



# **National Commission for Academic Accreditation & Assessment**

## **Handbook for Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Saudi Arabia**

### **PART 1**

## **THE SYSTEM FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ACCREDITATION**

**THE SYSTEM FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE  
AND  
ACCREDITATION**

**National Commission for Academic Accreditation & Assessment**

**Riyadh  
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia**

**January 2012**

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# INTRODUCTION

The National Commission for Academic Accreditation & Assessment has been established in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia with responsibility for determining standards and criteria for academic accreditation and assessment and for accrediting postsecondary institutions and the programs they offer. The Commission is committed to a strategy of encouraging, supporting, and evaluating the quality assurance processes of postsecondary institutions to ensure that quality of learning and management of institutions are equivalent to the highest international standards. These high standards and levels of achievement must be widely recognized both within the Kingdom and elsewhere in the world.

This Handbook has been prepared to assist institutions in introducing and developing internal quality assurance processes and in preparing for the external peer reviews that the Commission will conduct to verify the achievement of high standards of performance.

Part 1 of the Handbook is intended to give a general overview of the system for quality assurance and accreditation. It describes the principles that underlie the approach taken by the Commission, summarizes standards that will be applied in quality assurance and accreditation judgments, and briefly outlines the stages involved in the approval of institutions and accreditation of programs. This part of the Handbook also includes an explanation of a number of terms used for the quality assurance and accreditation system in Saudi Arabia.

Part 2 of the handbook focuses on internal quality assurance processes. It provides advice on establishing an institution's quality center, processes of planning, evaluation and internal reporting on educational programs, and self study and improvement of institutional activities. Templates for use in preparing reports are included in appendices.

Part 3 of the Handbook provides details of what is required in preparation for and the conduct of external reviews. These processes relate to applications for approval and accreditation of a new institution, the accreditation and re-accreditation of programs, and institutions on a five year cycle.

Parts 1, 2 and 3 of the Handbook should be read in conjunction with two other key documents, a *National Qualifications Framework* setting out the learning expectations and credit requirements for levels of academic awards and two documents setting out standards for accreditation. The standards deal with eleven areas of activity in higher education institutions. The primary standards documents are *Standards for Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions* and *Standards for Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Higher Education Programs*. Both of these are accompanied by companion documents providing self-evaluation scales for assessment of performance in relation to the standards. Statements of standards for special situations are being progressively developed. These include programs offered by distance education, and standards for technical training for use with technical training programs in community colleges established by universities. Supplementary documents dealing with other special issues relevant to distance education and to programs in different special fields are in preparation. Separate statements of standards for technical training will also be provided. These documents explain the standards expected by the Commission and are intended to serve as important guides for continuing improvements in quality.

# CHAPTER 1

## PRINCIPLES AND PROCESSES

### Summary of Arrangements

The National Commission for Academic Accreditation & Assessment has responsibility under its By-law for establishing standards and for accreditation of all postsecondary institutions and all postsecondary programs other than military education. Its responsibility relates to both institutions as a whole and to the individual programs they offer. Details of how these responsibilities will be carried out are provided in this Handbook.

The Commission is an independent authority reporting directly to the Higher Council of Education. Its role is separate from that of the Ministries and other government agencies to which institutions are administratively accountable and which may establish regulations and reporting requirements for the institutions for which they are responsible.

The Commission's responsibilities relate to quality issues, which include the resources available, processes followed, the quality of services provided and the quality of students' learning. The Commission has established required standards in eleven broad areas of activity, and has developed a national qualifications framework that specifies generic standards of learning outcomes for each level of qualifications. It expects institutions to establish internal quality assurance systems that ensure high levels of quality in all of these eleven areas.

These internal systems must include processes of strategic planning in relation to appropriately defined institutional mission statements, and short term and long term planning and reporting procedures based on evidence of quality of performance. Periodic comprehensive self-studies must be undertaken to assess performance and plan for improvement. These self-studies are followed by independent external peer reviews that verify the conclusions of the self-studies and consider performance in relation to international standards. The Commission considers the reports from these independent external reviews in making its decisions on accreditation.

Existing institutions are expected to introduce quality assurance systems as soon as possible during a transition period lasting several years and will be assessed for accreditation progressively during that period. New institutions are expected to develop plans for their quality assurance systems before they receive their license to operate.

For new institutions, plans for establishing the institution and planning and delivering its programs should be reviewed to check that if properly implemented they will meet the Commission's quality requirements and any additional requirements established by the Ministry to which the proposed institution will be responsible.

If the Commission believes the plans are satisfactory it will give provisional accreditation for the institution to offer programs in certain fields up to specified levels, and will give provisional accreditation for programs for which details have been provided. At a later stage the Commission will conduct a further review to determine whether the plans have been properly implemented. If accreditation requirements are met at that later stage, the "provisional" designation will be removed and the institution, or the programs concerned, will be fully accredited.

Existing institutions and new institutions after they have achieved full approval and accreditation will be reviewed once every five years. Programs will also be re-accredited on a five yearly basis.

## **1.1 Principles Underlying the System for Accreditation and Quality Assurance**

### **1.1.1 Responsibility for quality rests with institutions delivering programs.**

The institutions delivering programs in Saudi Arabia are responsible for the quality of those programs and for the quality of all of their facilities and activities. An “institution” is the legal entity established in Saudi Arabia with authority to grant academic awards.

The principle of institutional responsibility has a number of important implications.

First, while an external organization such as the Commission can have an important role in assisting institutions in planning and introducing strategies for improvement and in evaluating and publicly reporting on what is achieved, this does not remove responsibility from the institution. An external authority can help, but it cannot deliver quality.

Second, although an institution may decentralize some of its responsibilities or delegate authority to an internal unit such as a college or department, this does not remove responsibility from the institution as a whole. Reviews of quality by the Commission for institutional accreditation will address the total institution and reviews of programs for program accreditation will address everything that affects the quality of the program.

Third, if an institution in Saudi Arabia delivers a program that has been developed elsewhere, it is still the institution in Saudi Arabia that must accept responsibility and will be accountable for the quality of the programs it offers. This is the case even where an academic or technical qualification may be issued by a partner institution in another country. An international institution wishing to operate in Saudi Arabia must establish a legal entity within the country, must meet the quality requirements for an institution of its type in Saudi Arabia regardless of any accreditation or quality requirements in its own country, and must provide sufficient resources and facilities within Saudi Arabia to satisfy quality standards.

### **1.1.2 Quality relates to all of an institution’s functions and activities.**

Quality assurance processes in institutions should involve not only the educational programs, but also other matters such as the facilities and equipment, staffing, relationships with the communities served by the institution and the administrative processes that link all these together. This means that a quality assurance system should involve individuals and academic and organizational units throughout an institution, not only those directly involved in the delivery of educational programs.

Within each of these internal units consideration should be given to their inputs, processes, and outcomes, with an emphasis on the quality of the outcomes of the services they provide. In the past considerations of quality were largely based on inputs such as the qualifications of faculty, provision of equipment and facilities and adequacy of resources. However, while these are still important the emphasis has shifted. The most important consideration is the quality of outcomes, although inputs and the processes used are still significant and standards relating to them must be maintained.

### **1.1.3 Emphasis should be on support for continuing quality improvement rather than on satisfying required standards.**

The primary objective of the system for accreditation and quality assurance is continuing improvement and this orientation will permeate all of the Commission’s activities. The system is based on a fundamental assumption that institutions wish to operate with high and increasing levels of quality, comparable to, and wherever possible exceeding international standards. The most important function of the Commission is to assist institutions in achieving those improvements.

An important consideration in accreditation judgments will be the existence and effective use of quality improvement mechanisms. Institutions will be encouraged to work towards continuing improvement beyond minimum requirements in all of their activities.

However the Commission does have a statutory obligation to ensure that necessary standards are achieved. Provided this is done, accreditation will be granted, but if inadequate standards are found this must be recognized and the need for improvement made known. Accreditation can only be granted when required standards are met.

