

Decision No. EI-2024-24 on the accreditation of the WASCAL Graduate Study Programme on Climate Change and Water Resources issued by University of Abomey-Calavi, Benin

The President of the High Council for the Evaluation of Research and Higher Education,

Considering the Research Code, in particular Articles L. 114-3-1 to L. 114-3-6;

Considering the Board's deliberation of 29th September 2022 on the accreditation criteria for international study programmes (except doctorates/PhDs);

Considering the Decision No. 2023-9 of 16th March 2023 on the international accreditation procedure of the High Council for the Evaluation of Research and Higher Education;

Considering the agreement DEI_20220407 of 12th May 2022 - for the evaluation/accreditation of seven training courses, delivered by training and research centres affiliated to the WASCAL network in seven sub-Saharan African countries;

Considering the opinion issued by the Accreditation Commission on 25th April 2024;

Decides:

Article 1

Noting that the Graduate Study Programme on Climate Change and Water Resources delivered by University of Abomey-Calavi in Benin meets the four accreditation criteria, voted by the Board of the High Council on 29th September 2022, as follows:

ACCREDITATION CRITERION 1: DOCTORAL POLICY

The Graduate Study Programme on Climate Change and Water Resources (GSP - CC&WR) is highly relevant given the societal and scientific challenges it addresses, and its hosting by UAC aligns well the university's thematic strengths. Links could be developed with other UAC training programmes similar to the GSP CC&WR by integrating teaching and research efforts. Developing more public/private and national/international partnerships for the programme would further enhance its ability to address challenges and generate positive impacts on water issues in the West African region within the context of climate change. The current developments with the National Water Institute (INE), including its designation as a Centre of Excellence, the construction of a new building, and the creation of a new postgraduate school under a new legal framework (2022) present an opportune moment to bolster support for this GSP. Within the framework of the new Graduate School on Water Sciences, alongside two other GSPs, collaborative synergies need to be co-designed. This context offers a timely opportunity to build upon the outcomes of the international evaluation and fully realign of this GSP with the new offerings of Master's and PhD curricula.

ACCREDITATION CRITERION 2: TRAINING, HOSTING AND SUPERVISION ARRANGEMENTS FOR DOCTORAL STUDENTS

The initial semester of courses at UAC serves as valuable mechanism to prepare all students for their PhD research projects in their home countries, building upon the skills acquired during their Master's studies. However, a comprehensive revision of the curriculum and organisation of this semester is necessary to accommodate and leverage the heterogeneity of students' profiles, and to update and streamline the modular architecture. Improvements can be made in supporting to maturation of research projects alongside coursework, in collaboration with co-supervisors. The programme's strong output of scientific articles is very good and relevant to its scientific field. Increased involvement from alumni and socio-economic partners could further enrich both the societal and scientific perspectives of the GSP. The effectiveness of co-supervision involving a professor from the GSP team, a scientist from the home country, and possibly a scientist from Germany varies. Clarification of the defence procedure is warranted, which could be addressed through the establishment of the new postgraduate school on Water Sciences at UAC.

ACCREDITATION CRITERION 3: ATTRACTIVENESS, PERFORMANCE AND RELEVANCE OF THE DOCTORAL PROGRAMME

The Graduate Study Programme on Climate Change and Water Resources has earned a growing reputation in academia and among potential candidates. While the recruitment process benefits from this reputation, efforts should be made to encourage a more balanced gender ratio and to document the process more comprehensively. Enhancing the visibility of the GSP by ensuring that disseminated information is regularly updated would be beneficial. Alumni from the first three batches predominantly found employment in the academic sector and actively contribute to the academic training of doctoral students through monthly seminars. Their involvement could extend to the revision of the training programme itself. A skill-based approach should be developed in collaboration with socio-economic and operational partners to address the full science-society continuum related to water and climate change. This approach would create more job opportunities to GSP alumni and enhance capacity-building in the WASCAL network countries.

ACCREDITATION CRITERION 4: MANAGEMENT AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT OF THE DOCTORAL PROGRAMME

The Graduate Study Programme on Climate Change and Water Resources benefits from the quality assurance system of its host university for the selection of PhD candidates and teaching staff. However, in practical terms, students are recruited and monitored throughout their training and research following WASCAL processes and standards. While WASCAL's funding of thesis projects supports students' success, it is essential to accurately assess their needs and ensure flexible funding during the course of their studies. The quality of the training programme is not systematically monitored, despite the involvement of two governance bodies. To address these gaps, it is important to develop mechanisms for the overall monitoring of the programme's quality (evaluation of teaching, curriculum content, monitoring of student supervision, etc.) and continuous improvement, potentially under the direction of the LSAB, ISAB, and possibly the School of Postgraduate Studies. External mediation mechanisms could also be introduced to the programme to resolve student difficulties impartially. Introducing a skill-based approach into the training would enhance graduates' job market integration. Close monitoring of alumni career paths through interactions with alumni would also help steer the doctoral programme and improve its relevance in terms of research agenda and capacity-building. To facilitate the centralisation of the research results of the GSP CC&WE, including publications and skills portfolios, on the WASCAL-UAC website would facilitate knowledge dissemination and access.

Article 2

The Graduate Study Programme on Climate Change and Water Resources issued by University of Abomey-Calavi in Benin is accredited for a period of 5 years from the date of this decision.

Article 3

The decision is accompanied by the following recommendations and comments:

- Align the GSP with the new organisational structure of INE and other GSPs to identify synergies and opportunities for joint activities
- Revise the six-month training programme to update and articulate emerging priorities and state-of-the-art approaches. Introduce elective courses and on online resources to allow students to catch up on pre-requisites
- Proceed with this revision relying on a consolidated team of professors for the sake of co-design the training programme, and increase the share of practical didactics in the laboratories of INE or other GSP partners
- Foster closer interactions with professionals and socio-economic stakeholders to ensure the relevance and the applicability of research projects. Establish partnerships with operational services to facilitate the transfer and strengthen the science-practice interface.
- Define a clear and consistent publication policy, and improve support to PhD candidates in the publication process

Consolidate the policy regarding the mobility in Germany for a scientific stay, and the support mechanisms

Emphasise the importance of maturing research proposals before starting the fieldwork, to ensure adequate budgeting, data collection procedures, and international mobility plan.

Article 4

This decision will be published on the Hcéres website.

Paris, 14th June 2024.

The acting President
signed

Stéphane Le Bouler