

REACHING OUT GLOBALLY - HOW ONE ASSO- CIATION REAPED THE BENEFITS OF A MULTI-FACETED ACCREDITATION PROGRAMME

SUCCESSFULLY MARKETING A NATIONAL PREMIUM ACADEMIC PROGRAMME INCREASINGLY DEPENDS ON ACHIEVING INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION BY EMPLOYERS, PROSPECTIVE STUDENTS AND PEER INSTITUTIONS. PROSPECTIVE STUDENTS ARE PARTICULARLY INTERESTED IN PROGRAMMES THAT CAN ACT AS A DOOR-OPENER TO PROMISING CAREER PATHS IN MULTINATIONAL COMPANIES. THEY ARE SPECIFICALLY LOOKING FOR MULTICULTURAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS WITH WELL-ESTABLISHED INTERNATIONAL LINKS AS WELL AS SUBSTANTIAL ALUMNI NETWORKING.



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EPAS - the EFMD Programme Accreditation System - serves as an educational partner to accredit and continuously improve the international reach of EFMD members' programme offerings. Following two successful pilot phases in 2006, ambitious 'Scale Up' initiative is in place to expand the portfolio of accredited programmes in order to add brand value to accredited programmes in key business school markets.

EPAS accreditation provides:

- a 'quality first' approach



- increased brand recognition by key stakeholder groups of accredited programmes
- acts as a 'proof of concept' for successful internationalization
- a useful network
- the possibility of serving as a substitute for mandatory national accreditation, depending on context.

However, the most immediate benefit of EPAS accreditation is also the one most often overlooked by programme and possibly even business school management. EPAS is based on a unique value model embedded in its Standards and Criteria that enforces a quality first approach at all levels without infringing on an institution's prerogative to differentiate itself from competitors (and also any implicit market standards).

The overall programme assessment is put into the context of the institutional as well as the national and international environments. A programme is evaluated on the basis of its design, delivery and outcomes and, in addition, by appraising the supporting quality assurance processes. The assessment philosophy is designed to add value to a school and not to take an auditing approach. Academic programmes often involve a lot of pragmatism. Programme officials may focus too much on marketing issues and may apply myopic short-cuts when it comes to the fundamentals of quality management, often driven by the need to respond quickly to market dynamics in the presence of tight budget constraints.

EPAS, however, puts these quality issues at

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A POSITIVE IMPACT ON OTHER PARTNER INSTITUTIONS... A WORD FROM MICHEL POTÉ, DIRECTOR, ESSCA, GRANDE ECOLE PROGRAMME

Institutions of higher learning tend to devote more attention to the production side of their activity - scientific work and educational programmes - rather than to their own markets. This is understandable as they are concerned with long-term issues that should not be influenced too much by contextual hazards. In the case of business schools in particular, this might have two negative effects that could impair their relevance, if not addressed properly.

First, business schools tend to live in comfortable isolation from the 'real world' and miss opportunities to learn from companies and the business world. Second, they tend to protect with jealousy their idiosyncrasies and only undertake marginal cooperation with partner institutions.

I believe that accreditation procedures are a powerful lever to help institutions clarify their missions and improve their processes but also to relate more efficiently to their environment and learn from it. ESSCA has gained a lot from its EPAS accreditation process. Its focused approach has allowed an in-depth analysis of its Grande Ecole programme and has served as a powerful lever for innovation and progress. EPAS has also provided us with an invaluable opportunity to evaluate our programme against international best practices both from the corporate and the academic world.

In addition EPAS will be a powerful reference for our graduates on the world job market.

the forefront and thereby enforces principles that ensure the creation of long-term value for the organisation as a whole. It can ultimately create a halo effect for the entire institution and can therefore act as a catalyst for change.

PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE HAS SHOWN THAT ACCEPTABLE LEVELS AND FORMS OF INTERNATIONALISATION MAY VARY WIDELY DEPENDING ON THE INSTITUTION'S MARKETS

In this context, organisational learning takes place in two stages:

- preparing the self-assessment report during the accreditation phase
- dealing with specific weaknesses identified by the peer review team after having completed the initial accreditation

Previous experience has shown that acceptable levels and forms of internationalisation may vary widely depending on the institution's markets. For example, a Belgium-based programme with strong corporate links to international consultancy firms and investment banks has to adopt a global approach.

By contrast, a programme operated out of Russia with non-financial companies as the key corporate stakeholders would necessarily use different geographical reference points and would also need to cope with the fact that the home country already represents a

culturally diverse melting pot.

Accredited programmes bear witness to the fact that EPAS has already helped schools to attain top positions in national rankings. The reputational potential will only be fully realised once the EPAS portfolio has crossed a critical threshold. The 'Scale Up' initiative aims at achieving this objective within the coming eighteen months.

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