

EU-REPARIS Accountancy Education Benchmarking

SUCCESS STORY

There is widespread recognition that reliable and credible financial information is vital for markets to function efficiently and for economies to grow. The quality of financial information is directly related to the quality of services provided by professional accountants. Sound systems of accountancy education increase the labor readiness and skills of the next generation accountancy workforce, produce competent and capable practitioners whose expertise and professionalism contribute significantly to financial decision making and help build public trust and confidence.

- The Road to Europe: Program of Accounting Reform and Institutional Strengthening (EU-REPARIS) has been designed to help and encourage the process of integration of candidate or potential candidate countries for EU enlargement in the countries of Southeast Europe. A key area of focus for the program is the development of accountancy education aligned with International Education Standards™ (IESs™) issued by the International Accounting Education Standards Board™ (IAESB™) and the educational requirements of the EU's Statutory Audit Directive for professional qualifications, continuing professional development, and at university level. An [Education Community of Practice](#) was established as a means of achieving this objective.
- The six member countries of the EU-REPARIS Education Community of Practice¹, participated

CFRR»

Centre for Financial Reporting Reform



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in an Accountancy Education Benchmarking Study exploring accountancy education at both university and professional levels in order to identify the status of IES implementation by accountancy education providers and to identify priorities for change. The Study offered a comprehensive assessment of 14 universities and Professional Accountancy Organizations (PAOs), who together provide 25 academic and professional accountancy education programs to around 4,120 students. Curricula content, learning outcomes, and proficiency levels from these programs were analyzed using a set of international benchmarks, including the IESs.

- The findings, results, and conclusions of the Study were disseminated at three regional and two national workshops. Education providers and other stakeholders, including policymakers, accountants, regulators, and the business community, discussed how to align accountancy education programs with international best practices and increase the labor readiness and skills of the next generation accountancy workforce.

¹Including Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia FYR, Montenegro and Serbia.

WIDE REACHING BENEFITS

This Accountancy Education Benchmarking Study gives the participating institutions clear information on their educational provision and how it compares to international expectations. A number of good practices in accountancy education emerged from the Study, including some unique insights into how often resource constrained institutions have innovated in order to implement IES. The benchmarking tool supports self-assessments, gap analysis, baseline assessments, and diagnostics. Benchmarking allows accountancy education providers worldwide an opportunity to better understand and target educational reforms, bringing benefits to all stakeholders. These include:

- **For students:** clarity of the syllabus and course content. This assists decision-making during course selection, e.g. core versus elective modules, undergraduate versus master's programs.
- **For universities:** specific detailed knowledge of their performance against the benchmark to guide revisions and updating of curricula to address core IES requirements. The schedules of syllabus content can support an application for accreditation or international recognition. It also offers a possibility for analysis of gaps between academia and professional education, facilitates better linkage with PAOs, and can be used as a tool to influence policymakers.
- **For employers:** future access to an improved recruitment base. Closing the gaps between international and national education programs develops the next generation of accountants with the knowledge and skills to meet the needs of business.
- **For PAOs:** evidence of whether they are successfully meeting the ongoing learning needs of members of the profession. It provides a gap analysis that aids transition to the learning outcomes approach required by IES. It helps PAOs self-assess to what extent their program learning outcomes compare with targeted international benchmarks. It supports comparability among different programs; provides evidence to support applications for recognition of qualifications; and can be used to help attract new members to the profession.
- **For accreditation bodies:** verifiable schedules of syllabus content that support an education providers' application for accreditation or international recognition. It helps national accreditation bodies assess new accountancy programs.
- **For policy makers:** an overview of national accountancy education which can support effective decisions on education resource allocations. It can aid the development of competency frameworks at national levels and is a powerful decision-making tool.
- **For society:** findings have been used to facilitate in-country focused discussions with a broad range of stakeholders (including policymakers, academia, the profession, regulators, private and public sector employers, business community, as well as development partners). This can help build consensus and facilitate accountancy education reforms. It also feeds into wider public understandings of the role and expertise of accounting professionals and the value they provide while supporting SME access to finance and private sector growth.