#### **1.1.4 Supportive relationships are essential.**

Relationships of trust and support are essential within institutions and between institutions and the Commission and the reviewers with whom it works. No institution or program is perfect, and there is always scope for improvement. Willingness to acknowledge weaknesses and mistakes and work to deal with them is considered strength, not a weakness. It must be possible for individuals, for groups within institutions, and for institutions as a whole, to frankly acknowledge difficulties and discuss plans for overcoming them without fear of damage to reputation. On the other hand attempting to conceal problems is a serious weakness that will be open to criticism.

This means that the style of interaction within an institution that is effectively working for quality improvement, and between the Commission and the institution during external reviews should be characterized by cooperation, openness and transparency, sensitivity to mission and objectives and constructive support in identifying and resolving difficulties.

#### **1.1.5 Assessments of quality must be evidence based and independently verified.**

Conclusions about quality should be based as near as possible on directly observable evidence rather than subjective judgements. Indicators of achievement should be identified in advance, related to valid benchmarks to establish appropriate standards of performance, and systematically reviewed. Where interpretations are required, for example where indicators provide indirect evidence of achievement of objectives, interpretations should be independently verified.

#### **1.1.6 Diversity should be encouraged.**

Flexibility in organizational arrangements is necessary to meet the needs of different communities, to respond to differing missions and to reflect the differing circumstances and resources of different institutions. Allowing diversity is also essential if creativity and innovation are to be encouraged and improvements are to develop over time. Specific requirements for meeting quality standards may vary for different types of institution. For example, research may be an important element in the work of some institutions and not for others, and the way an institution interacts with its community should differ for a large public university and a small college in a remote community.

However, while there are important differences in expectations for some standards, the quality of learning expected for academic awards does not vary. If community confidence in the system of postsecondary education is to be maintained it must be possible to rely on consistent standards of student achievement no matter what kind of institution students attend or how their programs are organized.

#### **1.1.7 Stakeholders should have substantial involvement in planning and review processes with feedback regularly obtained, analyzed, and responded to.**

Stakeholders include students and graduates, staff, employers, providers of funds, members of the communities served by the institution and any other groups with which the institution is involved. The stakeholders have a right to be involved, but even more importantly, have perspectives that need to be considered if a system for quality assurance is to be effective.

#### **1.1.8 Total institutional commitment to quality improvement should be achieved through effective leadership and widespread involvement.**

A good educational institution should be a learning organization, in which all faculty and staff are involved in evaluating their performance and that of the units within which they work, and offer ideas and plan for improvement following that evaluation. There must be effective leadership and coordination at the level of the institution as a whole, but this leadership and coordination must be combined with wide participation in evaluation, planning, and reporting. While effective leadership is essential at the most senior levels of the institution, it is equally important in internal academic and administrative units.

## **1.2 Internal Quality Assurance Processes**

All postsecondary institutions are expected to have comprehensive and effective quality assurance systems.

For a new institution a quality assurance system should be an integral part of the plans for its development. Plans for the quality system should deal with monitoring and improving the quality and effectiveness of all programs to be offered and also of the academic and administrative units and functions within it. The role and processes to be followed by a quality unit or center should be described.

For an existing institution processes of quality assurance should be fully integrated in all parts of the organization. More detailed descriptions of these expectations are set out in the Part 2 of this Handbook, which deals with internal quality assurance processes and in the *Standards for Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions*. In summary, the expectations include leadership and coordination of quality assessment and improvement processes based on the mission and goals of the institution; preparation of detailed planning and reporting procedures; and implementation of those procedures in a continuing cycle of annual planning, monitoring and review. More comprehensive self-studies should be conducted periodically. These serve as a vital review and planning mechanism for the institution itself and also as the basis for independent external reviews by the Commission.

For an existing institution that does not yet have such a system, arrangements for internal quality assurance would normally start with the establishment of a quality center, appointment of key staff to that center and appointment of a quality committee drawn from all sections of the institution. This center would involve people across the institution in an initial self evaluation, which would provide a starting point for plans for improvement where necessary and the introduction of required quality assurance processes.

Part of the institution's responsibility for its own quality assurance involves assessing itself against appropriate standards using external benchmarks or reference points. These may be descriptions of standards provided by the Commission, benchmarks relating to the performance of other comparable institutions within Saudi Arabia or elsewhere, or the opinions of independent evaluators with relevant experience in postsecondary education. In some cases institutions may use the judgments made by international accrediting bodies for this purpose. Although these evaluations may be made by people external to the institution, from the Commission's point of view, they are part of the institution's own arrangements for quality assurance, and for the purposes of the system of accreditation and quality assurance in Saudi Arabia, are regarded as internal mechanisms.

## **1.3 External Quality Assurance Processes**

The Commission has established a system for external quality assurance involving accreditation of institutions and programs if they meet required quality standards. To carry out these evaluations the Commission will use trained and experienced reviewers. They will study documentary information, visit institutions, and provide recommendations to the Commission. A summary of the processes followed is given below, and the stages are described in greater detail in Chapter 3 of this Handbook. Part 3 of the Handbook deals specifically with external review processes and the preparations that are needed for those reviews.

For new institutions, assessments by the Commission will occur at two stages. First, when a proposal to establish a new institution is being considered or when it has just started, the Commission will consider its current activities and review the plans for further development. This review is designed to ensure that if the plans are properly implemented the institution and its quality assurance systems will likely **satisfy** the required standards and that programs will meet accreditation requirements. At that stage the institution and its programs will receive

provisional accreditation. If the plans also meet the standards established by the relevant Ministry a license will be given to allow it to begin operating. The second stage occurs after the institution is established and the first group of students have completed their programs. The Commission will carry out a further assessment to ensure that plans were properly and fully implemented and that standards are being met. Full institutional and program accreditation may then be given.

After full accreditation, programs will need to be re-accredited every five years. External reviews of the institution will also be conducted on a five-yearly basis. (While a five year cycle will be the norm, the Commission may at its discretion require an external review at an earlier time).

The reviews of institutions and of programs are closely related. Institutional reviews will deal with all of an institution's activities, including an overview of the quality of its programs and the facilities and services to support them. Reviews of programs will deal in greater detail with individual programs and the standards of teaching and learning achieved.

To ensure that these different types of reviews are effectively coordinated and do not result in unnecessary additional work for institutions, several steps will be taken. First, while the focus of program reviews will be on individual programs, arrangements may be made for considering groups of closely related programs at the same time. Second, wherever possible the timing of external program and institutional reviews will be coordinated. In small institutions with only a small number of programs, the reviews may be combined so that work on preparation of material need be done only once rather than duplicated. Alternatively, for a large institution with many different programs, the reviews may be spaced apart to minimize the amount of work required at any particular time. These arrangements will be discussed with institutions at the time when reviews are scheduled. The reports on reviews that have been undertaken will be made available to the members of later review panels so that they are aware of comments and recommendations that have been made.

## **1.4 Stages in Accreditation for New Institutions**

These notes apply to an institution responsible to the Ministry of Higher Education. For any institution that must be approved by, or is responsible to a different government agency, details of requirements must be obtained from the ministry or agency concerned. The following notes are a summary of the stages involved. Further details are provided in Chapter 1 of Part 3 of this Handbook.

### **1.4.1 Stages in Accreditation for New Private Higher Education Institutions (See Special Note Below)**

- The proposers of the institution apply to the Ministry of Higher Education for an Initial Licence.
- The proposers of the institution provide details of their proposal to the Ministry of Higher Education which assesses the plans in relation to the Ministry's regulations, and to the NCAAA which assesses the plans in relation to its quality assurance requirements. The plans include a Stage 1 plan showing what will be done in preparations before the first students are admitted, and the proposal to the NCAAA should include details of programs to be offered within the first three years. If the plans are acceptable the Ministry will indicate its approval and the NCAAA will give provisional accreditation. The proposers can then proceed with the Stage 1 preparations.
- When the stage 1 preparations have been completed, this will be checked and a final licence will be issued by the Minister enabling the institution to admit students and commence operations.
- Annual reports will be required to the Ministry and the NCAAA indicating progress in implementing the plans, and in the second year the NCAAA will conduct a site inspection before confirming the provisional accreditation.
- When the first group of students have completed their programs (normally in the fifth year) the institution will be required to complete a self study and will be reviewed by the NCAAA for full accreditation of the institution and of the initial programs.
- When full accreditation has been granted, there will be further reviews for reaccreditation of the institution and its programs every five years.

