AAP Overhaul

PROJECT REPORT[a]

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Preamble

Summary

Examination and repair (i.e. 'overhaul') of an institutional *annual activity plan* (AAP) through Diagrammatic Causal Analysis™ (DCA) regarding its (a) internal coherence and (b) articulation with higher-rank frameworks.

Credits

The project was conducted as an academic R&D exercise of Systems Planning℠ (v. cover page) between February and May 2016. The report contains the English (international) version of the original material, translated for the purposes of the project. The identity of the institutional entities (e.g. school, university) is withheld.

1. Setting

1.1 Object and intent

An institutional *annual activity plan* (AAP) was proposed in early 2016 as a list of actions (indiscriminately also referred to as 'measures') complemented by respective indicators, goals, and entities responsible per action. The innovative nature of the plan's presentation encouraged a thorough technical examination ('overhaul') as an academic exercise in the field of planning methodology.

1.2 Methodology

The method of choice was Diagrammatic Causal Analysis™ (DCA) of Systems Planning℠ (Perdicoúlis, 2014b, 2010), resulting in a review and a revision of the original plan. All diagrams use the SPML™ notation (Perdicoúlis, 2014a) — Figure 1.1.

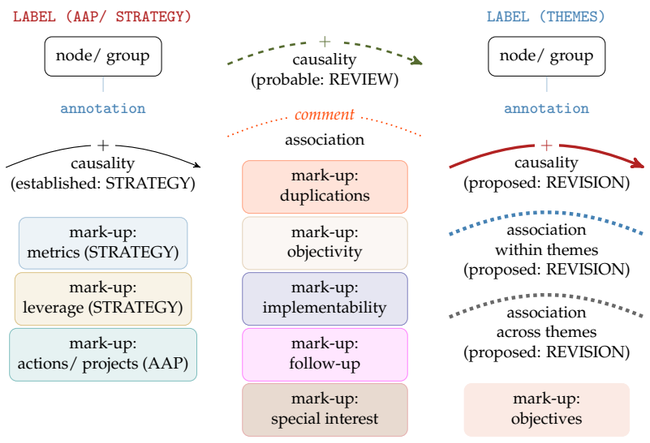

FIGURE 1.1 [KEY] The SPML™ notation employed in the project

The analysis of the AAP aimed at its (a) internal coherence and (b) articulation with higher-rank frameworks. Although an institutional strategy and a pluriannual activity plan were mentioned, there were no *specific* references to them; hence, a generic 'foundation' RBP was employed instead (Perdicoúlis, 2016a,b), which appears at the core of Figures 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3.

2. Execution

2.1 The original plan

The original AAP was presented in four tables (2.1–2.4), corresponding (albeit not strictly) to the 'strategic objectives' of the school: teaching, research, extension, and administration.

2.2 Review

Pre-processing

Before proceeding, the action entries had to be uniquely identified so that they could be referred to individually in a succinct and unambiguous manner. Hence, an enumeration scheme was attributed to each action, consisting of the letter of the table and the number of the row (e.g. A-1, A-2; B-1, B-2).

The table headers raised some initial questions — for instance:

i. What is the purpose of the 'measures/ actions'?
ii. What is the difference between measures and actions?
iii. How does the plan relate to the school strategy?
iv. How are the 'indicators' to be measured?
v. What is the year of reference for the 'goals'?
vi. How do the 'responsible' entities coordinate their duties?

Obtaining clarifications would have required an interview with the plan originators. Instead, mandated by the brevity of the academic exercise, the questions were contemplated in the review (§ 2.2) and the revision (§ 2.3).

Transcription phase (Figure 2.1)

The original AAP was transcribed from the tables into a reverse blueprint (RBP) — Figure 2.1. Actions became nodes, enumerated and grouped in the same way as in the tables. Annotations next to each action accommodated indicators and goals or venues and dates, as necessary. Information about the people responsible for each action was withheld in order to (a) make the diagram lighter, and (b) be appropriately considered after the plan revision (i.e. in the resulting executable projects).

