

**National Commission for Academic Accreditation  
and Assessment**

**Quality Assurance Centers in Post-Secondary  
Institutions**

Quality assurance centres are set up in post secondary institutions to lead, support, and coordinate quality assurance processes throughout an institution

This brochure provides information about the role, structure and organization of quality assurance centres, and factors important in their success.

Note: It is recognized that administrative arrangements vary in different post secondary institutions and the suggestions made in this brochure should be adapted as necessary to suit different circumstances.

## **Organizational Arrangements for a Quality Assurance Centre**

A centre should be managed by a senior member of staff (often called a Director), with knowledge and experience in post secondary quality assurance, and capacity for effective leadership.

The Director should be administratively responsible to the President, Rector or Dean, or to another senior member of the central administration such as an Academic Vice President.

A Quality Committee should be established. The committee should be chaired by a senior member of the central administration, and made up of individuals drawn from colleges or departments and major administrative units throughout the institution. Members should have good knowledge of quality assurance processes. They should be capable of providing sound advice on institution-wide quality assurance matters, as well as leading quality initiatives within their own sphere of activity.

Quality officers should be identified in administrative units throughout the institution, and in larger units committees might also be established. In addition to these cross-institution sub-committees might be established to develop or advise on particular tasks.

The role of the quality committee should include such things as providing advice to the quality centre on its activities and the development of the institutions quality assurance system, recommending quality improvement plans for the institution to senior administration, approving common forms and documents for use in quality assurance activities across the institution, and providing leadership in implementing quality assurance initiatives in sections of the institution, and monitoring and reporting on quality of performance in the institution.

Staff requirements for a quality assurance centre will depend on the size and complexity of the institution, and the extent to which responsibilities are centralized or distributed throughout the institution. However common arrangements would normally be a staff of between two and five people including, a Director, some secretarial and administrative support, and other professional staff with specific responsibilities.

A quality centre would normally be centrally located close to the senior administration with an office or offices, filing and storage facilities, capacity for display of reference material, and access to meeting space.

## **Critical Success Factors for a Quality Assurance Centre**

Active support and commitment to quality improvement from the President or Rector, and senior administration.

Staff of the centre with good knowledge of quality assurance processes and capacity for effective leadership.

An institutional environment that promotes innovation, tolerates mistakes, and recognizes outstanding achievement.

Institution-wide commitment to excellence, and to participation in initiatives to achieve it.

Widespread involvement throughout the institution in planning, monitoring, and reporting on quality improvement strategies.

Openness of staff to feedback on performance, to new ideas, and to advice and constructive suggestions from colleagues and stakeholders.

Recognition by faculty and staff of the need for cooperation in a team approach to quality assurance.

Willingness of faculty and staff to improve their own skills and participate in institutional strategies for improvement.

Institution-wide commitment to evidence based assessments, using pre-determined indicators, external benchmarks, and independent verification of evidence and conclusions.

Integration of quality assurance processes into normal administration.

An adequate budget to support quality initiatives.

Rigorous application of quality assurance processes to the operations of the quality assurance centre itself.

## **Responsibilities of Quality Assurance Centres**

Common Responsibilities are to lead, coordinate and support quality assurance processes in all parts of an institution by:

### **Developing Commitment to Quality Improvement.**

- Promoting understanding of the importance of quality assurance and of strategies to achieve it.
- Developing mission and objectives for quality improvement for the institution and encouraging units throughout the institution to take similar action in their own sphere of activity.
- Arranging for special recognition within the institution for significant improvements and outstanding achievements in quality.
- Involving stakeholders in strategies for quality assurance and ensuring community awareness of significant achievements.

