



organ für akkreditierung und qualitätssicherung  
der schweizerischen hochschulen

**Accreditation process**

**OAQ final report**

**Franklin College Switzerland (FCS)**

August 2004

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organe d'accréditation et d'assurance qualité  
des hautes écoles suisses

organo di accreditamento e di garanzia della  
qualità delle istituzioni universitarie svizzere

OAQ Final report  
Franklin College Switzerland (FCS)  
August 2004, page 2/13

## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 Context of the procedure

Franklin College Switzerland (FCS) is an American independent four-year liberal arts college, located in the Lugano area. Its mission statement is the following: "The mission of Franklin College is to provide a multi-cultural and international environment within which students acquire the essential knowledge and critical, creative and analytical abilities necessary to attain success in their chosen careers and to live culturally enriched and rewarding lives". The College is governed by a Board of Trustees, responsible for academic integrity and financial health of the College, and registered as a non-profit organization. Approximately 400 full-time students are currently enrolled, most of them following a 4-year curriculum. Half of the students are American citizens, a quarter are Europeans, the others coming from all over the world (50 nationalities on average).

Franklin College Switzerland is offering curricula leading to Bachelor of Arts degrees with the following majors: Art History, European Studies, History and Literature, International Banking and Finance, International Communications, International Economics, International Management, International Relations, Literature, Modern Languages (French and Italian), Visual and Communication Arts. Combined majors and double majors are possible, and a "Honor Program" option has been designed a few years ago, to provide a greater challenge to more talented and ambitious students, and to further utilize the expertise of the Faculty. FCS has been granted accreditation as a four-year baccalaureate degree-granting institution by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (one of the eight recognized regional accrediting organizations in USA) since 1990, and this was reaffirmed again in 2000.

Franklin College is one of the very first institutions having applied for accreditation by the Center for accreditation and quality assurance of Swiss universities (OAQ). The application form was sent to OAQ in February 2003, requesting accreditation at institutional level, mentioning the purpose being the recognition of the Bachelor of Arts degrees offered by the College. The application form was accompanied by a letter of recommendation from Mr Marco Baggiolini, President of the Università della Svizzera Italiana.

As stated in the Guidelines for academic accreditation in Switzerland<sup>1</sup>, art. 12, private institutions are submitted to a preliminary examination, by the OAQ. It was performed in April 2003 and ended with a positive recommendation to start the accreditation process.

The accreditation procedure started on September 23<sup>rd</sup> 2003 and was conducted by the OAQ in accordance with all the methods and rules prescribed in the Guidelines<sup>1</sup>. The FCS has done everything in order to let this process run with the best collaborative spirit, and the OAQ thanks the institution for having consistently given all the information needed, and for participating constructively in the assessment procedure.

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<sup>1</sup> Guidelines for academic accreditation, Swiss University Conference, December 2002

According to article 21 of the "Guidelines", this final report is meant to present a synthesis based on the self-evaluation report of the institution<sup>2</sup>, the expert report<sup>3</sup> written by the peer-leader after the on-site visit, and the statement of the applicant<sup>4</sup> about the expert report, the OAQ expressing its own conclusions based on all the information gathered during the process.

The whole process was held in English, which is the campus and classroom "lingua franca".

## 1.2 Object of the accreditation procedure

The accreditation procedure itself began in September 2003 with the visit of the Dean of the College, Dr Armando Zanecchia. The question of the object of accreditation was raised at that time, the institutional procedure being chosen because it could potentially have a larger impact on Franklin College Switzerland public recognition than accreditation at program level only. One should add that it was not clear at that time whether an accreditation at program level only of a non-accredited institution was at all possible.

## 1.3 Expert group

The following persons were part of the expert team:

- Prof. Ossi V. Lindqvist, University of Kuopio, Finland, and Chair, Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (peer leader)
- Dr. Sandra E. Elman, CEO, Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities, Redmont, Washington, U.S.A.
- Prof. Francesco Lurati, Director of the Executive Master of Science Program in Communications Management, Università della Svizzera Italiana (USI), Lugano, Switzerland.
- Prof. Pierre de Senarclens, Institut d'Etudes Politiques et Internationales, Université de Lausanne, Switzerland.

The representative of OAQ accompanying the group of experts was Dr Isabelle Dustin.

