

**INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE HANDBOOK FOR AFGHAN UNIVERSITIES
2015
MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION**

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INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE MANUAL FOR Afghan UNIVERSITIES

Introduction

Introduction: history of the quality assurance and accreditation process

The process of accreditation had its beginning in 2009 when Deputy Minister M. O. Babury began to work on accreditation with Dr. Fred Hayward, an advisor to the MoHE and former Executive Vice President for the Council for Higher Education Accreditation in the United States, then working for the USAID-funded Higher Education Project (HEP). In April 2009 he was asked to prepare a concept paper on accreditation. That was shared with senior leaders in higher education and began a discussion about the possibility of establishing accreditation in Afghanistan. Soon thereafter a Commission on Quality Assurance and Accreditation was established by Deputy Minister M. O. Babury to consider that possibility. It was supported by HEP and met twice a week for two hours to develop the process, rules and regulations. This was a very inclusive process with a great deal of consultation with universities, higher education leaders, NGOs and input from accreditors around the world. During that year twelve criteria (standards) for accreditation were developed as well as “Self-Assessment Guidelines for Higher Education Institutions.” In 2010 the Commission prepared “Bye Laws for Quality Assurance and Accreditation.” They were approved by the Ministry in July 2011. Seminars and workshops on accreditation were held during 2011 to familiarize universities and higher education institutions with the process, led by the faculty members on the Commission. A pilot self-assessment was undertaken with the four Kabul universities to be sure the process and the criteria were workable and met MoHE goals. A few minor changes were made as a result and accreditation was inaugurated in June 2012 for public higher education institutions to be followed a year later with the inclusion of private higher education institutions. The whole process, supported by HEP, was a very participatory one with input from higher education institutions, workshops, discussion of the draft documents, revisions based on them, and general agreement about the process by mid-2012.

The accreditation process:

The process which was established was similar to that in many parts of the world and drew, in particular on that in the United States, Great Britain and several other Asian nations. Each institution that sought accreditation was to carry out an institutional self-assessment to show its status in terms of each of the twelve criteria for accreditation. The criteria are: mission and purpose; governance and

administration; academic programs; faculty members and staff; students and learning; library and information resources; physical and technological resources; financial resources; strategic planning and evaluation; quality assurance and improvement; contribution to society and development; and integrity, public disclosure, and transparency.

The institutional self-assessment, along with supporting evidence, was to be submitted to the Quality Assurance Commission for review. If that review was satisfactory, a peer review team of faculty members (peer reviewers) was to be sent to the institution to assess whether or not the institution met the standards sufficiently to achieve candidacy for accreditation. The peer review team prepared a Site Visit Report on its visit stating its assessment of the status of the institution in terms of the twelve criteria and giving a score. If it recommended candidacy level 1, level 2, or accreditation, it made that recommendation to the Commission which had the final decision-making authority. That decision was not appealable except if the institution alleged fraud. It could then be appealed to the Minister. Of the two levels of candidacy, level 1 and level 2, the latter required a higher level of compliance with the twelve standards. The Commission developed a 100 point rating scale requiring at least 50 points for candidacy level 1 and more than 70 for candidacy level 2. Once an institution reached level 1 it had to wait a year to apply for level 2. In an exceptional case, it was possible for an institution to achieve candidacy level 2 in its first assessment. After level 2 a year had to pass before an institution could apply for accreditation. At each stage, a new self-assessment had to be prepared and a new site visit by peer reviewers undertaken along with a report and recommendation to the Commission. Accreditation is for five years, although an institution can be reviewed prior to that time if there is evidence that its quality has declined markedly.

During the initial period of preparation, the Commission selected peer reviewers based on nominations from the institutions. They were distinguished faculty members with outstanding records. A peer reviewer could not be assigned to the institution that nominated him or her. About 50 peer reviewers were trained during the first year at workshops in Kabul. Refresher workshops are held from time to time for new reviewers and others. Thirteen universities established institutional quality assurance committees by the end of 2012. The accreditation process was voluntary for the first two years becoming mandatory for all public and private higher education institutions in June 2014. Those institutions that have graduated their first students must start the accreditation process within one year from that date – that is by June 2015.