A proposal to establish a new private university must include plans to meet the special requirements of a university. The institution should start as a college, and if plans are approved, given the opportunity to move to university status as the requirements for a university are met.

### **Special Note:**

During the transition stage in the implementation of the system for quality assurance and accreditation special arrangements have been made between the Ministry of Higher Education and the National Commission for Academic Accreditation & Assessment for initial licensing and assessments for scholarship eligibility for students in private universities and colleges.

Under these transitional arrangements the MHE will evaluate proposals to establish private institutions considering both MHE requirements and NCAAA standards for accreditation. If approval is given the NCAAA will evaluate the institution and its programs in relation to quality requirements during its first and later years and recommend eligibility if its standards are met. The institution and its programs must be assessed for accreditation after the first group of students has graduated. Further details of these arrangements are described in Chapter 1 of Part 3 of this Handbook.

#### **1.4.2 Approval and Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions Based in Other Countries Wishing to Operate in Saudi Arabia.**

An international higher education institution wishing to operate in Saudi Arabia should follow the same steps as a private college described above. The institution would have to be established as a legal entity (e.g. a company) in Saudi Arabia (which should be done as part of the Stage 1 preparations noted above). Services and support systems provided by the “home” institution would be taken into account in judgments made by the Ministry and the NCAAA, but all requirements for a private institution in Saudi Arabia must be met.

If an international institution wishes to offer a program through a franchising agreement (or comparable process) with a Saudi Arabian institution, the Saudi Arabian institution must have a final licence whose scope of activities includes that program. The program must meet Saudi Arabian requirements for accreditation, and it must have been given provisional accreditation before it can be offered.

#### **1.4.3 Accreditation of New Public Universities**

##### **(a) New universities established from the beginning**

An initial license is not applicable because the Government has made a decision to establish the university. However planning and establishment of the new university should follow a parallel process to that for a new private college.

- Plans should be prepared for the institution that meet the requirements of the Ministry of Higher Education and the Higher Council of Education and these plans should be checked by the Ministry. The plans for the quality assurance arrangements in the institution and the programs to be offered within the first three years should be submitted to the NCAAA. If the plans meet the NCAAA requirements and the initial activities are considered satisfactory they will be approved by the Ministry and the NCAAA will give provisional accreditation for the institution and the programs to be offered in the first three years.
- When the Stage 1 preparations have been completed the institution will be authorized by the Minister to admit students and start operating.
- If plans are being implemented as proposed, the NCAAA will conduct a site visit in the second year and confirm the provisional accreditation.
- When the first group of students have graduated, the institution will conduct self studies and the NCAAA will carry out an assessment for full accreditation of the institution and the initial programs.
- When full accreditation has been granted, there will be further reviews for re-accreditation of the institution and its programs every five years.

(b) New university formed from existing public colleges or campuses

- The Committee responsible for planning for the establishment of the new university should prepare plans that meet the requirements of the Ministry of Higher Education and the Higher Council of Education and these plans should be checked by the Ministry. The Committee should conduct an initial self evaluation of programs and activities on the existing campus (es) and prepare plans for quality assurance for the new institution. These plans should meet the requirements of the NCAAA for a quality assurance system, and should also deal with any deficiencies found in the initial self evaluation. The NCAAA will assess those plans and if judged to be satisfactory will grant provisional accreditation. This should be done before the new institution begins to operate as a university under its own name.
- The NCAAA will conduct a site visit in the second year and if the plans are being implemented as proposed confirm the provisional accreditation.
- When the first group of students have graduated, the institution will conduct self studies and the NCAAA will carry out an assessment for full accreditation of the institution and the initial programs.
- When full accreditation has been granted, there will be further reviews for re-accreditation of the institution and its programs every five years.

#### 1.4.4 Accreditation of Existing Public Universities and Private Universities and Colleges

The NCAAA will consult with institutions and prepare a schedule for reviews for full accreditation. Reviews will normally be carried out for institutional accreditation as a first step, and followed with reviews for accreditation of programs at a later time, however in a small institution the two forms of accreditation may be carried out concurrently.

Reviews for accreditation will not be carried out before the first group of students have graduated from the institution or the program concerned.

When full accreditation has been granted, there will be further reviews for re-accreditation of the institution and its programs every five years.

### 1.5 Consistent Use of Titles for Awards and Types of Institutions

Postsecondary education programs are provided by many different types of institutions, some designed for different types of programs such as technical training or higher education, some involved in research and the delivery of postgraduate professional and research programs and some concentrating on excellence in teaching and support for students at the undergraduate level. In many countries there are also some specialized professional institutes offering high quality postgraduate professional education in specific fields for experienced practitioners in those professions, or in general areas of required expertise such as business administration.

There is potential for confusion and undermining of public confidence if titles of programs or names for categories of institutions are ambiguous or are used inconsistently. Consequently, the Commission will require conformity with standard terminology in accrediting programs and institutions.

The titles and expectations for learning outcomes for programs are specified in the *National Qualifications Framework*. Where the same or similar titles are used for programs in technical training and higher education, as in the case of diplomas and, one of the terms “technology”, “technological”, “of technology”, or “technical” should be used in the title for the technical qualification.

The levels of programs offered by institutions are as follows:

### **In Vocational and Technical Training**

**Vocational and Technical Institutes**—Vocational and technical training including short courses and courses of up to 3 years and up to level three in the *National Qualifications Framework*. Completion of these three year studies is regarded as equivalent to the completion of secondary education.

**Colleges or Institutes of Technology** (for male students) and **Higher Technical Institutes** (for female students) —Programs normally up to two years in length following completion of secondary education or equivalent, leading to a technical diploma at level 5 of the Vocational and Technical Training strand in the *National Qualifications Framework*. In one college of technology an additional program is offered for trainers in the vocational and technical training system at level 6 of the *National Qualifications Framework* leading to the degree of Bachelor of Technology Education.

### **Private Training Centers and Institutes**

Technical training is also offered in a variety of short courses and other training programs by private training centers and institutes up to level 4 of vocational and technical training strand in the *National Qualifications Framework*.

Programs up to level 3 of the vocational education strand of the *National Qualifications Framework* are not considered postsecondary, and those programs and the institutions that operate only at those levels will not be approved or accredited by the Commission. However, programs at levels 4, 5 and 6 are regarded as postsecondary, and they and the colleges of technology or private training institutes offering them will require accreditation by the Technical and Vocational Training Corporation (TVTC).

### **In Higher Education**

**Community Colleges**--Community Colleges are normally associated with public universities. Programs are offered up to the level of two year diplomas or associate degrees. Programs may be either higher education or technical in nature and must be clearly designated as such. Higher education programs are accredited by the Commission on the basis of its higher education standards and program requirements. Technical programs may be accredited by the Commission on the basis of its standards for technical programs. Preparatory or foundation courses which they sometimes offer are not considered postsecondary and do not carry credit towards a higher education award. However, the university is required to have effective systems for overseeing the quality of the programs offered.

**Higher Education Colleges**--Programs are normally offered up to level 3 of the higher education strand of the *National Qualifications Framework*, leading to a bachelor degree. Research activities by the colleges and staff who teach in them are encouraged but not required. However, teaching staff are expected to be involved in scholarly activities that ensure they remain up to date with emerging developments in their field of teaching and with associated pedagogy. In certain cases professional programs may be offered up to the level of masters degrees, subject to conditions relating to faculty expertise, resources and facilities.