## 2 Self-evaluation report

The self-evaluation report was written by the Dean of the College and submitted to OAQ on January 15<sup>th</sup> 2004. The experts mentioned their impression that a great majority if not all the

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<sup>2</sup> Self Evaluation Report of Franklin College, January 15, 2004

<sup>3</sup> Experts' Report on the Visit to Franklin College, Switzerland, February 2004, Prof. Ossi V. Lindqvist, 20th April 2004

<sup>4</sup> Letter from Dean Armando Zanecchia to Dr Rolf Heusser, director of OAQ, May 14 2004

staff had been involved in the application and the self-evaluation process. The College had established a College-wide Steering Committee and various working groups, including students and alumni, to prepare for the accreditation process. In accordance with the Guidelines, the self-evaluation report refers to all the quality standards concerning institutional accreditation, as well as a few of the standards related to programs, these being approved by the director of OAQ and chosen as to give examples of how institutional quality assurance processes are put into practice at program level. The curriculum chosen, after consultation of OAQ, was the Bachelor of Arts with major in "Economics and Finance".

The external expert panel was very positively impressed by the self-evaluation report of Franklin College. "Under every major heading, the report ran a short SWOT analysis, including the self-assessed strengths, weaknesses and recommendations for further action. The overall impression the team obtained was that these analyses were generally open, transparent and factual, and they already recognized and made reference to several strengths and possible problems areas that the external team had similarly recognized. "By its extent and information content the self-evaluation report was rich in information, detailed, well structured and developmentally oriented. (...) It could be considered even exemplary by its contents and depth.", quoted from Appendix 1, pages 5 and 7.

It shows the experience the institution already has in evaluation procedures, having written several such documents in order to gain and keep its accreditation by the Middle State Commission on Higher Education, in the United States. The related US reports, including the last follow-up review from 2000, have been transmitted to the OAQ for information purposes. These documents were not used by the expert team in this process.

### 3 On site visit of the College

The on-site visit took place on the 19 and 20th February 2004. The experts met for a briefing session on the previous evening, during which impressions about the self-evaluation documents could be shared and points to address during the visit could be prepared. An introduction to the Swiss higher education system and the Swiss accreditation system was provided by the OAQ.

The program of the visit had been prepared by FCS and OAQ and included discussions with various groups (direction and board of trustees, managerial staff and quality assurance responsible person, students, alumni, faculty, administrative and technical staff). A visit of the premises was included, during which the team split for time saving purposes. Some time between sessions was devoted to a first analysis of the observations. The experts were also given a chance to examine samples of student work, projects and papers. Two members of the team were able to attend shortly, and without previous notice, a lecture course in International Finance.

The entire direction, staff, students and alumni were found to be willing to have frank and open discussions, which proved friendly and very informative. Answers were found to be very consistent from one group to another, although seen from different points of view. The

final debriefing session had been organized as a public meeting by Franklin College Switzerland, and nearly all the students and staff attended it.

## **4 Assessment of Franklin College by the quality standards of OAQ**

### **4.1 Strategy, organization and quality management of the institution**

The strategic plan of FCS was found very instructive and pertinent, as well as "modern" in the sense that future risk analyses were an integral part of it. Decision-making processes are clear, the small size of the institution allowing faculty/staff involvement at various levels. Because the College is driven by tuition fees, a service-oriented approach to the student body is noticeable. Human resources, structures and material means are sufficient to fulfill the goals and objectives of the College in its present situation. Although the overall financial situation is sound and the College has full autonomy to use its financial means, they do restrict the institution in its research activities. The financial basis therefore has to be strengthened. The institution management is well aware of this and works on an increase of endowment fund, among other financial sources. Various quality assurance mechanisms are in use (e.g. regular evaluations of courses by students, etc.). FCS is an equal-opportunity employer, with a typical female/male ratio of 60:40 among students, but it faces difficulties in hiring full-time female academic staff, so that the gender balance in teaching staff is not achieved.

### **4.2 Range of programs**

The Bachelor of Art degree offered by FCS seems to be very much in tune with the degree structure required by the Bologna Declaration, with a credit system comparable to the European new ECTS. But FCS does not offer Master's or PhD programs, as opposed to traditional European universities, for which this feature "identifies" an institution as a university. This point is further addressed in part 6.

The various academic levels attained by students after completion of the last year of High school in different countries is taken into account by the "advanced standing" mechanism. Typically, a student entering FCS with a "classical" Swiss Maturität, German Abitur, or French Baccalauréat for example, is able to complete the requirements of the Bachelor of Arts degree in three years, as would be the case in a European university. Students with a US high-school degree are expected to complete these requirements in four years.

