



ATHEA Accreditation Report

on

Business School Nederland (BSN)

Herenstraat 25
4116 BK Buren
The Netherlands
<https://bsn.nl>

April 20, 2022

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Executive Summary

Business School Netherlands (BSN) is a Dutch Government-recognized private University of Applied Sciences established in the Netherlands in 1988 which currently offers executive training programs for managers, and MBA and DBA degrees. Through partnership agreements, BSN offers international programs in 10 countries on 4 continents including Africa, South America, Europe, and Asia. The teaching philosophy and learning programs are based on the principles of Action Learning. The institute and its programs are recognized by the Dutch Ministry of Education, and accredited by the Dutch governmental accreditation Board NVAO, the Accreditation Council for Business Schools and Programs (ACBSP) and are certified by the Swiss certification EduQua.

BSN was granted ATHEA Candidacy Status by the Board of Commissioners on October 17, 2016, and the candidacy status was extended on June 30, 2021. BSN subsequently applied for Institutional Accreditation and submitted the self- study and appendices in January 2022.

A site-visit team consisting of an academic, an international expert in higher education accreditation, a student, and the executive director of ATHEA conducted a hybrid site visit on March 29, and 30th, 2022. The chair of the site visit team and the ATHEA executive director were present in-person; two other members of the evaluation team participated remotely. Key members of the staff at BSN Netherlands participated in-person while staff based in other countries, such as South Africa and China, participated remotely. Faculty and students participated remotely.

The ATHEA evaluators met with institute's leadership team, administrators, faculty, and students; the evaluators examined supporting documentation and sought clarification on relevant items from the self-study report. The Board of Commissioners concluded that BSN fulfilled the critical criteria for accreditation and thus met all 10 of the accreditation standards; the Board of Commissioners has provided both recommendations for improvement and commendations for exemplary performance.

Upon the recommendation of the Board of Commissioners, BSN was granted Institutional Accreditation on April 20, 2022.

Section I – Introduction and context

Section 1.1. Institutional background and context

Business School Netherlands (BSN) is a Dutch Government-recognized private University of Applied Sciences and was established in the Netherlands in 1988. Since its inception, BSN has offered executive training programs for managers and MBA programs. In the early 2000s BSN started offering DBA programs. Starting in 1993, through partnership agreements, BSN offered its programs in countries outside of the Netherlands and currently runs international MBA and DBA programs in 10 countries spanning 4 continents including Africa, South America, Europe and Asia.

Since 1991, Action Learning has been the guiding teaching and learning philosophy of BSN. The institute has been a World Institute for Action Learning (WIAL) affiliate for many years and has over 15 Certified Action Learning Coaches and over 60 teaching staff worldwide. BSN is recognized by the Dutch Minister of Education, and accredited by the Dutch governmental accreditation Board NVAO, by the Accreditation Council for Business Schools and Programs (ACBSP); it is certified by the Swiss certification body EduQua.

Section 1.2. Accreditation Self-Study

The Accreditation Self-Study was written by Jelena Roborgh-Mitrovic, Quality Manager

Section 1.3. Members of the site-visit team

Site-Visit Chair – Matthew Andrews, Dean & Director of Doctoral Research, International School of Management, Paris.

Site-Visit International Expert – Dr. Nitesh Sughnani, Knowledge and Human Development Authority, Dubai Government.

Site-Visit Student Representative – Jailan Elost, student at the British University in Dubai

Site-Visit Administrator – Oliver Olson (ATHEA Executive Director)

Section 1.4. The site-visit - BSN Participants

Site-visit: March 29 and 30, 2022

- Annette Nijs, President and Chair
- Bing Han, Head of BSN China
- Billy Coop, Academic Director
- Juanita Boucher, Head of BSN International
- John Zhang, CEO BSN Netherlands
- Bart Stolk, Director of Education
- Marcel van der Ham, Dean
- Jelena Roborgh-Mitrovic, Quality Control
- Arthur van Gemert, Student Advisor
- Students and Faculty Members

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

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

BSN is subject to the standards set by national and international accrediting and/or certification bodies including NVO, EduQua, and the ACBSP. A Quality Manager oversees the QA system, which primarily focuses on feedback from key stakeholders such as students, alumni, faculty, and Action Learning coaches. BSN’s continuous improvement approach is based on the PDCA (plan-do-check-act). BSN is also certified by an external Dutch quality control agency which assesses stakeholder satisfaction every two years by conducting interviews with alumni. Several different bodies are involved in assessing quality and recommending and/or implementing changes.

Recommendations

ATHEA recommends that BSN develop an integrated quality assurance framework. This framework should bring together both operational, stakeholder satisfaction and academic (learning) objectives and outcomes. It should report on those outcomes, and document the decisions made based on outcomes data. It should be clear to external evaluators how learning outcomes data are integrated into the QA policies and practices, how decisions are made based on this data, and what the main decision-making body/s is/are. Furthermore, it is recommended that BSN make explicit in this framework how transnational QA is implemented and measured in all programs and partner locations, and how these goals and outcomes contribute to the overall QA coherence.