The Review Process:

The Commission members have set high standards for the reviews and carry out a careful assessment of the Institutional Self-assessments. About half of the initial *Institutional Self-assessments* were returned to the institutions for additional information or documentation. Where questions persisted, the Commission, or some of the staff met with representatives of the institutions. Similarly, the Commission reviewed the site visit reports carefully and several were sent back to the peer review committees for further elaboration. The process has been marked by Commission efforts to educate the institutions about the accreditation process and its goals. The goal is for institutions to see it as a learning experience for the institutions, faculty members and staff, and to focus on quality improvement overall. The objective is not to deny candidacy or accreditation but to help the institutions learn what they need to do to meet normal quality expectations. The MoHE has seen the process as one of cooperation between the institutions and the Commission in the name of overall quality improvement for the system as a whole. That theme has continued in its work with private higher education institutions which began in 2013.

In late 2012 a Directorate of Quality Assurance and Accreditation was established in the MoHE to oversee the accreditation process and staff were hired. By the end of 2013, thirty-three institutional self-assessments had been completed, reviewed, and comments sent back to the institution. These were from twenty public institutions and thirteen private institutions. Six institutions had been visited by peer review teams of four to six faculty members. These teams were to make a recommendation for *admission to candidacy* or denial of admission. If the recommendation was positive they would decide whether it was to be candidacy level 1 or level 2.

During 2013 the first six higher education institutions completed their self-assessments, had the self-assessments approved, had site visits by peer reviewers, and received positive decisions made about admission to *candidacy for accreditation level 1* – the first step in the accreditation process. They were: Kabul University, Kabul Polytechnic University, Kabul Medical University, Kabul Education University, Kandahar University and Nangarhar University.

Private Higher Education and Accreditation:

The quality assurance and accreditation process was intended from the outset to include both public and private higher education institutions as well as any foreign institutions operating in, or having offices in, Afghanistan. However, the MoHE planned to start with public institutions first given the large number of institutions and would begin to involve private higher education a year later in

2013. During that year a number of workshops were held for private higher education institutions and the first of them began to prepare their institutional self-assessments. By the end of 2013, thirteen private higher education institutions had completed their institutional self-assessments and had them reviewed and approved by the Commission on Quality Assurance and Accreditation.

All over the world, as higher education grows rapidly and its cost continues to rise in both public and private sectors, there is increasing interest in quality and standards. Any country that aspires to become a knowledge-based economy must demonstrate that it takes the quality of its higher education programmes and awards seriously, and is willing to put into place the means of assuring and demonstrating that quality.

The purpose of this manual is to enable universities and other higher education institutes in Afghanistan to set up their own internal quality assurance systems at a high level of functionality.

Need of Quality Assurance in Higher Education

Providers of higher education have a primary responsibility for the quality of their provision and its assurance, and as such, quality assurance must be a continuous and an on-going process. Though the top management may set policy and priorities, quality assurance is the responsibility of everyone in an educational institution. Assuring quality should not be considered as a one-off activity that takes place only in preparation for external quality assurance procedures.

Quality assurance systems in higher education established in many countries comprise of two basic components: an internal component and an external component. Internal quality assurance refers to internal processes that an institution has developed in order to monitor and improve the quality of their students' learning experience and ensure achievement of established goals, objectives and standards, whereas external quality assurance brings in a third party, to review the learning experience offered by an institution or a study programme and achievement of established goals, objectives and standards. Moreover, internal quality assurance must be a continuous, on-going process whereas external quality assurance can usually be conducted only at intervals, perhaps several years apart, and at supra-institutional levels. Hence, external QA alone cannot bring about sustained improvements in the quality of the learning experiences offered by any institution, but can help in assessing the credibility of the results of internal evaluation.

Why is Internal Quality Assurance Important?

Quality assurance (planned and systematic review process of an institution or educational program to ensure that acceptable standards of education, scholarship, and infrastructure are being maintained and enhanced) needs to be a continuous, on-going process. Everyone working in an institution must take responsibility for building it into their day-to-day, routine activities. This can be brought about only through internal QA. Hence, internal QA is considered as the corner stone of QA in higher education.

The set of internal processes that help institutions to improve their performance is sometimes referred to as 'quality enhancement'. Most of the emphasis in developed countries has shifted to making quality enhancement more effective, as external quality assurance activities occur at long intervals (perhaps once in five years), and at very high level. The European *Standards* recommend that external quality assurance procedures should take into account the effectiveness of such internal quality assurance processes. In some countries the external quality assurance agency has a defined role of promoting internal quality assurance within

institutions.