**University Colleges** -- University colleges have a strong commitment to undergraduate teaching but also some of the requirements for a university, particularly involvement in research and high quality postgraduate programs at master's level (level 7 in the higher education strand of the *National Qualifications Framework*). The level of resources and research infrastructure must be adequate to support research by teaching staff and students in all the fields in which programs are offered. Postgraduate programs at master's degree level may relate primarily to professional fields.

**Professional Institutes**--Professional Institutes are sometimes established by professional societies or other international organizations and offer professional programs up to the level of a master's degree such as an

MBA, normally in a single field of study. Programs must meet all the accreditation requirements for the type of program concerned. The programs may be designed primarily for experienced members of the profession wishing to upgrade their qualifications through full time or part time study.

**Universities**--Programs may be offered up to the level of doctorates including research and professional degree programs. There are minimum requirements for breadth of study, research activity and provision of resources in support of postgraduate teaching and research that are set out in Chapter 2 of Part 1 in this Handbook and the *Standards for Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions*.

## **1.6 Transition to the System for Accreditation and Quality Assurance**

The Commission wishes to move as rapidly as possible to implement the new system for accreditation and quality assurance. Information about standards and procedures will be made generally available and all institutions will be encouraged to introduce internal quality assurance processes as soon as possible. To assist them as they do so, opportunities will be provided for training and advice, and reference documents will be made available.

## **1.7 Misrepresentations of the Status of an Institution or of Approvals or Accreditation**

Community confidence in the system of postsecondary education and training requires accurate and honest representation about institutions and programs and their accreditation status. Any misrepresentation by or on behalf of an institution will be regarded as a serious offence.

Examples include advertising or referring to a program or an institution as fully accredited when it has been provisionally accredited, using the term university in the title of an institution when it has been licensed as a college or an institute, claiming or implying that a program is accredited by the Commission when this is not the case, or wrongly claiming that a program offering is within the scope of an institution's license. Misrepresentations such as these will lead to cancellation by the Commission of accreditation of the program concerned and of the institution, as well as incurring severe penalties from the responsible Ministry.

It is possible that an institution or a program may be accredited by an international organization outside Saudi Arabia, but not by the Commission in Saudi Arabia. This could occur for a variety of reasons including that the program (or institution) is of good quality but has not yet been considered by the Commission for accreditation, or that different standards have been applied and the institution or program would not meet the Commission's standards. To protect the community from possible misrepresentation about the quality of an institution or program, reference to that accreditation can only be made in descriptive information or promotional literature if two conditions are met. (i) Any reference to accreditation by another agency must clearly indicate the organization from which accreditation has been obtained. It must not say simply that it is or has been accredited which could imply that accreditation has been granted by the official accrediting agency in Saudi Arabia (the NCAAA) and (ii) The accrediting agency is one that is officially recognized by the government in the country where it is established and is endorsed by the Commission.

# CHAPTER 2

## STANDARDS FOR ACCREDITATION AND QUALITY ASSURANCE

### 2.1 Standards for Institutions and Standards for Programs

The standards to be applied in judgments about accreditation are based on what are generally considered good practices in postsecondary institutions. These “good practices” must be explained so that institutions can refer to them in their internal quality processes and external reviewers can use them as criteria in their evaluations. The practices are summarized in eleven broad statements of standards and described in two documents, *Standards for Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education Institutions*, and *Standards for Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Higher Education Programs*. The standards are also used with two companion documents prepared to help institutions and those responsible for the delivery of programs to evaluate their performance in relation to the standards. These are the *Self Evaluation Scales for Higher Education Institutions*, and the *Self Evaluation Scales for Higher Education Programs*.

The eleven broad standards apply to both institutions and programs though there are differences in how they are applied for these different kinds of evaluation. The standards are presented in five groups:

- a) **Institutional Context**
  - 1) Mission and Objectives
  - 2) Governance and Administration
  - 3) Management of Quality Assurance and Improvement
  
- b) **Quality of Learning and Teaching**
  - 4) Learning and Teaching
  
- c) **Support for Student Learning**
  - 5) Student Administration and Support Services
  - 6) Learning Resources
  
- d) **Supporting Infrastructure**
  - 7) Facilities and Equipment
  - 8) Financial Planning and Management
  - 9) Employment Processes
  
- e) **Community Contributions**
  - 10) Research
  - 11) Institutional Relationships with the Community

In evaluations for institutional accreditation, performance in relation to all of these areas is considered for the institution as a whole including an overview of programs across the institution. For a program evaluation each standard is considered from the perspective of the particular program under review.

Some activities of an institution affect individual programs in only a very indirect way; for example, the quality of processes followed by a university council. These are not included in a program evaluation. However some activities administered centrally in an institution do have a major impact on programs: for example, the appointment of staff, or the effectiveness of a central library. These are considered in a program evaluation as they affect the particular program being evaluated, even though they are not controlled by the program’s managers.

The standards are applicable to all institutions, large and small, public and private. However, the way tasks are carried out will vary widely, reflecting the size, complexity, and resources available to an institution, the environment in which it is operating, and the priorities established in its mission.

The Commission has not established weightings for the different areas of activity in making evaluations since the relative importance can vary for different kinds of institutions and the circumstances in which they operate. For example, a university with a major commitment to research would be expected to give significant emphasis to research and strategies to develop research capacity. However, a college with undergraduate programs would be expected to have limited involvement in research or perhaps none at all, though its teaching staff would be expected to engage in scholarly activities that keep them up to date with developments in their field.

Despite these variations it is expected that the standard for learning and teaching, with particular emphasis on learning outcomes, will always be regarded as of primary importance.

Programs must lead to standards of student achievement that are consistent with the requirements of the *National Qualifications Framework*, a document that describes in general terms the increasing levels of knowledge and skills required for higher qualifications.

The main elements in the *Framework* are:

**Levels-** Levels numbered and linked to qualification titles to describe the increasing intellectual demand and complexity of learning expected as students progress to higher academic awards.

- **Credits** - Points allocated to describe the amount of work or volume of learning expected for an academic award or units or other components of a program.
- **Domains of Learning**-The broad categories of types of learning outcomes that a program is intended to develop.

The qualification titles and levels are consistent with current practice in the Kingdom ranging from a diploma/associate degree after a minimum of 60 credit hours (two years of postsecondary study) to a doctorate. Normal full time load for a student is 15 credit hours in one semester but up to 18 may be acceptable.

The domains of learning describe broad categories of learning outcomes in four broad areas with a fifth, psychomotor skills, added in particular fields of study where this kind of learning is important. The domains are:

- **knowledge**, the ability to recall, understand, and present information, including:
  - knowledge of specific facts,
  - knowledge of concepts, principles and theories, and
  - knowledge of procedures.
- **cognitive skills**, the ability to:
  - apply conceptual understanding of concepts, principles, theories and
  - apply procedures involved in critical thinking and creative problem solving, both when asked to do so, and when faced with unanticipated new situations.
- **interpersonal skills and responsibility**, including the ability to:
  - take responsibility for their own learning and continuing personal and professional development,
  - work effectively in groups and exercise leadership when appropriate,
  - act responsibly in personal and professional relationships,
  - act ethically and consistently with high moral standards in personal and public forums.
- **communication, information technology and numerical skills**, including the ability to:
  - communicate effectively in oral and written form,
  - use information and communications technology, and
  - use basic mathematical and statistical techniques.
- **Psychomotor skills** involving manual dexterity that are extremely important in some fields of study. For example, very high levels of psychomotor skills are required for a surgeon, an artist, or a musician.

The *National Qualifications Framework* includes broad general descriptions of the level of mastery expected in each of these domains for each qualifications level.

The standard for learning and teaching requires that students learn the knowledge and skills expected in academic disciplines or required for professional practice in fields for which they are being prepared. To meet this requirement institutions, should consider in their planning the requirements of any relevant professional body or specialist accreditor in the field, as well as any special requirements relating to circumstances in Saudi Arabia.