Standard 2 - Design and Approval of Academic Programs

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

Programs at BSN have clearly defined learning outcomes which are reviewed every 2-4 years. The Education and Examination Regulation lists these outcomes and maps intended outcomes to various assessments. The MBA program is reviewed by the Quality Management Department, and the DBA is reviewed by the DBA Steering Committee. Also, an Advisory Board regularly assesses the MBA curricula with respect to industry needs. Action Learning coaches and Student Advisors help monitor and facilitate student progression.

Recommendations

None.

Commendation

BSN has an impressive portfolio of programs, partnerships, and agreements, and a strong leadership team managing the core functions of the institute.

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

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

BSN's learning approach is based on Action Learning and is primarily geared towards working adults. This approach often involves small groups who work on real problems in organizational contexts and is designed to help students develop creative and flexible problem-solving skills. Students must be very active in their own learning; the system allows for flexibility in terms of what students study and how quickly they progress. Action Learning coaches help guide students throughout their programs. Staff are trained to adopt a student-centered approach in their interactions with BSN students.

There are a variety of teaching and assessment methods implemented at BSN such as lectures, workshop, practical simulations, self-reflection, company analyses, literature reviews, Q & A tests, Action Learning projects, and the doctoral thesis (in the DBA program). The Examinations Committee oversees assessment in the MBA program and the DBA Steering Committee for the DBA program. Formal appeal procedures are in place for the results of examinations – these are published in the EER and OER document.

Recommendations

None

Commendation

ATHEA commends BSN's commitments to Action Learning and how the school has made this the core of everything they do.

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

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

BSN has a robust admissions process in place to ensure that students who are admitted have the necessary prerequisites to succeed in their respective programs. MBA and DBA programs are completed in 3-4 phases. The EER/OER and DBA regulations make it clear which assignments need to be completed in which phase. The EER/OER and student manuals state how assignments are marked/recognized, describe the criteria to progress from one phase to the next, and also explain how final marks are calculated.

There is a learning management platform which helps administrators track student progress and helps students monitor their own progress. Members of the administrative staff work closely with supervisors and coaches to guide student progress. The policies and procedures for progression, recognition and the certification processes are all documented, available for all students and, in most cases, for prospective students; moreover, policies and procedures have been approved by the Dutch accreditation council NVAO (for the MBA), and by the ACBSP (for the MBA and the DBA).

Recommendations

None

Standard 5 - Teaching Staff

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

BSN employs eight head tutors (instructors) for the MBA programs, all of whom hold at least a Master's degree and most of whom hold a DBA or a PhD in their respective fields of teaching expertise. Head tutors are accountable for designing and updating the content of the 8 core courses/main topics in Phase 2 of the MBA. They also are responsible for designing the introductory modules offered during Phase 1 of the program. Faculty are evaluated by students and also monitored by the program manager.

A majority of BSN's faculty consist of freelance teachers and coaches; the institute therefore does not have tenure, promotion policies, workload policies, scholarly expectations, or service policies designed for full-time faculty. It is noted that many faculty members work for other universities, consultancy/research organizations, or business; and may engage in scholarly activities for these other organizations. Faculty are offered Action Learning training.

Qualifications for teaching the MBA and DBA programs are explained in the institute's Human Resources Policy. The policies for the recruitment and selection of faculty is also described in the Human Resource's Policy. BSN's existing network is key for the recruitment of faculty and many faculty have been with BSN for a substantial period of time. Action Learning Coaches are generally recruited from among MBA and DBA alumni.

Recommendations

BSN should develop a policy which explicitly encourages and recognizes scholarly activities as a faculty contribution.

Commendations

The faculty is experienced, committed to BSN and to its Action Learning approach.

Standard 6 - Learning Resources and Student Support

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

BSN is a private entity and its income derives primarily from tuition fees. The recognition from the Dutch government allows BSN to benefit from some government funding and scholarship schemes which contribute to its financial model. BSN owns and operates high quality administrative and teaching facilities in Buren which are appropriate for its mission and student body. This center includes 4 classrooms, 8 meeting rooms, as well as student lounge/eating area, and office facilities for the staff. There is a small physical library but most students use the electronic resources through EBSCO. BSN employs administrative staff to support its faculty and students and maintains a learning management platform. Action Learning coaches are an important component in providing guidance for students as they progress through their programs. Current financial, physical, learning, staffing and technological resources are adequate to support its portfolio of course offerings and programs.

Recommendations

BSN should ensure that student services, facilities, and learning outcomes receive comparable levels of attention and investment for students in all programs and studying at all locations.

Commendations

There is a general satisfaction among students who appear to be receiving a quality educational experience.