Areas that are considered of particular importance in internal quality assurance include:

- policy and procedures for higher education;
- approval, monitoring and periodic review of programs and awards;
- assessment of students;
- quality assurance of teaching staff;
- learning resources and student support;
- information systems; and
- public information.

Integration between Internal and External Quality Assurance

Internal and external quality assurance procedures complement each other in many ways. An internal quality assurance process with preparation of a self-assessment report is a critical core element of the external quality assurance process. A set of standards and criteria, pre-determined by the national quality assurance system, usually forms the basis for the self-evaluation report. Such standards and criteria are usually developed through nation-wide consultations to ensure wide participation of the stakeholders. A thorough quality assurance exercise needs a good set of information on the pre-determined criteria and standards to sustain quality judgments.

External quality assurance can play a very important role in strengthening internal quality assurance. Identification of the criteria used for external quality assurance can inform institutions of what they need to focus on in developing and strengthening their internal quality assurance processes. Explicit acknowledgement by the external quality assurance agency that the effectiveness of internal quality assurance practices in an institution will be taken into account during the external review process will help to further strengthen internal processes. External quality assurance can also help an institution to identify which internal processes are working well and those that need to be strengthened further, as well as those that may need to be introduced because they may be currently non-existent in the institution.

Suggested composition of the Internal Quality Assurance Unit

In 2009, it was suggested that Internal Quality Assurance Units (IQAU) in Afghan Universities be appointed by the_____ with the following minimum composition:

- Chaired by a Senior Academic appointed by the Senate;
 - Deans of all Faculties and / or a nominee from each Faculty, recommended by the Faculty Board;
 - Registrar or his nominee;
 - Bursar or his nominee;
 - Librarian or his nominee;
 - Director, Staff Development Centre.
 - Convener/Secretary to be elected by the Unit from among its members. The Chairperson should report directly to the Vice-Chancellor.
- It was further suggested that the Vice-Chancellor be invited to attend meetings that discuss issues of particular importance.

Functions and Responsibilities of the IQAU

It is suggested that the responsibilities of the IQAU should include among others the following activities:

Co-ordination of all QA related activities within the institution; Liaising with UGC/QAA Council and other external QA agencies; Implementation of QA Reviews/Audits and follow up action; Preparation of report;

Provision of advice on QA to all Faculties and Departments and guidance in Faculty level QA activities; Monitoring

Organization, where necessary, of awareness programmes on QA for the staff members;

Quality and QA aspects in the institution's corporate plan;

Facilitation of identification and sharing of good practices between academic Departments;

Preparation of QA-related guidelines and manuals for use within the institution (e.g. academic regulations, equipment manuals, laboratory manuals etc.)

Ensure the necessary Academic Regulations/By-Laws are in place, and if not, make recommendations for remedial action. Suggested activities include:

- Establishment of a well equipped IQAU in Universities;
- Conduct Faculty level Awareness Programmes among staff members;
- Establishment of Faculty QA Cells, and defining their duties and responsibilities;
- Initiate and support preparation of SER for Institutional Reviews;
- Motivate as many Departments as possible to prepare SERs for Subject/Programme Reviews. It is expected that IQAU will report to the University Senate on a monthly basis.

By-laws

The Constitution of Afghanistan mandates that the Government “establish and administer higher, general and specialized education institutions.” The constitution calls for the development of education programs that are “effective” and “balanced.” To achieve that effectiveness and balance the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) must establish mechanisms to assess and improve the quality of higher education. To that end, the *Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS)* emphasizes the importance of “quality education” for all Afghans. It calls for “an increase in the quality and independence of the Higher Education system” among its “priority policies.” In that vein, the *National Higher Education Strategic Plan: 2010-2014 (NHESP)* spells out a vision for higher education as a “high quality public and private higher education system that responds to Afghanistan’s growth and development needs.” The NHESP includes plans to establish a quality assurance and accreditation agency. The MoHE gives quality improvement and quality assurance a very high priority placing them at the heart of the five year plan.