Judgments about quality should involve comparisons with past performance (to assess improvement) or with other institutions to make judgments about quality and relative levels of performance. The objective of the system in Saudi Arabia is that quality will be at least equivalent to that found in good quality international institutions. This will require international comparisons on at least some important matters. However, points of comparison to establish benchmarks of performance must be appropriate for the institution concerned and its mission and circumstances.

Part 2 of this Handbook includes details of what should be included in a number of planning documents and reports. In attachments to that Handbook, templates have been provided to assist those responsible for the preparation of these documents. These templates are designed to provide descriptions of plans and reports on activities, with summaries of evidence about performance in relation to the standards.

In the vocational and technical training strand of the *National Qualifications Framework*, six domains of learning have been identified. These differ to some extent from the domains in higher education, reflecting the different orientation of programs in that sector including the key requirement to develop a number of specific skills required for employment. As for higher education, achieving the required standards of learning in these domains is extremely important and this will require use of teaching strategies appropriate for the type of learning involved. Considerations for program accreditation will include careful consideration of the teaching strategies used to achieve those outcomes, the ways that learning is assessed, the processes for verifying the quality of learning outcomes and the extent to which employment requirements are met.

The ultimate objective of any program is that what is learned will be used effectively after graduation. This cannot be properly fully determined through student assessments while students are still enrolled. Because of this, the evaluation of programs is expected to include at least some evidence that what is learned is applied appropriately in personal and professional lives after graduation. This will call for evidence based on surveys or other mechanisms to assess whether the required long term learning outcomes have been achieved.

## **2.2 Using Evidence for Evaluations of Quality**

Judgments about quality should be based on evidence rather than relying on reputations or general impressions. Evidence can be anything that informs a decision. In developing a system of quality assurance it is possible to plan in advance for the kind of evidence that will be provided.

While a variety of forms of evidence can be used, it is necessary to decide on at least some specific performance indicators. For example, a form of evidence about the quality of teaching might be the opinions of students. A performance indicator based on student opinions would need to be quantified in some standard form such as the average rating of quality of teaching on a standard scale by students in a class. Other indicators might be the completion and passing rates of students in courses (after independent verification of the standards required), or ratings of the value of a course or program in a survey of graduates.

Performance indicators will also be used by external reviewers in an external review. However, when making judgments about quality other information may come to notice, and this should also be taken into account. Part of the role of an external reviewer is to verify the conclusions made by an institution and this often involves consideration of evidence that goes beyond the performance indicators that have been selected by the institution.

In addition to the indicators that an institution selects for its own evaluations and reports, which should reflect its own mission, priorities and organizational arrangements, the Commission will from time to time identify a limited number of key performance indicators (KPIs) that should be used in all institutions or in particular groups of institutions. Data on those KPIs will be required in the self-study reports considered in external reviews....

## 2.3 Summary of Standards, Forms of Evidence, and Possible Indicators

A summary of the eleven general standards, some comments on kinds of evidence that could be considered and possible performance indicators based on this evidence is provided below. The comments on evidence and indicators presented here are intended to be illustrative. Part of the quality planning for an institution or a program is to identify evidence and indicators that will be used for that institution or program for quality assurance purposes.

It should also be noted that in these examples, the standards for an institution offering face-to-face or on-campus instruction have been used. For an institution offering distance education programs some different forms of evidence and indicators would be required.

### A. Institutional Context

#### Standard 1: Mission Goals and Objectives

#### Standard 1: Mission Goals and Objectives

Institutional Standard	Program Standard
The institution's mission statement must clearly and appropriately define its principal purposes and priorities, and be influential in guiding planning and action within the institution.	The mission of the program must be consistent with that for the institution and apply that mission to the particular goals and requirements of the program concerned. It must clearly and appropriately define the program's principal purposes and priorities and be influential in guiding planning and action.
Specific requirements for an institution relating to Standard 1 are specified under the headings of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.1 Appropriateness of the Mission</li> <li>1.2 Usefulness of the Mission Statement</li> <li>1.3 Development and Review of the Mission</li> <li>1.4 Use Made of the Mission</li> <li>1.5 Relationship Between Mission, Goals and Objectives</li> </ul>	Specific requirements for a particular program relating to Standard 1 are specified under the headings of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.1 Appropriateness of the Mission</li> <li>1.2 Usefulness of the Mission Statement</li> <li>1.3 Development and Review of the Mission</li> <li>1.4 Use Made of the Mission</li> <li>1.5 Relationship Between Mission, Goals and Objectives</li> </ul>

### Evidence and Performance Indicators

Evidence about the quality of the mission could be obtained from examination of the mission statement itself, copies of papers proposing the mission or modifications to it, interviews with staff and students to find out how well it is known and supported, and consideration of other reports, proposals and statements to determine the extent to which the mission is used as a basis for decisions. Indicators that could be used include responses to questions on surveys to determine how well the mission is known and supported, or the proportion of policy decisions that refer to the mission among criteria for decision-making.

#### Standard 2: Governance and Administration

#### Standard 2 Program Administration

Institutional Standard	Program Standard
The governing body must provide effective leadership in the interests of the institution as a whole and its clients, through policy development and processes for accountability. Senior administrators must lead the activities of the institution effectively within a clearly defined governance structure. Their activities must be consistent with high standards of integrity and ethical practice. If there are separate sections for male and female student's resources must be comparable in both sections, there must be effective communication between them, and full	Program administration must reflect an appropriate balance between accountability to senior management and the governing board of the institution, and flexibility to meet the specific requirements of the program concerned. Planning processes must involve stakeholders (e.g. students, professional bodies, industry representatives, teaching staff) in establishing goals and objectives and reviewing and responding to results achieved. If a program is offered in sections for male and female students resources for the program must be comparable in both sections and there must be

involvement in planning and decision making processes. Planning and management must occur within a framework of sound policies and regulations that ensure financial and administrative accountability and provide an appropriate balance between coordinated planning and local initiative.	effective communication between them and equitable involvement in planning processes. The quality of delivery of courses and the program as a whole must be regularly monitored with adjustments made promptly in response to feedback and developments in the external environment affecting the program.
Specific requirements for an institution relating to Standard 2 are specified under the headings of:  2.1 Governing Body 2.2 Leadership 2.3 Planning Processes; 2.4 Relationship Between Sections for Male and Female Students 2.5 Integrity 2.6 Internal Policies and Regulations 2.7 Organizational Climate 2.8 Associated Companies and Controlled Entities.	Specific requirements for a particular program relating to Standard 2 are specified under the headings of:  2.1 Leadership 2.2 Planning Processes 2.3 Relationship Between Sections for Male and Female Students 2.4 Integrity 2.5 Internal Policies and Regulations

### Evidence and Performance Indicators

Evidence about the quality of governance and administration can be obtained from the terms of reference for the governing body and major committees, samples of documents recommending decisions by these bodies, and evidence of their self-assessment. Evidence about the quality of policy and regulations, risk assessment analyses or oversight of controlled entities can be obtained by examination of relevant documents and discussions with faculty and staff who might be expected to be aware their contents. Organizational climate can be assessed by survey results or discussion with staff and students.

Indicators could be at least partly based on responses to surveys by teaching and other staff and students, graduates, employers, and professional bodies.