Regional workshop, June 2015, Skopje



Regional Workshop, June 2017, Vienna

TESTIMONIALS

University of Sarajevo, School of Economics and Business Sarajevo (SEBS)

"At SEBS, the strongest emphasis is placed on the continuous improvement of the teaching process and programs' curricula. SEBS introduced a new curriculum in September 2015. The initiative for changes in the curriculum design over the past five years has been encouraged by the need to meet the demand of the accreditation bodies and the many stakeholders including students, faculty, business community and administrative staff. SEBS participated in the CFRR pilot accountancy education benchmarking study performed in late 2014 and incorporated the results of this analysis into the curriculum revision process. The Study helped identify the discrepancies between SEBS's accounting and auditing programs and the best international practices. It also provided SEBS with the tools to improve the learning experience for its students. With these results, along with all other inputs mentioned above, SEBS has managed to upgrade and redefine curricula for its accounting and auditing programs and bring them one step closer towards the highest international standards."

University American College Skopje (UACS), School of Business Economics and Management

"At American College we've been trying to expand our offerings by exploring new majors that best serve the needs of the business community. The UACS School of Business Economics and Management has earned international accreditation from the Accreditation Council for Business Schools and Programs (ACBSP) as of 2011. But this accreditation does not extend to programs in accounting and audit. It is a separate track. Having been a center of excellence for almost a decade now, we felt that we need to expand in the area of Accounting and Audit. But, we haven't had experience, knowledge, and even more know-how about accountancy programs. In this sense, the Accountancy Education Benchmarking tools that have been developed within the World Bank EU REPARIS project were excellent for curricula development. We used the tool to develop the accountancy program curricula and have launched the program in the last academic year. Further, as a result of our interactions within the EU REPARIS Education Community of Practice we have already signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Institute of Certified Auditors and are in process of signing one with the Institute of Accountants and Certified Accountants."

Society of Certified Accountants and Auditors of Kosovo (SCAAK)

"The accountancy benchmarking study greatly helped us to better coordinate professional and academic accountancy education in Kosovo. Often in Kosovo, academia and professional accountancy organizations have seen each other as competition, and as detached from each other. This study has helped us shows that cooperation and coordination between education providers at both levels is critical to advance in this area. Having a well-developed system of progression between university and professional education is especially useful for developing countries that struggle with capacity and resource issues and is essential for developing a quality education system at a country level."

University of Pristina, Faculty of Economics

"The Accountancy Education Benchmarking Study was an excellent tool to benchmark our accountancy programs with international benchmarks, including the International Education Standards and we thank the World Bank's Center for Financial Reporting Reform team and the EU-REPARIS program for making this study possible. The results of the study were very practical and easy to use. For example, we have used and applied the result of the benchmarking to update our undergraduate accountancy curricula. We also used the benchmarking study results to design a new Master in Accounting program, that is being launched for the first time during the academic year 2017/2018 after the accreditation process is completed."

SUPPORTED BY:

The development of the Accountancy Education Benchmarking Study and its related methodology has been supported by expert teams of the International Accounting Education Standards Board™ (IAESB)™ and the International Federation of Accountants® (IFAC®).



PARTICIPATING UNIVERSITIES AND PAOs:

- University of Tirana, Faculty of Economics
- Institute of Authorized Chartered Auditors of Albania (IEKA)
- University of Sarajevo, School of Economics and Business Sarajevo (SEBS)
- University of Banja Luka, Faculty of Economics
- Association of Accountants and Auditors of Republic Srpska (AAARS)
- University of Pristina, Faculty of Economics
- Society of Certified Accountants and Auditors of Kosovo (SCAAK)
- Ss Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje, Faculty of Economics - Skopje
- Institute of Certified Auditors of the Republic of Macedonia (ICARM)
- University of Montenegro, Faculty of Economics
- Institute of Certified Accountants of Montenegro (ICAM)
- University of Belgrade, Faculty of Economics
- Serbian Association of Accountants and Auditors (SAAA)
- Serbian Chamber of Authorized Auditors (CAA)

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