Chapter I: General

Article 1: Legal Framework: These byelaws are prepared based on the 3rd and 4th items of Article 3 of the Higher Education Institutions' Law for the purpose of quality assurance and accreditation of higher education institutions and universities as well as to improve and maintain the quality of higher education in a balanced and effective manner.

Article 2: Definitions

1. ***Accreditation:*** Accreditation is a process of internal and external quality review and assessment of higher education institutions, programs and semi higher institutions for quality assurance and quality improvement to insure that they meet existing *standards* of quality and effectiveness in terms of faculty members, teaching, research, and service, as well as infrastructure, financial viability, sustainability, outcomes, and compliance with existing laws.
2. ***Candidacy for accreditation:*** A two stage process of requirements which must be met prior to an application for accreditation. Each level has higher requirements for the higher education institution (see Article 9).
3. ***Criteria.*** The requirements to improve and promote quality set by the accreditation agency for *candidacy for accreditation*. The criteria spell out the conditions that must be met for each level of candidacy (level one or level two).
4. ***Institutional Accreditation:*** The focus of accreditation is on the institution as a whole (see accreditation above) for quality assurance and improvement to insure that it meets existing *institutional standards* of quality and effectiveness in terms of faculty members, teaching , research and service as

well as infrastructure, financial viability, sustainability, outcomes and compliance with existing law.

5. **Program Accreditation:** External quality review and assessment of higher education programs/professions for quality assurance and quality improvement to insure that they meet existing *standards* of quality and effectiveness for that profession in terms of faculty members, teaching, research, and service, as well as infrastructure, financial viability, sustainability, outcomes, and compliance with existing laws. Program Accreditation focus on specific programs or faculties such as teacher education (approved by the MoHE in 2008), law, medicine, engineering, and health professional programs.
6. **Standards:** The requirements and conditions that must be met by institutions or programs to be *accredited* by the Accreditation Agency. These involve expectations about quality effectiveness, outcomes and sustainability
7. **Indicators:** Indicators are tools for the measurement and performance of criteria that provides transparency and accountability in educational systems. Indicators provides for quality education and makes it achievable. In other words, indicators are characteristics which are used to gather statistics to make judgements about expected standards.
8. **Higher Education Institutions:** includes universities and higher education institutions.

Article 3: Accreditation of Public and Private Higher Education Institutions. All higher education institutions, public and private, are subject to accreditation, including distance education.

Article 4: Foreign Higher Education Institutions. Foreign higher education institutions operating in Afghanistan are subject to accreditation following the same criteria and standards as public and private institutions. This includes foreign institutions operating campuses in Afghanistan, those with offices in Afghanistan, those offering distance education by mail or on the Internet which have a presence in Afghanistan, and those which license, franchise, or authorize others operating in Afghanistan to utilize their material, name, certificates, degrees, and or any other higher education material or recognition. Failure to follow these rules will lead to closure and could also result in fines or other penalties. Existing bye-laws, rules and regulations of the MoHE will continue to be in force regarding recognition and authorization to open.

Chapter II

The Quality Assurance and Accreditation Agency

Article 5: Agency. The Quality Assurance and Accreditation Directorate, hereafter called the Agency, is responsible for quality assurance and accreditation of public and private higher education institutions. The Agency will work with the and higher education institutions to encourage quality improvement. The Agency will operate

under the mantle of the Ministry of Higher Education as an independent entity at the outset, and will gain total autonomy after two to five years of operation and will emerge as a national independent quality assurance and accreditation body of higher education institutions. The Agency will have an independent Council which will oversee the Agency and make decisions on *candidacy for accreditation* and about *accreditation*. The day to day operation of the agency will be run by a Director assisted by professional and support staff. Functions of the Agency include to:

1. Encourage, promote, and enhance quality improvement in the nation's public and private higher education institutions with the goal of meeting international standards in all areas.
2. Oversee the accreditation process of all public and private higher education institutions including foreign providers of courses, distance education, training, degrees, certification, and other activities at the higher education level.
3. Inform and educate higher education institutions and the public about accreditation requirements, the process, procedures, and benefits.
4. Organize the selection and training of peer reviewers following policies prepared by the Council of the Agency. Selection of peer reviewers will be made by the Council of the Agency.
5. Advise institutions about the quality assurance process and assist them as they set up quality assurance committees on their campuses, prepare for their self-assessments, site visits, and other aspects of the process.
6. Protect the quality of higher education including use of the terms: *university, academic ranks (professor, associate professor, dean, rector, chancellor, president) and academic degrees*.
7. Keep records of those institutions *admitted to candidacy, accredited, denied accreditation, put on probation, or closed*, and make their names available to the public.
8. Respond to public enquiries about accreditation, quality assurance and quality improvement.
9. Liaise with foreign accreditors and quality assurance organizations and keep up to date on the latest quality assurance activities internationally.