Nº	Measure/ Action	Indicator	Goal	Responsible
A-1	Adjust the UG syllabi	Harmonisation of courses, as proposed in the official guide	70%	Degree coordinators and department coordinators
A-2	Propose PG degrees	Number of degrees proposed	2	Degree coordinators and department coordinators
A-3	Propose PhD degree	Number of degrees proposed	1	Department coordinators and Work Commission
A-4	Propose PG degree taught in English	Number of degrees proposed	1	Department coordinators and Work Commission
A-5	Promote the adoption of e-learning	Number of courses offered	2	School faculty
A-6	Increase partnerships with enterprise	Number of students in training and business projects	50%	Degree coordinators and department coordinators
A-7	Promotion of UG degrees	Create a 'Mission Group' and the Plan with strategy and actions in high schools, actions during 'open day', 'junior university'	20% more actions	Degree coordinators and department coordinators; student association nuclei
A-8	Define disciplinary areas in the school	Create a 'Mission Group' and a proposal document	approval	Mission Group; departments; Scientific Council
A-9	Improve teaching and learning quality	Survey of improvement needs in lab equipment and pedagogic material	2 labs	Responsible for the teaching labs
A-10	Improve teaching and learning quality	Action plan for courses in a critical state (CCS)	reduce the number of CCS	Commission of the Pedagogic Council
A-11	Promote faculty and student mobility	ERASMUS mobility and sabbatical leaves abroad	15%	Mobility liaisons; departments; student association nuclei

Table 2.1 AAP — Part A: Teaching and Training

Nº	Measure/ Action	Indicator	Goal	Responsible
B-1	Define strategic areas of research based on the competences of the faculty	Create a 'Mission Group' and the document with the proposal of the areas	Approval	Mission Group; departments; Scientific Council
B-2	Propose a PhD degree	Definition of the strategic area and design of the degree	1	Departments; Work Commission; Scientific Council
B-3	Promote research practice	Create a 'Mission Group' and strategy to qualify faculty and staff	Approval	Mission Group; departments; Scientific Council
B-4	Increase the number of faculty integrated in research centres	Increase of faculty/ integrated researchers	10%	Departments; Administration of the school
B-5	Increase the quantity and quality of scientific production	Number of articles in ISI and citations per publication	100	Departments
B-6	Increase the participation in research projects	Create 'Mission Group' to define the strategy and 'Work Groups' to prepare candidatures	Approval; increase of the number of projects and financing (20%)	Mission Group; Work Group; departments; Scientific Council
B-7	Promote internal cooperation and research dissemination	Organisation of workshops and conferences	5	Departments
B-8	Increase community services	Increase rate of the number of actions achieved	10%	Departments
B-9	Promote intellectual property	Increase the number of patents	1	Departments

Table 2.2 AAP — Part B: Research and Extension

Annotation phase (Figure 2.2)

Carried out on the transcribed plan (Figure 2.1) and registered in a separate diagram (Figure 2.2), the review revealed (a) 'internal' shortcomings (Tables 2.5–2.9) and (b) interesting 'external' relations with the 'foundation' strategy (Perdicoúlis, 2016a), none of which were evident (or even detectable) in the original AAP.

Reference	Example
A-3, B-2	'propose PhD degree'
A-1, A-10	'harmonisation of courses'

Table 2.5 Duplication — resolve by elimination or articulation

Reference	Example
A-1	'update the course curricula'
A-2, A-3, A-4	'prepare degree…'
A-1, A-10	'harmonisation of courses'

Table 2.6 Objectivity gap — resolve by defining 'end states' (objectives)

Reference	Example
A-9/ A-10	'improve teaching and learning quality'
A-6	'increase partnerships with enterprise/ institutions'
B-3	'promote research practice'
B-4	'increase the number of faculty integrated in research centres'
B-5	'increase the quality and quantity of scientific production'
B-6	'increase participation in research projects'
B-7	'promote internal cooperation'
B-8	'increase services to the community'
B-9	'promote intellectual property'

Table 2.7 Implementability gap — resolve by defining 'how to do this'

Reference	Example
A-8	'define disciplinary areas for the school'
B-1	'define strategic areas for research'
C-2	'identify maintenance operations in the spaces of the school'

Table 2.8 Follow-up gap — resolve by defining 'what to do next'

Shortcoming	Example
Vague action	(A-10) 'Improve teaching […] quality'
Inappropriate indicator	(A-10) 'Action plan'
Action in the indicator field	(A-7) Indicator: 'Create…'
Misleading goal	(B-2) 'Propose a PhD degree'; Goal: '1'
Vaguely defined goal	(A-1) '70%'

Table 2.9 Shortcomings of rigour or formality

2.3 Revision

Resolutions

Relatively simple shortcomings (Tables 2.5–2.8) were resolved by making amendments in the revised AAP (Figure 2.3). Shortcomings of rigour or formality (Table 2.9) required interaction with the originators of the AAP, which was beyond the scope of the academic exercise. The issues identified in the pre-processing phase of the review (§ 2.2) were also given a resolution during the revision of the AAP — Table 2.10.