"The group of experts is of the opinion that Franklin College meets this requirement on range of programs and their integration with other institutions of higher education, but only at the level of undergraduate teaching and what solely concerns the Bachelor degree" (Appendix 1, page 12). The experts recommend the college to follow European developments in the Bologna process closely (e.g. adaptation of diploma supplement).

### 4.3 Research

FCS defines itself in its strategic planning primarily as a teaching institution in the liberal arts tradition. However, keeping up-to-date with the developments in each one's field is necessary for proper integration of research results in the teaching activities. "There are individual faculty whose past or present or current scientific works reach good international standards, but this fact does not apply to all of them." (Appendix 1, page 14).

The experts underlined the need for a plan that gives proper weight to research activities within the College. Following the self-evaluation report, the time devoted by the faculty to research represents nowadays on average 20% of the workload. Many of the faculty members expressed explicit willingness to engage more in active research themselves, both time and financing allowing. Although personal research is expected and encouraged by punctual means, the group of experts found that "research in the College strategy and as an active component of its teaching is not satisfactory" and that Franklin College would thereby not correspond to a full university status in Switzerland. On the other hand the group of experts still feels that considering the overall nature of Franklin College as a liberal arts and undergraduate college, it is still able to follow sufficient quality standards in its teaching and provision of teaching skills. This issue is being recognized and it seems to get even stronger emphasis in the hiring of new staff." (Appendix 1, page 15).

This experts' appreciation of the research level at FCS at two different levels, namely "not satisfactory" as to attain a "Humboldt" university level, but nevertheless "fit for purpose" considering education up to Bachelor level (according to the US and the new "Bologna" European structure), provides the main argument for the experts' recommendation regarding accreditation, in part 6.

### 4.4 Academic staff

Most of the issues concerning the academic staff have been covered above (4.3). Procedures for selecting, nominating and promoting academic staff comply with the standards. Interestingly, a rather sophisticated system of assessment of faculty merit is exposed in the self-evaluation report (Appendix 1, page 37), on which increments to individual salaries are based. The weighing of the different activities in this matrix is the following: teaching 50%, service 30%, professional engagement 20%. The self-recommendation of the Dean mentions alternative ways, in particular expressing the possibility of reduced teaching loads and additional support for research and professional engagement achievement.

Although the College is recognized as generally supportive of the continuing education of its staff (there is a Faculty Development Funding for example), the experts feel that FCS "would benefit by putting still stronger emphasis towards the staff development in its strategic and financial planning" (Appendix 1, page 16).

### 4.5 Administrative and technical staff

The criteria concerning the administrative and technical staff are fulfilled, taking into account the fact that the small size of the institution does not allow much flexibility in this respect.

#### 4.6 Students

Admission to FCS has been found both selective and competitive. The credentials required are defined and justified. There are mostly based on the official SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test) or ACT (American College Testing) program, as well as an essay and a personal statement, and a recommended personal interview. The experts appreciated the international composition of the student body.

As expected from a private institution, retention rate and graduation rate are carefully monitored. However there are insufficient data about drop-outs (reasons for drop-outs). Counseling services and guidance related to studies as well as concerning everyday life problems are extensively provided. Given the fact that US students are on average younger, and that nearly all of them are far away from home, these services go far beyond what is usually expected in this respect from European institutions.

Regarding the teacher/student ratio, the experts found the situation rather satisfactory: 1/15 with permanent teaching staff, 1/10 including part-time teachers. Both the students and alumni were very appreciative of the individualistic and interactive teaching methods in Franklin College, resulting in both the institution's culture and the small size of classes. Full time faculty staff also act as academic advisors.

The alumni expressed they had been very well prepared at Franklin for further studies and/or the working life. The international aspects in the College and its overall atmosphere were very positively emphasized.

#### 4.7 Infrastructure

"The group of experts found no special gaps or problems that might seriously affect the fulfillment of the College objectives" (Appendix 1, page 18), with respect to infrastructure. Both the number of students and the infrastructure are planned to expand.

#### 4.8 Cooperation

Cooperation agreements enable students from Franklin College ("Sophomore or Junior in good standing") to study abroad and get credits from other institutions, under certain conditions. The self-evaluation report mentions 50 institutions of Study Abroad/Exchange at Franklin in recent years, among them renowned ones (College of William & Mary, Cornell, Duke, Princeton, Southern Methodist, Tufts Universities, Wellesley College, Yale University, etc.). "Franklin College routinely exchanges faculty with other national and international institutions, particularly with respect to its two Summer Sessions and through its adjunct faculty affiliation" (Appendix 1, page 26).