Article 6: Council of the Quality Assurance and Accreditation. The Council of Quality Assurance and Accreditation is made up of seven to nine members selected from among the lists of faculty members by the Council and approved by MoHE.

1. *Nomination of candidates.* Candidates shall be nominated by the Academic Councils of higher education institutions. Each institution may nominate one member for 100 faculty members (100/1 ratio). Candidates should agree to be nominated. The candidates' profiles should include a letter of nomination, a complete vita with list of publications, employment history, and educational record which will be sent to the Council officially.
2. Member of the Council shall have the following qualifications:

- 1) Candidates must be distinguished academics or professionals¹ with at least ten years of university experience
 - 2) At least have a Master's degree and be at the rank of Assistant Professor
 - 3) Be familiar with a major international language
 - 4) Be able to promote and encourage participation in the quality assurance process
 - 5) Ability to make decisions in critical situations
 - 6) Be impartial and honest as well as have good reputation.
 - 7) Should be familiar with quality assurance and accreditation process as well as have experience in working with commissions such those on Academic Promotion and Evaluation of Academic Documents of the Directorate of Academic Affairs Coordination at the MoHE.
3. *Terms:* The term of office for Council of Quality Assurance and Accreditation is for five years and may be renewed once,
 4. *Chairman of the Council:* The chairman of the Council is chosen by the members, and may serve for one year with no extension.
 5. *Duties of the Council.* The Council of Quality Assurance and Accreditation has oversight over the activities of the Quality Assurance and Accreditation Directorate, the selection of *Peer Reviewers*, and makes decisions about *candidacy for accreditation, accreditation, denial of accreditation, and probation.*
 6. The director of Quality Assurance and Accreditation Agency will be selected by the members of Council and introduced to MoHE for approval.
 7. *Meetings.* The Council must meet regularly on a bi-monthly basis. Extraordinary meetings may be held based on the recommendation of the Director and approval of the members.
 8. *Day to day operations.* The Quality Assurance and Accreditation Council will monitor and oversee all academic affairs of higher education institutions.

Article 7. Director of the Quality Assurance and Accreditation Council

1. The Director of the quality assurance and accreditation shall have the following qualifications:
 - 1) The director must come from an academic background, have at least ten years of experience in higher education institutions as a teacher.
 - 2) Should have a Ph.D. or at least a Master's degree and be at the rank of Associate Professor or Full Professor
 - 3) Ability to work well with other people
 - 4) Be familiar with a major international language

¹ Distinguished nominees should have strong evidence of outstanding work in their field or profession such as articles published in refereed journals, refereed books published by reputable publishers, the rank of associate or full professor or equivalent administrative positions such as dean, vice chancellor, or chancellor, membership in a scientific council, head of a major department or head of a major professional organization.

- 5) Capacity to mobilize and encourage participation in the quality assurance process.
 - 6) Ability to make tough decisions in a crisis.
 - 7) Demonstrated capacity to be impartial and even handed and must have unquestioned integrity.
 - 8) Be impartial and honest as well as have good reputation.
 - 9) Should be familiar with quality assurance and accreditation process as well as have experience in working with commissions such those on Academic Promotion and Evaluation of Academic Documents of the Directorate of Academic Affairs Coordination at the MoHE.
2. The director of Quality Assurance and Accreditation will be working under the supervision of the Council as it is formed. The Director of the Quality Assurance and Accreditation Council will be working within the Deputy Ministers for Academic Affairs Office until it becomes an independent Agency.