### **Assisting and supporting internal administrative units in their quality improvement planning.**

- Arranging for the nomination or appointment of quality officers in administrative units in different parts of the institution.
- Providing or arranging training for staff in the institution in quality assurance processes.
- Providing or arranging training in teaching strategies and assessment processes relevant to different types of intended learning outcomes.
- Cooperating with internal units in the provision of orientation and induction programs for new staff to ensure thorough understanding and support for quality assurance strategies.
- Assisting in the preparation of quality improvement plans and evaluation processes for administrative units within the institution.
- Developing and recommending standard forms for use in the institution for conducting surveys and reporting on quality indicators such as teaching evaluations, employer or graduate surveys, and program or subject specifications and reports.
- Providing technical support for calculations of validity and reliability of assessment tasks and evaluation surveys.
- Conducting surveys of graduates and other stakeholders.
- Maintaining contacts with stakeholders and seeking their opinions and advice on quality improvement strategies.
- Assisting internal units to identify independent evaluators to assist them in their quality assurance activities and advise on quality improvement.
- Providing reference material and disseminating information about developments in quality assurance and accreditation, and about good ideas at other institutions in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and in other countries that would assist faculty and staff throughout the institution in quality improvement.

### **Coordinating institution-wide strategies for quality assurance and improvement.**

- Developing a quality improvement plan for the institution as a whole.
- Specifying key performance indicators for use across the institution, leaving scope for individual units to define additional indicators relevant to their own activities.
- Maintaining files and records of plans, reports, statistical information, and other information for reference over time., and following up on plans for improvement to monitor implementation and evaluate success
- Coordinating and leading the preparation and management of external institutional reviews, coordinating these with external program reviews.

### **Reporting on developments in quality assurance for the institution as a whole.**

- Preparing annual reports on quality assurance for senior administration and governing board drawing on key performance indicators and consolidated information from reports of internal units.
- Leading periodic institutional self-studies, coordinating these with the timing and conduct of program self-studies in a whole of institution process.

## **Documents and Materials that Might Be Prepared in Common Form by a Quality Centre for Use Across An Institution.**

- Format for presentation of quality improvement plans.
- Format for specification of mission, objectives, indicators and benchmarks.
- Program and course portfolios.
- Templates for annual program and course reports.
- Survey forms for student course evaluations.
- Survey forms for program evaluations by graduates.
- Forms for surveys of employers and other stakeholders.
- Format for descriptions of performance indicators.
- Templates for presentation of self-study reports.

## **Functions for Attention in a Quality Center's Institutional Quality Assurance Strategy**

- Mission and objectives
- Governance and administration
- Quality assurance systems
- Learning and teaching—within each program and for the institution as a whole
- Student administration and support services
- Learning resources
- Facilities and equipment
- Financial planning and management
- Staffing and employment processes.
- Research
- Community relationships

For each function inputs, processes and outcomes should be considered, but with greatest attention to the outcomes. There should be a clear understanding of desirable levels of performance, with objectives, indicators and performance benchmarks established, valid and reliable evaluation processes in place, and plans made for improvement.

## Some Quality Criteria for a Quality Assurance Center

Criteria	Examples of Indicators
Institutional Commitment to Quality Improvement	<p>Ratings by faculty and staff of the importance of quality assurance.</p> <p>Involvement of faculty and staff in quality assurance activities within their own workplace.</p> <p>Proportions of program reports and reports on institutional functions completed on time.</p> <p>Proportions of actions recommended in action plans that are implemented on time.</p>
Institutional Achievement of Quality Standards	<p>Improvements in quality as measured by performance on key performance indicators.</p> <p>Graduate employment outcomes compared with outcomes in similar fields at the same time at other institutions.</p> <p>Graduate ratings of quality of programs and achievement of intended learning outcomes.</p> <p>Employer ratings of the quality of graduates.</p> <p>Evaluations of quality in external reviews.</p> <p>Community perceptions of the quality of the institution.</p>
Effectiveness of the Services Provided by the Centre	<p>Ratings by staff/managers of administrative units of the assistance provided.</p> <p>Proportion of faculty and staff participating in professional activities organized by the centre.</p> <p>Extent to which procedures developed are adopted in other institutions.</p> <p>Ratings by senior administrators of the value of the services and reports prepared by the centre.</p> <p>Ratings of the quality of quality assurance processes in external reviews.</p>
Consistency of Processes with Generally Accepted Standards of Good Practice.	<p>Extent to which stakeholders are involved in quality evaluations and planning for improvement.</p> <p>Appropriateness of performance indicators and benchmarks used for quality evaluations.</p> <p>Reliance on evidence of performance rather than subjective impressions.</p> <p>Extent to which independent external evaluators are used to validate conclusions about quality and plans for improvement</p> <p>Use of appropriate strategies for teaching and student assessment for achievement of intended learning outcomes.</p> <p>Emphasis on outcomes as a major focus in evaluations.</p> <p>Involvement of all sections of the institution in quality assurance activities.</p>

## **Getting Started. -- Some Suggestions for a New Quality Assurance Centre**

These suggestions assume that a decision has been made to establish a centre, key staff have been appointed, and a quality committee formed.