The experts mention their feeling that the College seems a bit isolated, probably because of the lack of long-term research network. The experts recommend closer ties and networking with Swiss higher education institutions (e.g. USI) and other higher education institutions.

The experts' report also mentions successful cooperation with alumni, who help the College to build links with the working environment.

#### 4.9 Quality of programs

In addition to the institutional quality standards (Art. 6 of the Guidelines<sup>1</sup>), the following three quality standards, taken from the "Quality standards for academic programs" (Art. 7 of the Guidelines) did take part of the accreditation procedure at Franklin college. This was communicated to the institution and the experts from the beginning of the process. To serve as example for this purpose, the Bachelor of Arts with Major in Economics and Finance was chosen.

Standard 3.02 *"The range of programs covers the major aspects of the field in question. It allows students to acquire scientific working methods and ensures that scientific findings are integrated. The teaching and evaluation methods used are in line with the stated teaching goals and objectives."*

The group of expert concluded that the criterium was fulfilled, noticing that the international aspects in all FCS curricula are particularly represented, with special attention to the development of students' communication skills. "There seems to be sufficient amount of interrelated links between the courses for the sake of coherence, as well as necessary auxiliary courses (statistics, computer science, etc.). Student research is required and encouraged especially in Economics and some other courses, and hopefully this aspect is further strengthened in the future. The Academic Travel program has covered visits, among other places, to US Federal Reserve Bank, The World Bank, the OCDE and other such international and national institutions. (...) The goals and objectives of the programs as such are present on the Internet and they are up-dated regularly (...)." (Appendix 1, page 20).

Standard 4.01 *Courses are taught by educationally competent and academically qualified faculty.*

The experts feel that this standard is in general fulfilled by Franklin College. Research activities of faculty, however, still seemed to be too limited. Educational competence and teaching experience appear to be important criteria in selecting the teaching staff in FCS. It was found by the experts that the faculty is generally qualified and experienced in the European and North American context. The faculty seems capable and willing to engage into more research.

Standard 4.02 *The workload assigned to teaching and to research activities is defined.*

As stated in parts 4.2 and 4.3, the balance in teaching and research duties of the faculty at Franklin College is very uneven. The "professional engagement" including research, accounts for 20% of the "grading" in the system used for the faculty assessment by the Dean. This may include publication of books, paper and articles in refereed journals, conferences, inter-institutional research collaborations, artistic creations, etc. The group of experts "again draws the attention to the heavy teaching load contracted to the full-time

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<sup>1</sup> Guidelines for academic accreditation, Swiss University Conference, December 2002

faculty (7 courses per year), which clearly leaves too few possibilities for research, on campus or outside it." Appendix 1, page 21).

## 5 Profile of the College strengths and weaknesses from the experts point of view

The experts mention the importance of taking into account the difference in higher education systems in the USA and in European, and remind that the ongoing Bologna process has been inspired by the two-tier degree structure with the Bachelor degree and the graduate studies following it.

Maybe the most apparent strength of FCS lies in its international character, with students coming from all over the world to study together, who do actually learn one from another as well. The required Academic Travel program adds to this effect. Satisfaction level of the students and alumni is very high, the quoted reasons being: highly interactive and stimulating teaching, small institution and class size, good student:teacher ratio, freedom to express needs for improvement as well as quick responsiveness to these needs, quality of infrastructure, counseling and services, geographic location, etc. This also reflects the "market-orientation" of the College, the main source of income being the students' fees, as opposed to European public institution of higher education.

The quality of the Bachelor programs of Franklin College is perceived by the experts to correspond to the requirements for an undergraduate degree program at university level. According to the experts, the Bachelor degree offered by FCS apparently is close to the new Bachelor that is being developed in the Bologna signatory countries (...) " Appendix 1, page 23. The experts appreciated the fact that "The College is further developing an internal quality assurance system, where learning outcomes and outcomes assessments in general are getting higher priority."

The experts however mention several challenges (not to say weaknesses) of academic and financial nature: "...the share of direct research engaged by the staff and faculty is quite insufficient for the kind of institutional accreditation it is applying for (universitär). Yet strengthening the research component is also tied to College's financial basis. (...) the existing endowment is minuscule but the College presented plans of fund raising to increase it several times over the next few years."