Duties of the director of Quality Assurance and Accreditation Council

includes:

- 1) Promote and encourage quality improvement in public and private higher education institutions in Afghanistan.
- 2) Supervise the Quality Assurance and Accreditation Council's professional and support staff.
- 3) Encourage the development of a "culture of quality" in higher education.
- 4) Oversee, in keeping with policies of the Council, the accreditation process including: permission to apply for candidacy, candidacy for accreditation and accreditation. Decisions about candidacy and accreditation are made by the Council (see Article 6).
- 5) Attend all meetings of the Council as an ex-officio.
- 6) Inform the public about the accreditation process and the meaning of accreditation in terms of the quality of institutions.
- 7) Work to eliminate diploma mills and bogus or sub-standard higher education institutions.
- 8) Represent the Quality Assurance and Accreditation Agency to the public.
- 9) Carry out policies of the Council of the Agency.
- 10) Oversee the training of peer reviewers.
- 11) Work with higher education institutions to improve quality.
- 12) Publicize the decisions of the Council about candidacy for accreditation and accreditation including insuring that this information is available to the public on the Agency website and in published material detailing those institutions admitted to candidacy (level one and level two), those which are accredited, those which are on probation, and those which have been denied accreditation. A list should also be published of institutions closed by the Agency following decisions of the Council or because they were diploma mills, fraudulent, or sub-standard.

Article 8: Autonomy of the Quality Assurance and Accreditation Agency

The Agency will initially be housed in the Ministry of Higher Education and be under the general supervision of the Deputy Minister for Academic Affairs although it will be an independent body with total control over accreditation decisions as specified in Articles 9 through 13. Its budget will be provided and monitored through the MoHE during this period though it will control its day to day expenditures based on the financial procedure of the Government. At the end of an initial period of two to five years the Agency, if it is ready to operate autonomously, will become totally autonomous with its own budget provided through the Ministry of Finance following normal government procedures for autonomous agencies. It will continue to work closely with the MoHE.

Chapter 3: The Accreditation Process

Article 9: Stages in the Accreditation Process. The process of accreditation has four stages:

1. ***Permission to apply for accreditation and begin a self assessment:*** The higher education institution requests *permission to apply for candidacy*. It must demonstrate that it is properly registered with the MoHE to operate, provide basic information about its organization, structure, academic focus, infrastructure, and financing. Once permission is obtained the institution may begin its self-assessment for *candidacy* or will enter the Accreditation process according to article 20.
2. ***Candidacy for accreditation level one.*** This process is completed within two years. The first stage in the process of quality assurance in which the institution demonstrates that it meets the criteria for level one candidacy should be successfully completed within two years.
 - The process includes a self-assessment, peer review, peer review report and recommendation, and a decision by the Council of the Quality Assurance and Accreditation and compliance with the Bye laws and other legal documents.
 - If higher education institutions achieved *Candidacy for Accreditation Level 1* status in the first year, they are required, based on their self-assessments, to implement their action plan and other programs in the second year that are aimed at improving the quality.
3. ***Candidacy for accreditation level two:*** This is the second stage of the process of quality assurance in which the institution demonstrates that it meets the criteria for level two candidacy. An institution may achieve level two in its first consideration if it demonstrates that it meets the criteria for this higher level. Two year at level two must elapse before an institution can apply for *accreditation*. The process includes:

- A self-assessment by the institution to demonstrate that it meets the standards for accreditation, a site visit by a team of peer reviewers, their positive recommendation to the Council of the Accreditation Agency, and a decision on accreditation by the Council.
4. ***Consideration for accreditation:*** After achieving *candidacy level two* an institution may apply for accreditation. The process consists of a self-assessment by the institution to demonstrate that it meets the standards for accreditation, a site visit by a team of peer reviewers, their positive recommendation to the Council of the Accreditation Agency, and a decision on accreditation by the Council.

Article 10: Accreditation decisions. Accreditation decisions results in one of three outcomes: an institutions is:

- 1) accredited, which will be for five years;
 - 2) extended to candidacy to meet the standards; or *not* accredited
2. Failure to meet *standards* means that an institution is *not accredited*. It may be put on probation for up to eighteen months if the site visit review team believes it can meet standards within that period of time. In egregious cases, the institution may be closed immediately. An institution placed on probation will be closed or put under the authority of an accredited institution if it fails to meet standards within eighteen months. Decisions about accreditation are made by the *Council* of the Accreditation Agency based on the recommendations of a peer review committee which makes them following an examination of the institution's self-assessment report and a site visit to the institution. The report and recommendations of the site visit team are reviewed by the Council which makes the final decision.

