience and ensuring the success of its doctoral candidates.

Commendations

BSL has a partnership with EPFL called the Academic Citizens Assembly, which allows faculty to engage with students on research projects. One of its main agenda items is sustainability practices.

Standard 6 - Learning Resources and Student Support

Summary
The institution has appropriate funding for learning and teaching activities and provides adequate and readily accessible learning resources and student support.

Background information and analysis

BSL provides adequate and readily accessible learning resources (physically, human, Learning Resources Access) and student support.

The BSL campus, located in the "Collège de Chavannes" building, occupies the entire facility and is wheelchair accessible. It has dedicated spaces including administration offices, a Career Center, classrooms, a student lounge, faculty room, incubator, media center, and external lounge.

The institution actively supports and facilitates student-driven non-academic activities such as cultural events, investment clubs, and sustainability clubs. Students play a significant role in recruitment drives by sharing their experiences. The collaborative environment is fostered through student involvement in both academic and non-academic decision-making processes, with a highlight on the organization of a mandatory Business Innovation Week supported by student services. Additionally, the institution provides ample resources, mainly through EBSCOhost and Perlego, ensuring students are well-equipped for their academic pursuits.

Recommendations for quality improvement

None

Commendations

BSL has developed policies on how to deal with AI in higher education in January 2023 including how to use AI in the classroom and guidance for both students and faculty.

The individuals highly appreciate personalized career support for both their job search for entrepreneurial initiatives**.**

Standard 7 - Information Management

Summary
The institution collects, analyses, and uses relevant information for the effective management of their academic programs and other institutional activities with appropriate policies and procedures to facilitate clear communication with all stakeholders.

Background information and analysis

BSL has seamlessly integrated three dedicated systems to manage the complete student life-cycle, ensuring efficiency and data consistency. Salesforce handles inquiries to enrollment and serves as a long-term student-file manager. BIRI, an in-house system, manages registrar functions from enrollment to completion, providing real-time information to academic direction, administrative staff, faculty, and students. Google Classroom is utilized for course material management, offering flexibility to professors and facilitating the integration of third-party software.

These systems are interconnected through automated processes, streamlining data collection and management.

Recommendations for quality improvement

None

Standard 8 - Public Information

Summary
The institution publishes information about its activities, including academic programs, which is clear, accurate, objective, up-to-date, and readily accessible. The institution also publishes information regarding its ethical standards and conduct, community engagement activities, and social responsibilities.

Background information and analysis

The BSL website is organized into two menus: "Programs" for program-specific information and "Burger" for institutional details like mission, philosophy, community, services, news, and research. The BSL blog serves as a major source of information about BSL activities, with posts embedded on various pages of the website. Social media channels on LinkedIn, Facebook, and Instagram also share information about BSL. The marketing department is subject to the CEO's oversight, with a specific emphasis on the continuous monitoring of SEO Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). The organization maintains a keen focus on optimizing the use of tools and campaigns, reflecting a commitment to efficiency and effectiveness in marketing strategies. Website has been reviewed recently to clarify information aiming at improving the brand's reputation.

The Mission Statement emphasizes an ethical code of conduct for students and staff, detailed in documents such as the Staff Handbook, Faculty Code of Conduct, and Student Code of Conduct. The Code of Conduct for Faculty complements handbooks currently under revision, such as the Faculty Handbook.

Recommendations for quality improvement

None

Standard 9 - Ongoing Monitoring and Periodic Review of Programmes

Summary
The institution monitors and periodically reviews their programs to ensure that the programs achieve the objectives set for them and are responsive to the needs of students and society. Periodic reviews lead to continuous improvement of the academic program. Actions planned or taken because of the periodic reviews are communicated to all those concerned. A periodic review is also completed on the comprehensive quality assurance plan.

Background information and analysis

BSL's Quality Assurance involves the Process 6 B2B/B2C Development, integrating feedback from course evaluations, marketing data, career services, and research during weekly Academic Direction Meetings. The Academic Direction can propose program changes to the General Academic Committee, resulting in a yearly summary of program updates.

To stay informed about societal needs, BSL engages with innovators through the Doctoral School, a network of entrepreneurs, collaboration with EPFL EdTech collider, and hosting an independent incubator. Ongoing dialogue with employers through the Career Office contributes to understanding future employment needs.