### Standard 3: Management of Quality Assurance and Improvement

### Standard 3. Management of Program Quality Assurance

Institutional Standard	Program Standard
Quality assurance processes must involve all sections of the institution and be effectively integrated into normal planning and administrative processes. Criteria for assessment of quality must include inputs, processes, and outcomes with a particular focus on outcomes. Processes must be established to ensure that teaching and other staff and students are committed to improvement and regularly evaluate their own performance. Quality must be assessed by reference to evidence and include consideration of data that reports on specific performance indicators and challenging external benchmarks. Specific requirements in the institution's quality assurance system should be periodically reviewed to ensure that unnecessary requirements are not included and that data that is provided is actually used in an effective way.	Teaching and other staff involved in the program must be committed to improving both their own performance and the quality of the program as a whole. Regular evaluations of quality must be undertaken within each course based on valid evidence and appropriate benchmarks, and plans for improvement made and implemented. Quality must be assessed by reference to evidence and include consideration of data that reports on specific performance indicators and challenging external benchmarks. Central importance must be attached to student learning outcomes with each course contributing to the achievement of overall program objectives.
Specific requirements for an institution relating to Standard 3 are specified under the headings of:  3.1 Institutional Commitment to Quality Improvement 3.2 Scope of Quality Assurance Processes	Specific requirements for a particular program relating to Standard 3 are specified under the headings of:  3.1 Commitment to Quality Improvement in the Program

3.3 Administration of Quality Assurance Processes	3.2 Scope of Quality Assurance Processes
3.4 Use of Performance Indicators and Benchmarks	3.3 Administration of Quality Assurance Processes
3.5 Independent Verification of Evaluations	3.4 Use of Performance Indicators and Benchmarks
	3.5 Independent Verification of Evaluations

### Evidence and Performance Indicators

Evidence about the quality of management of quality assurance processes can be obtained by looking at the outcomes of those processes, which include progressive improvement in learning outcomes and aspects of the planning and administration of the institution.

Evidence about the processes followed can be obtained from surveys or discussions with staff or students. Other evidence can be gained from the quality of reports on performance by units within the institution, including whether they are evidence-based and appropriately benchmarked in relation to external standards. Information about the quality of services provided by a quality center can be obtained from rates of participation in, and reports on the effectiveness of professional development programs aimed at teaching methodology, quality improvement, consistency and appropriateness of quality-related documents, reports throughout the institution, and assessments of the value and effectiveness of quality assurance processes by students, staff, and senior administrators. The regular use of appropriate key performance indicators and benchmarks (including benchmarks relating to other institutions are particularly important.

The key performance indicators identified by the Commission should be used, but additional indicators linked to the particular mission of the institution and the program should also be used when appropriate. When goals and objectives are established for the development and improvement of the program appropriate performance indicators should be identified as part of that planning process

## B. Quality of Learning and Teaching

### Standard 4: Learning and Teaching

Institutional Standard	Program Standard
<p>The institution must have an effective system for ensuring that all programs meet high standards of learning and teaching through initial approvals, monitoring of performance, and provision of institution-wide support services. In all programs student learning outcomes must be clearly specified, consistent with the National Qualifications Framework and (for professional programs) requirements for employment or professional practice. Standards of learning must be accessed through appropriate processes and benchmarked against demanding and relevant external reference points. Teaching staff must be appropriately qualified and experienced for their particular teaching responsibilities, use teaching strategies suitable for different kinds of learning outcomes, and participate in activities to improve their teaching effectiveness. Teaching quality and the effectiveness of programs must be evaluated through student assessments and graduate and employer surveys, with feedback used as a basis for plans for improvement. If programs are offered in different sections for male and female students required standards must be the same, equivalent resources must be provided, and evaluations must include data for each section.</p>	<p>Student learning outcomes must be clearly specified, consistent with the National Qualifications Framework and requirements for employment or professional practice. Standards of learning must be accessed through appropriate processes and benchmarked against demanding and relevant external reference points. Teaching staff must be appropriately qualified and experienced for their particular teaching responsibilities, use teaching strategies suitable for different kinds of learning outcomes, and participate in activities to improve their teaching effectiveness. Teaching quality and the effectiveness of programs must be evaluated through student assessments and graduate and employer surveys, with feedback used as a basis for plans for improvement. If the program is offered in different sections for male and female students required standards must be the same, equivalent resources provided, and evaluations must include data for each section.</p>

<p>Specific requirements for an institution relating to Standard 4 are specified under the headings of:</p> <p>4.1 Institutional Oversight of Quality of Learning and Teaching</p> <p>4.2 Student Learning Outcomes</p> <p>4.3 Program Development Processes</p> <p>4.4 Program Evaluation and Review Processes</p> <p>4.5 Student Assessment</p> <p>4.6 Educational Assistance for Students</p> <p>4.7 Quality of Teaching</p> <p>4.8 Support for Improvements in Quality of Teaching</p> <p>4.9 Qualifications and Experience of Teaching Staff</p> <p>4.10 Field Experience Activities</p> <p>4.11 Partnership Arrangements with Other Institutions</p>	<p>Specific requirements for a particular program relating to Standard 4 are specified under the headings of:</p> <p>4.1 Student Learning Outcomes</p> <p>4.2 Program Development Processes</p> <p>4.3 Program Evaluation and Review Processes</p> <p>4.4 Student Assessment</p> <p>4.5 Educational Assistance for Students</p> <p>4.6 Quality of Teaching</p> <p>4.7 Support for Improvements in Quality of Teaching</p> <p>4.8 Qualifications and Experience of Teaching Staff</p> <p>4.9 Field Experience Activities</p> <p>4.10 Partnership Arrangements with Other Institutions</p>
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### Evidence and Performance Indicators

Evidence about the quality of learning and teaching may be obtained from ratings by students, graduates, and employers of the quality of programs, statistics on course and program completions and employment outcomes, ratios of students to faculty, and statistics on faculty qualifications. Important sources of evidence might include independent expert advice on the appropriateness of teaching strategies and assessments for the different domains of learning in the *National Qualifications Framework*. Evidence should be available about the results of benchmarking standards of learning outcomes in relation to appropriate external reference points. This could be done in several different ways including check marking of samples of students' work and independent assessments of the standards of test questions and students' responses.

The selection of performance indicators for quality of learning and teaching requires the use of data in a form that can be quantified and used in comparisons across the institution, with other institutions, and with past performance.

### C. Support for Student Learning

#### Standard 5: Student Administration and Support Services

Institutional Standard	Program Standard
<p>Administration of admissions and student record systems must be reliable and responsive, with confidentiality of records maintained in keeping with stated policies. Students' rights and responsibilities must be clearly defined and understood, with transparent and fair procedures available for discipline and appeals. Mechanisms for academic advice, counselling, and support services must be accessible and responsive to student needs. Support services for students must go beyond formal academic requirements and include extracurricular provisions for religious, cultural, sporting, and other activities relevant to the needs of the student body.</p>	<p>Admission processes must be efficient, fair, and responsive to the needs of students entering the program. Clear information about program requirements and criteria for admission and program completion must be readily available for prospective students and when required at later stages during the program. Mechanisms for student appeals and dispute resolution must be clearly described, made known, and fairly administered. Career advice must be provided in relation to occupations related to the fields of study dealt with in the program.</p>
<p>Specific requirements for an institution relating to Standard 5 are specified under the headings of:</p> <p>5.1 Student Admissions</p> <p>5.2 Student Records</p> <p>5.3 Student Management</p> <p>5.4 Planning and Evaluation of Student Services</p> <p>5.5 Medical and Counselling Services</p> <p>5.6 Extra Curricular Activities for Students</p>	<p>Specific requirements for a particular program relating to Standard 5 are specified under the headings of:</p> <p>5.1 Student Admissions</p> <p>5.2 Student Records</p> <p>5.3 Student Management</p> <p>5.4 Student Advising and Counselling Services</p>

**Evidence and Performance Indicators**

Evidence about the quality of student administration and support services can be obtained from surveys of students about the quality and responsiveness of services provided, usage rates for particular services, response times for communicating decisions on admissions, and the frequency and results of discipline procedures. Performance indicators can be based directly on this information, but additional evidence in a review might include such things as visits to facilities and discussions with students and staff.