	Issue	Resolution
i.	Purpose of 'measures/ actions'	Identification of objectives
ii.	Measures vs. actions	No (apparent) difference
iii.	Relation of the AAP to a strategy	Established in Figure 2.3
iv.	Measuring the 'indicators'	Dismissed as 'misleading'
v.	Year of reference for the 'goals'	Dismissed as 'misleading'
vi.	Coordination of duties	Appoint project managers

Table 2.10 Pre-processing issues and their resolutions

The quantitative issues of indicators and goals were globally dismissed as some were grossly misleading (Table 2.9). For instance, action A-3 insinuates that 'proposing a PhD degree' (any one) is successful when 'proposed PhD degree = 1', regardless of the motives, the scientific field, or the quality of the proposal. As another example, 'increasing community services' (B-8) is not expected to happen linearly, so the 10% goal is also misleading — especially when no time is defined.

The dynamics of the proposed actions explored and presented in Figures 2.2 and 2.3 (e.g. likely effects, associations) relate to both the internal coherence of the AAP and its articulation with higher-rank frameworks, as originally intended (§ 1).

Projects

The revised plan (Figure 2.3) formalised the actions into projects, which must be managed *individually* (Perdicoúlis, 2015) regarding organisation (e.g. tasks sequence and dependencies, project manager and participants) and resources (e.g. time and money), as well as *collectively* — for instance, the projects based on events (lower part of Figure 2.3) would give a better sense of organisation if displayed on a timeline instead of their distribution by departments, as in the source Table 2.4.

The upgrading of 'measures/ actions' into projects required an extension of the enumeration scheme (Table 2.11), in which 'X' indicates focus of attention and 'P' physical products such as maps. Some of the *focused* 'X' elements constitute the newly defined 'objectives' (orange band of Figure 2.3), while others remain at the executive level as projects.

Code	Meaning	Example
A-11	original	'promote the mobility of faculty and students'
A-11X	focus	'mobility of faculty and students'
A-11P	product	'map of the academic network'

Table 2.11 Example of the extended enumeration scheme

The newly defined objectives (orange band of Figure 2.3) were previously blended into the actions, or 'generally implied'. The existence of the objectives raises a new methodological issue: the *appropriateness* of the proposed actions, even when reformulated as projects (considering the conservative nature of the revision), which can be resolved only interactively with the originators of the plan or the administration of the school.

The project remains dedicated to producing a 'better AAP' and does not intend to create a strategy (Perdicoúlis, 2016b). Consequently, since no planning problem is defined, none of the diagrams bear 'XYZ' mark-up (Perdicoúlis, 2010).

Nº	Measure / Action	Indicator	Goal	Responsible
C-1	Recondition labs through financed projects	Create ‘Mission Group’ to prepare proposals	1 teaching lab; 1 research lab	Mission Group; departments; School
C-2	Identify maintenance operations	Reports to the Technical Unit	Timely communication	Technical liaison
C-3	Promote the qualification and specialisation of faculty (e.g. sabbatical leaves, advanced training)	Number of faculty in advanced training and sabbatical leaves	10% of faculty	Departments; School
C-4	Promote the qualification of staff	Number of staff in training	15% of staff	School

Table 2.3 AAP — Part C: Administration (original: ‘Organisation, Management, and Sustainability’)

Nº	Indicator	Venue, Date	Responsible
D-1	Competition: High school (1)	Campus, DD MMM	Department 1
D-2	Competition: High school (2)	Campus, DD MMM	Department 1
D-3	Convention: Subject	Campus, DD–DD MMM	Department 1
D-4	Master Classes: Special theme	Campus, DD MMM	Department 2
D-5	Forum: Special subject	Campus, DD MMM	Department 2
D-6	Distinguished Session: Speciality	Campus, MMM	Department 2
D-7	Seminar Series: Special subject (within the scope of [another activity])	Campus, MMM, MMM, MMM	Department 2
D-8	Practice Forum: Special subject (within the scope of [another activity])	Campus, TBA	Department 2
D-9	Alumni Reunion: Specific degree	Campus, DD–DD MMM	Department 3
D-10	National Contest: Speciality	Campus, MMM	Department 3
D-11	Speciality Day	Campus, MMM	Department 3
D-12	Thematic Event: Speciality	Campus, DD MMM	Department 3
D-13	International Conference: Speciality	Campus, DD–DD MMM	Department 3
D-14	Workshop: Employment	Campus, MMM	Department 3
D-15	Open Day	Campus, DD MMM	All departments of the School
D-16	Debate: Special subject	TBA	School
D-17	International Conference: Special education	Campus, DD–DD MMM	Departments 3 and 1
D-18	Thematic Week: Speciality	Campus, MMM	Department 3