Franklin College is strongly advised to include research as an integral part of its activities and strategy. It could assign, for example, one or several Chairs whose teaching and research duties are in better balance, and whose salary basis is attractive enough for very competent persons. Gender balance is also an issue as far as full-time faculty is concerns.

The Academic Travel program could be an even better asset to the College, were it academically better prepared and more research-based.

In this part of the report dealing with FCS strength and weakness profile, the experts then come to discuss which features make a tertiary level institution a "university". This point has been thoroughly discussed during the visit and also debated through emails after it, reflecting

the experts' concerns about expressing a judgment which would be fair to the institution, but also compatible with the overall Swiss higher education system in general. After consultation of the director of OAQ, the experts all agreed with the recommendation for accreditation stated in part 6. This decision takes into account that in the Swiss context, the property of a University lies in its strong research basis and teaching based on it. Furthermore it is uncommon in Europe that a University offers only undergraduate education.

## 6 Experts' conclusion

The experts' conclusion, expressing their recommendation for accreditation, is so short that it can be entirely quoted below:

"Based on the above observations and analyses, the group of experts is of the opinion that Franklin College Switzerland does not correspond to a university status in Switzerland, according to the interpretation of what the term "universitär" apparently constitutes.

In Franklin College, the degree structure and the overall width and quality of its undergraduate education do correspond to and meet the requirements for the undergraduate Bachelor Degree at a university level." (Appendix 1, page 26)

## 7 Franklin College Switzerland statement about the experts' report

The statement of FCS about the experts' report was sent as a letter from the Dean, Armando Zanecchia, to the Director of OAQ, Rolf Heusser.

In this document (Appendix 2), the Dean first expresses his satisfaction about the process in general, mentioning the competence of the expert team members and their careful reflections, as well as the productive, professional and engaging meetings.

Strengths of the institution, as observed by the expert team, are welcomed and listed again, with an additional comment on the reinforcement of Franklin College position within the ongoing Bologna process and the compatibility of the credit system used in FCS and the ECTS. In a context where a diversity of orientations and profiles is desired in European higher education, "Franklin College indeed fills an appropriate baccalaureate/first cycle degree niche on the bachelor-master-doctoral study structure." (Appendix 2, page 2)

The Dean welcomes the expert team's observation that there is a significant difference between a Swiss traditional, publicly supported research university and an institution like FCS. The College accepts that it does not correspond to the status of a full university in Switzerland, with regard of all the implications this latter denomination have on the research profile of an institution. The statement of Franklin College points out that research was not mentioned in the preliminary examination criteria. Nevertheless, the College acknowledges and will certainly consider the recommendations of the expert team about the need for a generally stronger research profile.

In the conclusion, the Dean states again the reasons the accreditation of the FCS degree is applied for: acceptance of the FCS degree as comparable to the new European Bachelor degree in Europe, enhanced mobility for students and graduates, growing partnership with the USI (Italian Swiss University in Lugano), compliance to the spirit of the Bologna Declaration. The document ends by quoting again the positive assessment by the experts of the undergraduate education offered in Franklin College.

## **8 OAQ conclusions and recommendations**

The OAQ fully supports the decisions and recommendations of the expert team. In summary, FCS cannot be awarded an institutional accreditation by the OAQ because of lacks in the research fields and the absence of Master/PhD programs, compared to Swiss universities, but the College does provide undergraduate education which meet the requirements for Bachelor degrees at university level, both in width and in quality. In accordance with international rules, the OAQ believes that accreditation can be awarded to high quality programs at university level, whether the institution offering the program is accredited or not.

Taking into account these facts, the OAQ recommends

1. that Franklin College Switzerland not be awarded accreditation as an university institution in Switzerland,
2. that the Bachelor of Arts degrees delivered by Franklin College Switzerland, as described in the FCS Academic Catalog 2003-2004, be awarded accreditation by the Swiss University Conference.

Franklin College Switzerland is strongly advised to strengthen its research activities in order to foster academic based education.

## **9 Appendices**

### Appendix 1

Experts' Report on the Visit to Franklin College, Switzerland, February 2004, Prof. Ossi V. Lindqvist, 20th April 2004

### Appendix 2

Letter from Dean Armando Zanecchia to Dr Rolf Heusser, director of OAQ, May 14 2004