Note: standards and criteria are parts of the Quality Assurance and Accreditation Directorate which should be prepared and approved by the Quality Assurance and Accreditation Council.

Article 11: Revocation of Accreditation. If the Agency believes an accredited institution no longer meets the standards prior to the end of the five year period for which it is accredited, it may recommend to the Council that a site visit team be sent to the institution to undertake a review of the situation. If the institution no longer meets the *standards* accreditation can be revoked, the institution put on probation for nine months, or closed in egregious cases.

Article 12: Reaccreditation. Accreditation is granted for a period of five years. An institution must be reviewed for renewal of accreditation at the end of the fifth year. The process is the same as the initial review (see Article 9). That decision could result in reaccreditation, probation for up to eighteen months, or loss of accreditation (which would result in closure).

Article 13: Appeal of a decision by the Council of the Accreditation Agency.

The decisions of the Council about *candidacy for accreditation* and *accreditation* are appealable according to the law.

Article 14: Peer review: Peer review is an external review and evaluation of the quality and effectiveness of an institution's academic programs, staff, structure, and outcomes, by a team of external evaluators who are specialists in their fields and knowledgeable about higher education in general

1. *Site Visit.* A team of peer reviewers selected by the Agency conducts a site visit at a higher education institution. The peer review team (usually 3 to 5 members based on the size of the institution) visits the institution to evaluate it and review its self-assessment. Peer reviewers prepare a *Site Visit Report* based on their assessment of the institutional self-assessment, discussion with faculty, administrators, staff, and students during the site visit which reflects their conclusions about whether or not the institutions meet the *criteria for candidacy for accreditation* or *accreditation standards*.
2. *Recommendation in the Site Visit Report.* The peer review team makes a recommendation to the Council of the Accreditation Agency regarding *candidacy for accreditation*, achievement or denial of *accreditation*, *probation*, or *reaccreditation* (see Articles 10, 11, and 12). Normally the *Site Visit Report* is confidential with only the Council decision being released to the public.
3. *Selection of Peer Reviewers.* Peer reviewers are selected on the basis of their expertise in their fields, experience, and reputation for impartiality and honesty.
4. *Training of Peer Reviewers.* All peer reviewers must successfully undergo training prior to being sent on a site visit. That training usually involves a workshop of one or two days including familiarity with criteria and standards for candidacy and accreditation, deportment during the site visit, confidentiality, and ethical standards relating to quality assurance. Peer reviewers will be held to a strict conflict of interest policy. A peer review may not be used at his or her own institution or at one which provided the nomination. They must be graduates of another institution and have no personal or material interest in the institutions (such as a spouse, relative or child at the institution or a contract or financial relationship with it).

Article 15: Self-assessment. After requesting and receiving permission from the Quality Assurance and Accreditation Agency, each institution will carry out an *institutional self-assessment* of its faculties, programs, and infrastructure prior to consideration for *candidacy for accreditation* and *accreditation*. This review is an evaluation of the quality and effectiveness of the institution's own academic programs, staffing, structure, and outcomes, designed to assess whether or not the institution meets the *criteria* or *standards* (see definitions above) set by the Accreditation Agency. The *Self-assessment* is carried out by the institution in preparation for a quality assurance site visit by an outside team of specialist peer reviewers (see Article 14). The Self-assessment results in a *Self-assessment Report*

which lays out its findings in terms of each of the criteria or standards set by the Accreditation Agency.

Article 16: Site visit. When the institution has completed its *Self-assessment Report*, the Agency will arrange for a visit to the institution by a team of peer reviewers who will review the institution's *Self-assessment Report*, interview faculty members, students, staff, and administrators as well as examine the structure and effectiveness of the institution and its academic programs following procedures established by the Agency Council and the MoHE. The site visit results in a *Site Visit Report* with recommendation by the Peer Review Team to the Council of the Accreditation Agency about *candidacy for accreditation, accreditation, or reaccreditation*.

Article 17: Fees. The Agency has the authority to charge fees on private higher education institutions to cover the cost of site visits in accordance with appropriate rules and procedures. A specific procedure is established for charging fees on private institutions.