Table 2.4 AAP — Part D: Events (NB: department names, event dates, and special-interest terms withheld)

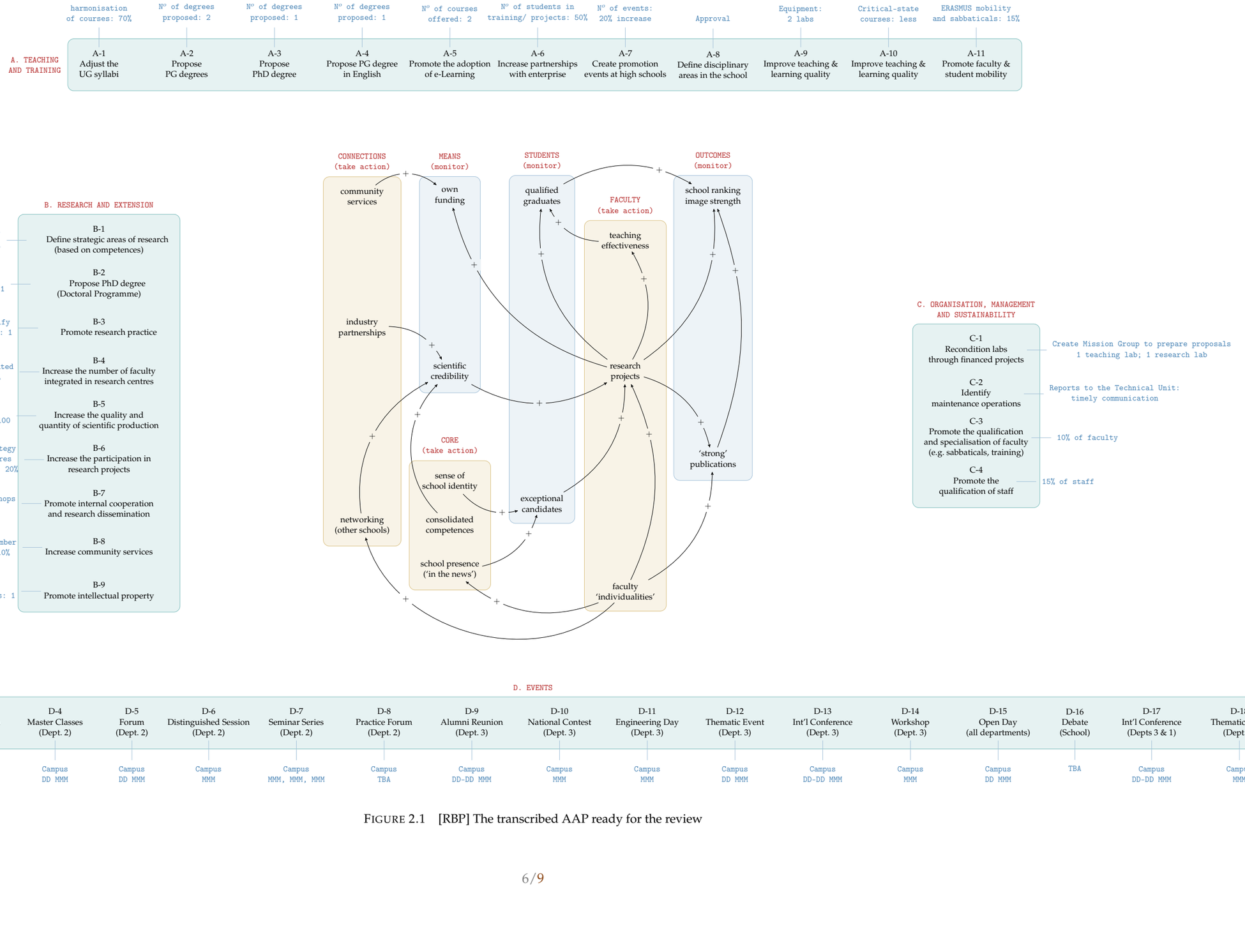

FIGURE 2.1 [RBP] The transcribed AAP ready for the review

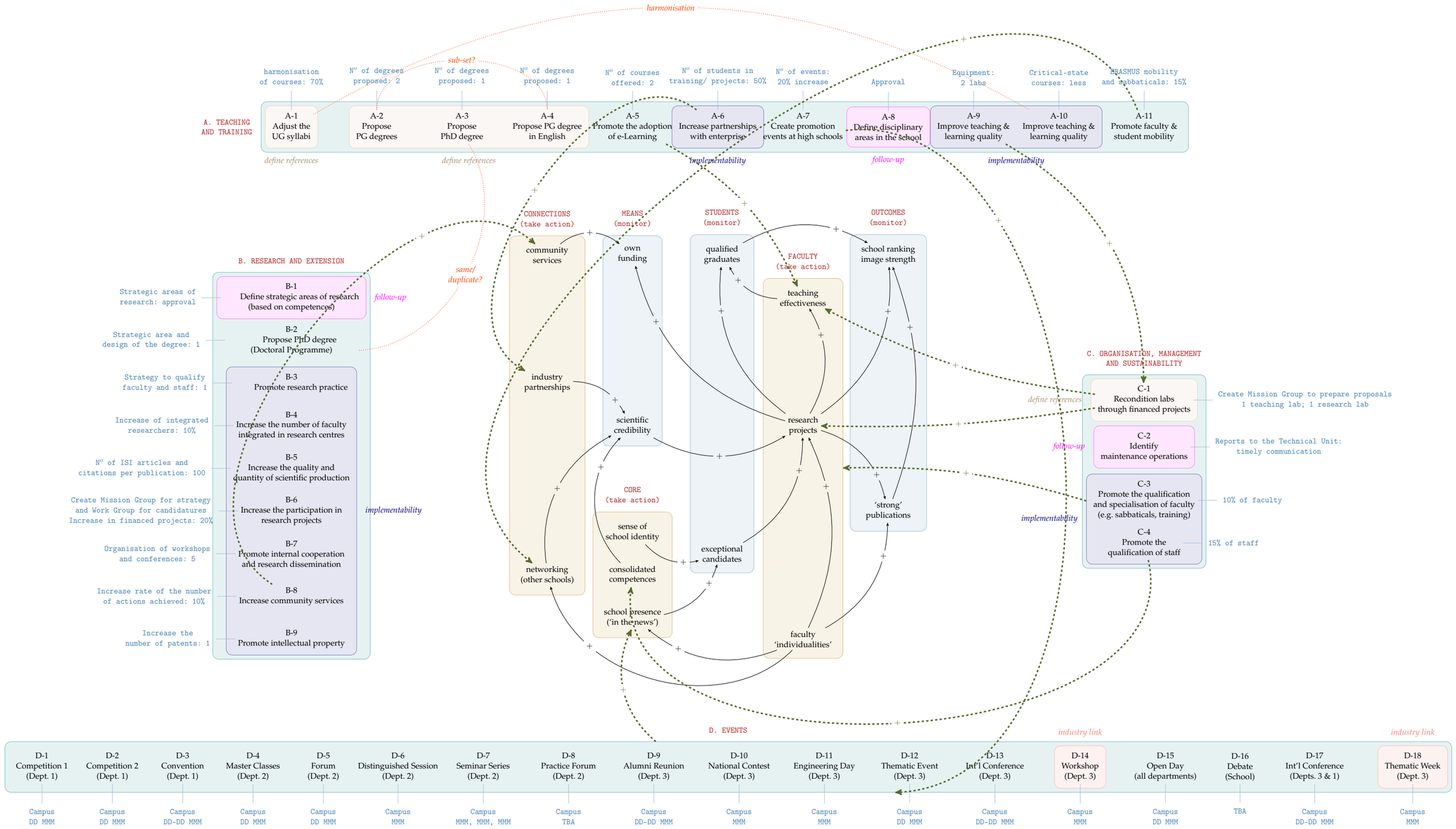

FIGURE 2.2 [RBP] The AAP with review annotations

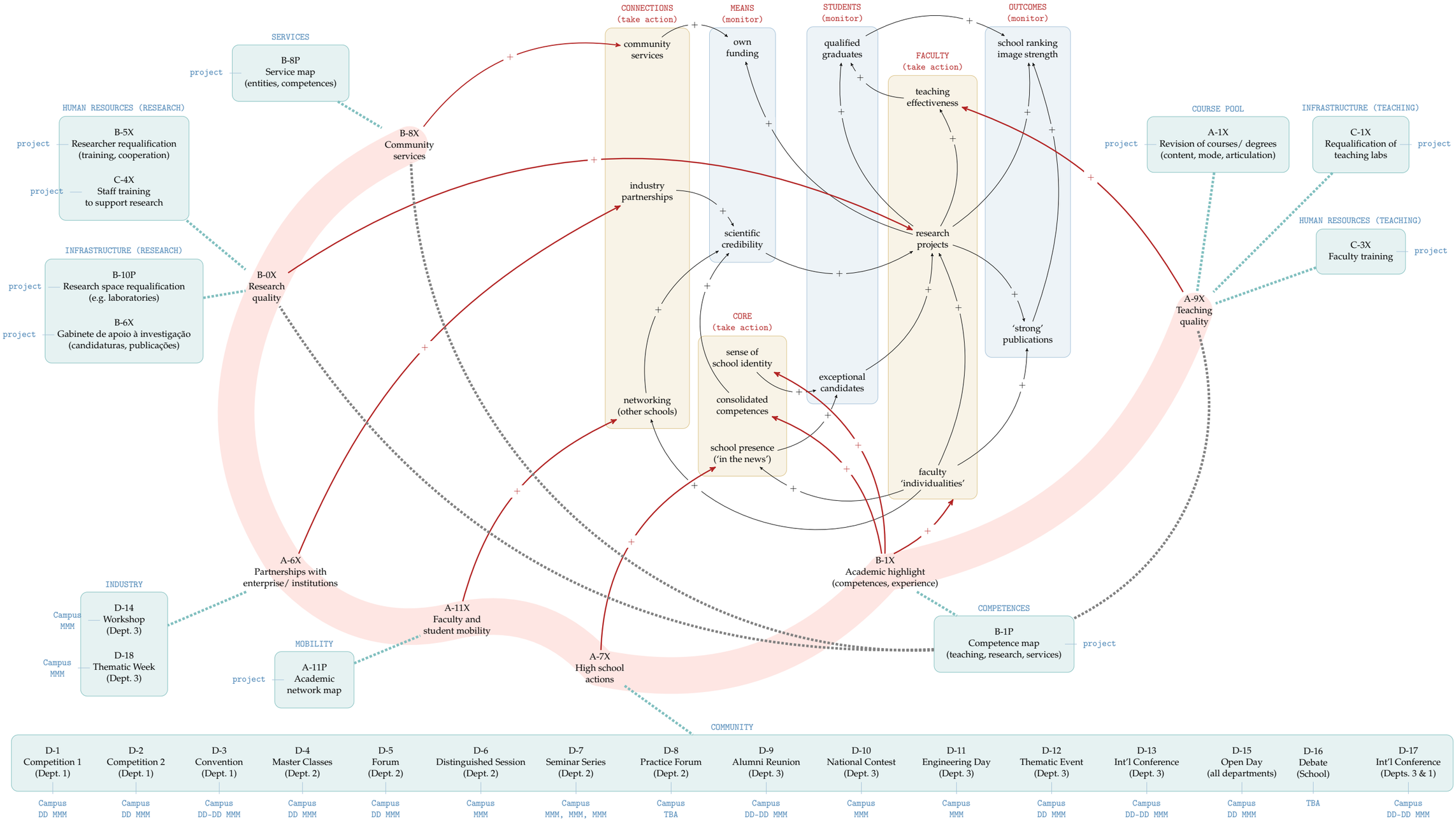

FIGURE 2.3 [RBP] The revised AAP

3. Conclusion

In a 'practical' sense, as befits an *annual activity plan*, the examination and repair of the AAP prepared a set of executable projects grouped in themes (blue labels in Figure 2.3). The projects still require operational definition, including the nomination of *unique* managers and calendarisation.

The disclosure of coordinated objectives (orange band of Figure 2.3) at a hierarchical tier above the projects bridges the AAP with higher-tier frameworks. Steps forward in this direction are to either adopt the 'foundation' strategy, or substitute that by the original strategy of the school.

The significant shortcomings (Tables 2.5–2.9) demonstrated in the proposed AAP were amended by the revision in an effective, yet conservative way. Interactive communication with the plan originators would further enhance the efficiency of the AAP, and could also improve their own planning skills.

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