Standard 7 - Information Management

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

BSN has IT systems and platforms which allow the institute to maintain a data base of its stakeholders and communicate with them; to plan courses and events; to track student progress; to manage finances and bookkeeping; and to support payroll and human resources activities. Social media platforms are used to communicate with students and alumni. BSN faced challenges initially transitioning to primarily online learning during the first few months of COVID due to the emphasis on in-person instruction for Action Learning, and the subsequent lack of experience with online learning. However, the institute effectively made the transition and currently offers a hybrid learning experience supported by its IT systems and platforms such as Zoom. BSN is currently evaluating platforms to replace its learning management platform Classe 365.

Recommendations

None

Standard 8 - Public Information

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'

BSN's websites <https://www.bsn.eu/> and <https://bsn.nl/> provide information about the programs offered, academic requirements, the Action Learning philosophy, scholarships, and events. The institute publishes its mission, vision, and codes of conduct on its website as well as the Education and Examination Regulation (EER) for MBA's. The institute publishes its adherence to ethical codes of conduct on its website, including its affiliation with the NRTO. A factsheet for MBA programs on their website lists average scores for assessment mapped to learning outcomes, as well as graduation rates for MBA programs. BSN also uses social media and newsletters to communicate publicly with its stakeholders.

Recommendations

BSN should publish pass rates and other relevant learning outcomes data for the DBA program as soon as they are available.

Standard 9 - Ongoing Monitoring and Periodic Review of Programs

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

BSN has a cyclical quality management system which continuously gathers feedback from key stakeholder groups including student, alumni, faculty, and Action Learning coaches. The International Quality Manager monitors this feedback and reports to the management. The Quality Management Department, as well as the Advisory Board review the MBA programs every two years including the course materials, and stakeholder feedback. The DBA program is reviewed periodically by the DBA Steering Committee. The Academic Director reviews assessment criteria for practical assignments. BSN management meets annually with the Advisory Board, which consists of employers, consultants, alumni, and professionals employed in both the private and public sectors.

Recommendations

None

Standard 10 - Cyclical External Quality Assurance

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

Background information and analysis

BSN undergoes several external quality assurance reviews. BSN reports annually to the inspectorate for education of the ministry of higher education in the Netherlands. The institute is accredited for its MBA programs by the Dutch NVAO accrediting body; accreditation is granted for a period of six years and requires annual reports. The Accreditation Council for Business Schools & Programs (ACBSP) accredits both their MBA and their DBA programs; this accreditation is granted for a period of 10 years and requires a quality assurance report every two years. BSN is also certified by the Swiss EduQua agency for vocational education which requires visits and audits. Finally, the institute gets evaluated every two years by CEDEO, a Dutch organization which assesses quality control and conducts interviews with BSN's alumni.

Commendations

ATHEA commends BSN's commitments to external quality assurance.

Section III – Summary of Actions Required, Recommendations, and Commendations

Actions Required

None

Recommendations

ATHEA recommends that BSN develop an integrated quality assurance framework. This framework should bring together both operational, stakeholder satisfaction and academic (learning) objectives and outcomes. It should report on those outcomes, and document the decisions made based on outcomes data. It should be clear to external evaluators how learning outcomes data are integrated into the QA policies and practices, how decisions are made based on this data, and what the main decision-making body/s is/are. Furthermore, it is recommended that BSN make explicit in this framework how transnational QA is implemented and measured in all programs and partner locations, and how these goals and outcomes contribute to the overall QA coherence.

BSN should develop a policy which explicitly encourages and recognizes scholarly activities as a faculty contribution.

BSN should ensure that student services, facilities, and learning outcomes receive comparable levels of attention and investment for students in all programs and studying at all locations

BSN should publish pass rates and other relevant learning outcomes data for the DBA program as soon as they are available.

Commendations

BSN has an impressive portfolio of programs, partnerships, and agreements, and a strong leadership team managing the core functions of the institute.

ATHEA commends BSN's commitments to Action Learning and how the school has made this the core of everything they do.

The faculty is experienced, committed to BSN and to its Action Learning approach.

There is a general satisfaction among students who appear to be receiving a quality educational experience.

ATHEA commends BSN's commitments to external quality assurance.

Section IV – Accreditation

Business School Netherlands (BSN) was found **"Substantially Compliant"** in all 10 Standards of Accreditation.

Upon the recommendation of the Board of Commissioners, BSN was granted Institutional Accreditation on April 20, 2022

Section V – Validity of the accreditation

The accreditation is valid until April 20, 2029 providing that the institution continues to fulfil the accreditation requirements.

Section VI – Publication requirement

This report will be published at ATHEA's and BSN's webpages.

The current accreditation status of the institution will be listed at ATHEA's website in the following locations:

[Member Directory – Association for Transnational Higher Education Accreditation
\(https://www.athea.org/membership/member-directory/\)](https://www.athea.org/membership/member-directory/)

[Actions and Disclosures – Association for Transnational Higher Education Accreditation
\(https://www.athea.org/accreditation/actions-and-disclosures/\)](https://www.athea.org/accreditation/actions-and-disclosures/)

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