Chapter IV: Miscellaneous Provisions

Article 18. Institutional Quality Assurance Committees. All higher education institutions should have a *Quality Assurance Committee* to monitor and facilitate quality improvement on campus. The Committee should be chaired by the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs. The committee should consist of five to nine members representing the major faculties and programs at the institution selected by the Academic Council. It may delegate responsibility for drafting faculty and departmental quality self-assessments to sub-committees but remains the authoritative entity for the overall institutional self-assessment report. All members should be productive scholars noted for excellence in teaching, research, and service. Most members should have advanced academic ranks.

Article 19. Interim Arrangements. Until legislation has been approved setting up an accreditation process, The Minister of Higher Education may appoint a Quality Assurance and Accreditation Committee to work with the universities and other higher education institutions to lay the groundwork for quality assurance including institutional and program self-assessment and other processes associated with quality assurance. This could include development of protocols, manuals for self-assessment, criteria and standards of quality expected of higher education institutions. Members of this Committee may become members of the Council of the Accreditation Agency after the legislation is approved.

Article 20. Initiation of the Process. All institutions that have graduated at least a first group of students should enter to the mandatory process of Accreditation.

Article 21 Enforcement. These byelaws are prepared in four chapters and twenty one articles which were amended with the majority of vote on 1392/9/4 by the Quality Assurance and Accreditation Commission and will be effective after approval of the Minister of Higher Education.

The University Council should appoint a central body, which may be named the Internal Quality Assurance Unit, headed by a Chairperson, to plan, organize, develop, facilitate and monitor all internal quality assurance programs and activities. The Chairperson should be appointed for a period of three years. He / she should be a Professor or a senior academic staff member of the university with substantial experience and knowledge in staff development. The university authorities should provide office space, supportive staff, and logistics for the Chairperson / IQAU to carry out his duties smoothly. The IQAU should prepare an annual work plan and submit it to the University Senate and the Council for approval before commencing a calendar year.

Developing a 'quality culture' through internal quality assurance

In order to develop a 'quality culture', in a higher education institution, its management should first identify the **main functions of the institution**. What sort of educational services does it offer? Is research an important part of its activities? Does it provide any other services to the public or industry?

They would need to understand the organization and management of the institution and the **key processes** in each of its main functions. This sort of information can be gathered from the **top leadership** of the institution, but it would be best if identification of the main functions and key processes were done by a group of **key individuals** from within the institution (namely the IQAU), since different people may see things in different ways. The most important areas for internal quality assurance processes in higher education institutions usually include

- Approval, monitoring and periodic review of programmes and awards
- Assessment of students
- Quality assurance of teaching
- Learning resources and student support
- Information systems
- Public information

Once the key processes within the institution have been identified, together with the persons responsible for each of these, it would be necessary to identify **what practices are already in place** to maintain standards. Discussions should be held with relevant groups to determine if such practices are adequate to ensure high standards, if **existing practices can be improved**, or if **new measures** need to be introduced. The measures should be such that they can be put into effect as part of routine practices within the institution. These measures should also be viewed from the perspective of the **institution's future plans**. If the institution plans to expand its student population, will the proposed system be able cope with such growth? If it plans to offer different modes of learning, will it be necessary to introduce a different system to quality assure the new mode of learning? **All levels of staff** should be encouraged to participate in these discussions, and put forward their own ideas, so that there is a strong feeling of ownership. This process may be facilitated by the QAAC, which can provide information on **internationally accepted practices and standards**, and **examples from other institutions**. Once agreement is reached on the key processes and measures that are essential for maintenance of standards, the IQAU should document them and obtain feedback from the institution on the documentation. Such **documentation** can provide points

of reference, and the means by which continuity can be ensured when leading figures retire or resign. Examples of such documentation include **codes of practice** on areas such as programme monitoring, approval and review; assessment of students; external assessors; student support and guidance; career guidance; postgraduate research programmes etc.

Attention should be paid to **disseminating information** to all staff members regarding when, where and how these quality assurance measures are to be put into practice, and a mechanism for **educating new recruits** should also be identified, so that no-one can plead ignorance.

Although it would be best if all staff are involved in some way in the development of the internal quality assurance processes, in practice, it will be necessary to identify a key group of academic staff (including the top leadership) who are particularly concerned with issues of quality assurance, so that they will facilitate the process, and be the champions for internal quality assurance. These 'champions for internal quality assurance' must be the members of the IQAU and the Faculty IQA cells.