BSL ensures student feedback on workload through systematic course evaluations, monitored real-time progression via individual Study Plans, and remediation measures. Assessment procedures are defined by faculty, validated by Deputy Academic Direction, and use industry-referenced software like Salesforce, Google Education Suite, Perlego, Turnitin, and Grammarly. The only in-house developed system is BIRI, with provisions for backups.

 Recommendations for quality improvement

None

Standard 10 - Cyclical External Quality Assurance

Summary

The institution undergoes external quality assurance in accordance with ATHEA Standards on a cyclical basis

Background information and analysis

BSL, a Swiss Higher Education Institute, has ISO 9001 certification following a three-year cycle with a reaccreditation audit in 2020 and the next planned in June-July 2023. ACBSP accreditation follows a 10-year cycle, with reaffirmation in 2017, a fully accepted QA report in 2021, and the next QA due in February 2025 for reaffirmation in 2027.

The 2020 ISO 9001 recertification prompted a complete revamp of the quality assurance system, transitioning from holacratic to a 6-process definition with KPI-based management review. Changes were reported in the ACBSP 2021 Quality Assurance Report, aligning metrics with ISO KPIs and BIRI implementation. The report was accepted without notes, conditions, or improvement opportunities.

BSL plans to pursue further accreditation processes with ATHEA, BGA, and AACSB to enhance integration of world-class standards into its daily operations.

Recommendations for quality improvement

None

Section III: Summary of Actions Required, Recommendations and Commendations

<u>Recommendations</u>

- BSL should proactively assess the faculty-to-student ratio, taking into account the potential growth of the DBA program. A careful expansion plan for faculty recruitment should align with the institution's commitment to providing a superior educational experience and ensuring the success of its doctoral candidates.
- BSL should split dual roles to avoid many risks. Currently BSL has an Acting Dean. The end of the interim function of Acting Dean will strengthen the processes of the organization by allowing a dedicated person to focus solely on the role of Dean. The commercial and academic responsibilities will continue to be shared by the Dean and the Chief Academic Officer. It is also recommended that BSL develop and implement a robust succession plan for critical leadership roles, including the Dean and Chief Academic Officer. This plan could identify and develop internal talent, providing a structured framework for leadership transitions. By adopting these recommendations, the organization can mitigate the risks associated with role conflicts, enhance leadership stability, and establish a framework for effective succession planning, ultimately contributing to the long-term success and resilience of the institution.
- BSL to submit the final teach-out agreement with ASIPES.
  (Note: Final teach-out agreement submitted to ATHEA on 22-Feb-2024.)
- It is recommended that the length of time for the DBA indicates a more explicit mention of the range of 3 to 6 years (in addition to the existing mention of a possibility of extension). If an extension of up to 3 years is communicated, it should be clear if this is an extension to the baseline of 3 years (thus 6 years total), or to the entire 3 to 6 year range, which would imply up to 9 years for the DBA program.

<u>Commendations</u>

- BSL has developed policies on how to deal with AI in higher education in January 2023 including how to use AI in the classroom and guidance for both students and faculty.
- BSL has a partnership with EPFL called the Academic Citizens Assembly, which allows faculty to engage with students on research projects. One of its main agenda's is sustainability practices.
- Valued personalized careers support for BSL student's job search and for entrepreneurial initiatives.

Section IV: Accreditation

Business School Lausanne (BSL) was found **"Substantially Compliant"** in all 10 Standards of Accreditation. Upon the recommendation of the Board of Commissioners, BSL was granted Institutional Accreditation on December 22, 2023

Section V: Validity of the accreditation

The accreditation is valid until December 22, 2030 providing that the institution continues to fulfil the accreditation requirements.

Section VI: Publication requirement

This report will be published at ATHEA's and BSL's webpages.
The current accreditation status of the institution will be listed at ATHEA's website in the following locations:

https://www.athea.org/accreditation/publications/

https://www.athea.org/athea-2/directory/

Publisher

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Simmeringer Hauptstraße 24
A-1010 Vienna
Austria

info@athea.org
www.athea.org