**Standard 6: Learning Resources**

<b>Institutional Standard</b>	<b>Program Standard</b>
Learning resources including libraries and provisions for access to electronic and other reference material must be planned to meet the particular requirements of the institution’s programs and provided at an adequate level. Library and associated IT facilities must be accessible at times to support independent learning, with assistance provided in finding material required. Facilities must be provided for individual and group study in an environment conducive to effective investigations and research. The services must be evaluated and should be improved in response to systematic feedback from teaching staff and students.	Learning resource materials and associated services must be adequate for the requirements of the program and the courses offered within it and accessible when required for students in the program. Information about requirements must be made available by teaching staff in sufficient time for necessary provisions to be made for resources required, and staff and students must be involved in evaluations of what is provided. Specific requirements for reference material and on-line data sources and for computer terminals and assistance in using this equipment will vary according to the nature of the program and the approach to teaching.
Specific requirements for an institution relating to Standard 6 are specified under the headings of: 6.1 Planning and Evaluation 6.2 Organization 6.3 Support for Users 6.4 Resources and Facilities	Specific requirements for a particular program relating to Standard 6 are specified under the headings of: 6.1 Planning and Evaluation 6.2 Organization 6.3 Support for Users 6.4 Resources and Facilities

**Evidence and Performance Indicators**

Evidence about the quality of the provision of learning resources and performance indicators derived from this evidence can be obtained from user satisfaction surveys, success rates for students in accessing course reference material, documents describing processes for identifying and responding to course requirements, and details of times when facilities are available for use by students and faculty. Information should be available about the provision of orientation programs for new students and responsiveness to requests from groups of stakeholders. The institution should be able to provide information about comparisons of the level of provision through books, periodicals, and web-based resources with comparable institutions offering similar programs. An appropriate performance indicator would be whether that level of provision was equalled or exceeded.

**D. Supporting Infrastructure**

**Standard 7: Facilities and Equipment**

<b>Institutional Standard</b>	<b>Program Standard</b>
Facilities must be designed or adapted to meet the particular requirements for teaching and learning in the programs offered by the institution, and offer a safe and healthy environment for high quality education. Use of facilities must be monitored and user surveys used to assist in planning for improvement. Adequate provision must be made for classrooms and laboratories, use of computer technology and research equipment by	Adequate facilities and equipment must be available for the teaching and learning requirements of the program. Use of facilities and equipment should be monitored and regular assessments of adequacy made through consultations with teaching and other staff, and students.

teaching staff and students and appropriate provision made for services such as food services, extracurricular activities, and where relevant, student accommodation.	
Specific requirements for an institution relating to Standard 7 are specified under the headings of: 7.1 Policy and Planning 7.2 Quality and Adequacy of Facilities and Equipment 7.3 Management and Administration of Facilities and Equipment 7.4 Information Technology 7.5 Student Residences	Specific requirements for a particular program relating to Standard 7 are specified under the headings of: 7.1 Policy and Planning 7.2 Quality and Adequacy of Facilities and Equipment 7.3 Management and Administration of Facilities and Equipment 7.4 Information Technology

### Evidence and Performance Indicators

Evidence about the quality of provision of facilities and equipment can be obtained from planning documents, user satisfaction surveys, reports on responses to those surveys, comparisons of provision with comparable institutions offering similar programs, and direct observations by independent evaluators.

Assessment of the condition of facilities and equipment and maintenance schedules should provide information about the quality and maintenance of facilities and major equipment. Regulations and codes of practice relating to the use of facilities and high value equipment provide evidence of sound management practices and security arrangements. Performance indicators could include such things as ratings on surveys of user satisfaction, statistics on equipment breakdowns, repair and upgrade schedules, and comparisons of provision to comparable institutions.

### Standard 8: Financial Planning and Management

<b>Institutional Standard</b>	<b>Program Standard</b>
Financial resources must be adequate for the programs and services offered and efficiently managed in keeping with program requirements and institutional priorities. Budgetary processes should allow for long term planning over at least a three year period. Effective systems must be used for budgeting and for financial delegations and accountability providing flexibility for managers at different levels in the institution combined with institutional oversight and effective risk management.	Financial resources must be sufficient for the effective delivery of the program. Program requirements must be made known sufficiently far in advance to be considered in institutional budgeting. Budgetary processes should allow for long term planning over at least a three year period. Sufficient flexibility must be provided for effective management and responses to unexpected events and this flexibility must be combined with appropriate accountability and reporting mechanisms.
Specific requirements for an institution relating to Standard 8 are specified under the headings of: 8.1 Financial Planning 8.2 Financial Management 8.3 Auditing and Risk Management	Specific requirements for a particular program relating to Standard 8 are specified under the headings of: 8.1 Financial Planning and Budgeting 8.2 Financial Management

### Evidence

Evidence about the quality of financial planning and management can be obtained from budget statements and audit reports together with relevant expenditure ratios; such as, staff and faculty salaries to total costs, and trends in expenditure on items such as student services, learning resources, and equipment. Reports on risk assessment should be available together with strategies for risk minimization. If the institution is involved in commercial activities, the short and long term total financial impact should be identified and evaluated in relation to the institution's mission and priorities. Performance indicators in this area commonly rely, to a considerable extent, on ratios of categories of expenditure in comparison to other institutions.

## Standard 9: Employment Processes

Institutional Standard	Program Standard
Teaching and other staff must have the qualifications and experience for effective exercise of their responsibilities. Professional development strategies must be followed to ensure continuing improvement in the expertise of teaching and other staff. Performance of all teaching and other staff must be periodically evaluated, with outstanding performance recognized and support provided for improvement when required. Effective, fair, and transparent processes must be available for the resolution of conflicts and disputes involving teaching or other staff. (Note: Teaching staff refers to all staff with responsibility for teaching classes including full and part time staff, faculty, lecturers, and teaching assistants)	Teaching staff must have the knowledge and experience needed for their particular teaching or other responsibilities and their qualifications and experience must be verified before appointment. New teaching staff must be thoroughly briefed about the program and their responsibilities before they begin. Performance of all teaching and other staff must be periodically evaluated, with outstanding performance recognized and support provided for professional development and improvement in teaching skills.
Specific requirements for an institution as a whole relating to Standard 9 are specified under the headings of: 9.1 Policy and Administration 9.2 Recruitment 9.3 Personal and Career Development 9.4 Discipline, Complaints and Dispute Resolution	Specific requirements for a particular program relating to Standard 9 are specified under the headings of: 9.1 Recruitment 9.2 Personal and Career Development

### Evidence and Performance Indicators

Evidence about quality of faculty and staff employment processes can be obtained from documents setting out employment and promotion processes and criteria, descriptions of orientation programs for new faculty and staff, and procedures for performance evaluation and support for improvement. Records of assessments of quality of teaching, and faculty and staff participation in professional development activities relevant to their employment can provide valuable evidence, particularly when they include ratios of participation and assessments of the value of those activities by the participants. Data on faculty turnover in parts of the institution can be used to indicate stability or instability in staffing. Regulations on dispute resolution combined with records of the incidence and outcomes of disputes can provide evidence about the effectiveness of those processes.

Performance indicators almost always include student/faculty ratios and proportions of faculty with levels of qualifications. However, a number of other performance indicators that can also be readily quantified are important such as participation ratios in professional development and scholarly activities. Others include; rates of turnover of faculty and staff, and incidence of disputes might be selected if there are problems in the institution that need to be monitored.