### **1. Communication with Staff.**

Make sure that staff have been informed by the President or Rector that the centre has been established, the importance of its role emphasized, and a clear indication given that its role is to assist everyone in improving quality, to provide needed services, and to coordinate a total institutional strategy.

### **2. Environmental Scan**

Make a frank and honest assessment of the current level of quality in the institution, the extent of understanding of and commitment to quality improvement by the faculty and staff, and the availability of evidence about quality. This assessment should be a formative evaluation. It should deal with the full range of institutional functions, including teaching and learning in all departments and colleges, and the support services and administrative functions. The analysis should be thorough, with examination of any available data, interviews with a cross section of students, staff and others, and visits to other institutions to get a perception of comparative levels of performance. A report should be prepared for discussion with the quality committee and as a basis for planning. It will also serve as a benchmark against which future improvements can be assessed.

### **3. Establishing Mission and Goals.**

A mission for institutional quality assurance should be defined. This should be linked to and assist in achieving the overall mission of the institution. A vision statement should be prepared describing the quality assurance system that it would be desirable to develop. Demanding but achievable goals should be set for initial developments.

### **4. Setting Objectives and Planning**

Specific objectives should be set for initial developments. These should be strategic, realistically taking account of the current state of knowledge and commitment within the institution and priorities for its development. Objectives should be staged in a planning sequence that identifies critical first steps, and a sequence of action until the most important quality assurance activities are in place.

A fully developed quality improvement plan must eventually involve coordinated action throughout the institution, but unless there are unusual circumstances it would be wise to start on a pilot basis in selected areas, refine the processes and documents used, and then move to wider implementation. The choice of what to focus on in the initial pilot activities is important. Involvement should be voluntary, and it may be wise to begin with a small sample of types of activity, possibly two or three programs, and one or more service functions such as a library or management of some student services.

Both immediate and intermediate objectives are needed in this interactive planning process.

Two kinds of indicators are needed, some relating to the strategy for introduction of the quality assurance system to assist in monitoring the effectiveness of that strategy, and some relating to the quality objectives for the sections of the institution that are involved in the pilot program. Base line data should be collected on these indicators so improvements can be assessed.

A most important element in the plan should be to involve the faculty and staff who will be involved in the initial pilot development, encourage their commitment, and undertake to provide the assistance they will need to participate. The active support of senior management will be essential.

#### 5. Preparation

Thorough preparations should be made, with briefings and training provided for those who will be involved, materials developed and field tested, and assistance given in planning. Advice from colleagues from other institutions with more established systems could be invaluable.

#### 6. Implementation

Staff from the centre should stay in close contact with those involved in initial activities, monitoring developments and helping to solve any problems that arise, and keeping notes on improvements that could be made, both in what is done by the staff involved, and in the assistance provided by the centre. Monitoring the process of implementation is at least as important as monitoring the impact of the strategies that are being put in place.

#### 7. Review

For a useful pilot development the groups involved should undertake a normal review process, considering evidence from indicators, interpreting the results and having their interpretations reviewed, and developing an action plan for future activity.

A review of the work of a quality centre during the initial pilot activities should follow the same processes with an assessment of the extent to which objectives have been achieved, consideration of evidence provided from indicators, interpretation of that evidence and action plans prepared for response. Independent advice should be obtained on the interpretations and conclusions, and a report prepared on what has been done.

At the end of the pilot activity a report on what has been done and the lessons learned should be made generally available. One important benefit of doing this is to demonstrate that the centre is committed itself to the processes it is advocating for others, practices what it preaches, and is doing its best to learn and improve. A general report should include agreed plans for the next, wider stage of implementation.