## Standard 10: Research

Institutional Standard	Program Standard
The institution should develop a research strategy consistent with its nature (e.g. as a university with research obligations or as an undergraduate college) and its mission. All staff teaching higher education programs must be involved in sufficient appropriate scholarly activities to ensure they remain up to date with developments in their field, and those developments should be reflected in their teaching. Staff teaching in postgraduate	A research strategy that is consistent with the nature and mission of the institution should be developed. All staff teaching higher education programs must be involved in sufficient appropriate scholarly activities to ensure they remain up to date with developments in their field, and those developments should be reflected in their teaching. Staff teaching in postgraduate programs or supervising higher degree research students must be actively involved in research in their

<p>programs or supervising higher degree research students must be actively involved in research in their field. Adequate facilities and equipment must be available to support the research activities of teaching staff and post-graduate students to meet these requirements. In universities and other institutions with research responsibility, teaching staff must be encouraged to pursue research interests and to publish the results of that research. Their research contributions must be recognized and reflected in evaluation and promotion criteria. The research output of the institution must be monitored and reported, and benchmarked against that of other similar institutions. Clear and equitable policies must be established for ownership and commercialization of intellectual property.</p>	<p>field. Adequate facilities and equipment must be available to support the research activities of teaching staff and post-graduate students to meet these requirements in areas relevant to the program. Staff research contributions must be recognized and reflected in evaluation and promotion criteria.</p>
<p>Specific requirements for an institution as a whole relating to Standard 10 are specified under the headings of:  10.1 Institutional Research Policies  10.2 Teaching Staff and Student Involvement in Research  10.3 Commercialization of Research  10.4 Research Facilities and Equipment.</p>	<p>Specific requirements for a particular program relating to Standard 10 are specified under the headings of:  10.1 Teaching Staff and Student Involvement in Research  10.2 Research Facilities and Equipment</p>

**Evidence and Performance Indicators**

Evidence about the institution’s research strategies can be obtained from documents; such as, a research development plan, faculty evaluation and promotion criteria, policies on commercialization of research, ownership of intellectual property, and the extent of cooperation with industry and other institutions. Further evidence can be obtained by consideration of agreements for cooperative research or shared use of major equipment items. Faculty and student surveys can provide evidence about the adequacy of provisions for research facilities and equipment.

Performance indicators for research are commonly based on statistics on the volume of research publications per faculty member, the proportions of research-active faculty, and numbers of research citations, compared to those of other comparable institutions. Although it may be more difficult to quantify, institutions with a commitment to community service or research contributions may wish to include indicators of the extent to which research and scholarly activities are translated into applications within the academic or professional field concerned.

**Standard 11: Relationships with the Community**

<b>Institutional Standard</b>	<b>Program Standard</b>
<p>Contributing to the community must be recognized as an important institutional responsibility. Facilities and services must be made available to assist with community developments. Teaching and other staff must be encouraged to be involved in the community and information about the institution and its activities made known to the community through public media and other appropriate mechanisms. Community perceptions of the institution must be monitored and appropriate strategies adopted to improve understanding and enhance its reputation.</p>	<p>Significant and appropriate contributions should be made to the community in which the institution is established drawing on the knowledge and experience of staff and the needs of the community for that expertise. Community contributions should include both activities initiated and carried out by individuals and more formal programs of assistance arranged by the institution or by program administrators. Activities should be documented and made known in the institution and the community, and staff contributions appropriately recognized within the institution.</p>
<p>Specific requirements for an institution relating to</p>	<p>Specific requirements for a program relating to</p>

Standard 4 are specified under the headings of:  11.1 Institutional Policies on Community Relationships 11.2 Interactions With the Community 11.3 Institutional Reputation	Standard 11 are specified under the headings of:  11.1 Policies on Community Relationships 11.2 Interactions With the Community
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### **Evidence and Performance Indicators**

Evidence about quality of community relationships can be obtained from documents describing policies on service to the community, criteria for faculty evaluation that include community contributions, and guidelines and processes for community media releases, and other public comments on behalf of the institution. Reports on community relationships that include such matters as community use of institutional facilities, participation of staff on community committees or development projects, and interactions with schools and other agencies can provide relevant information. Community views about the quality of the institution and its standing as a respected member of the community can be obtained from surveys.

A number of these forms of evidence include ratings that can be used directly as performance indicators. However, in this particular area, the mission of the institution and the community within which it operates are important in deciding what aspects of performance should be closely monitored.

## **2.4 Requirements for a University**

The Ministry of Higher Education has established minimum requirements for a private institution to be designated as a university. These Ministry requirements must be met for such an institution to be considered by the Commission for accreditation.

However, there are additional requirements for the *accreditation* of a university. For example, the Ministry requirements include a minimum of three colleges. For *accreditation* there must be programs in at least three fields of study.

The Commission requirements relate to the breadth of program offerings, the levels of programs offered, the extent of involvement in research, the existence of sustained scholarly activity by teaching staff, and the size of an institution considered necessary to sustain these activities at a viable level.

The requirements stated here are appropriate for a university with a mission that focuses on teaching rather than research and should be considered as a minimum desirable. It is expected that an established university with commitment in its mission to be a research university and to achieve international ranking would have substantially higher levels of research activity and postgraduate research than are stated here and would benchmark its performance in research and postgraduate studies against highly regarded international universities.

### **Minimum specific requirements are:**

#### **Breadth of Programs**

Programs offered in at least three broad fields of learning<sup>1</sup> with a minimum of 5% of the institution's students enrolled in programs in each of the three fields.

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<sup>1</sup>For the purposes of this requirement the following are considered broad fields of learning. 1. *Fine and Performing Arts*, 2. *Humanities and Religious Studies*, 3. *Education*, 4. *Social Sciences*, 5. *Business and Management*, 6. *Law*, 7. *Science*, 8. *Computer Science*, 9. *Engineering Manufacturing and Construction*, 10. *Agriculture and Related Studies*, 11. *Health Sciences*, 12. *Personal and Community Services (This classification is subject to periodic review)*

### **Level of Programs Offered**

Undergraduate programs should be provided in at least three fields of study. At postgraduate levels, programs should be offered up to the level of doctorates in at least one of those fields and at least master's degrees in a second. At least 5 % of students must be enrolled in higher degree programs. At least 2.5% should be enrolled in research degrees.

### **Involvement in Research**

At least 2.5% of the annual operating budget of the institution (excluding student stipends) should be spent on research or the support of research. This amount can include special research grants, the institution's share of joint research and development projects, and the provision of support for specialized research equipment for staff and postgraduate student research. However, it does not include funding for the teaching of postgraduate research other programs, or general program administration.

### **Sustained Scholarly Activity**

Teaching faculty at all levels in the institution should be involved in scholarly activities that ensure familiarity with the latest developments in their field and include exposure to those developments in their teaching.– Staff who are teaching at postgraduate level are expected to be qualified at the doctoral level and to be active scholars and researchers, as evidenced by recent refereed publications. Where professional programs are offered at postgraduate level, an alternative to doctoral qualifications for an appropriate proportion of teaching faculty may be extensive, successful, and recent experience in the relevant field of study.

### **Size of Institution**

The minimum size normally required for a university actively involved in research and postgraduate study to be economically viable expressed in terms of student enrollments is 2000 full time equivalent students in higher education award programs. This number does not include students enrolled in foundation or preparatory programs, or in other non-award courses. Depending on the level of funding available in a private university, a smaller number could be demonstrated to be sufficient.

### **Evidence and Performance Indicators**

Evidence about the quality of a university can be obtained from a range of sources relating to the special requirements for such an institution. General information should include matters relevant to all higher education institutions; such as, statistical data on enrollments, progression rates, graduation rates, responses to surveys of graduates and employers compared to other institutions. For a university, performance indicators should include information on the extent and impact of scholarship and research through numbers of publications and citations in refereed research journals, rates of publication of postgraduate student research, funds provided for research, and numbers of patents. For an established university, a useful source of evidence would be inclusion and position in international rankings of universities.

## **2.5 Interim Arrangements for Accreditation of Universities**

The Commission recognizes that there are a number of new public and private universities that have been established in Saudi Arabia. Their undergraduate programs may be very good but it may take some time for the requirements for research and postgraduate studies to be met. Accordingly the Commission has indicated that will not deny accreditation to these institutions provided certain initial requirements are met. These initial requirements, which will be in place for the first cycle of accreditation reviews (2010 to 2015), the following minimum requirements, will apply.

### **Planning for the Development of Research and Postgraduate Studies**

The institution must have a strategic plan that meets the minimum requirements described in the previous section and **Standard 10 Research**, within a period of five years.

### Breadth of Studies

Programs offered at least at the bachelor's degree level in at least three broad fields of study

### Level of Programs

Approval from the Ministry of Higher Education and introduction of at least one postgraduate program.

### Involvement in Research

A minimum of 2.5 percent of the annual operating budget spent on support for research. (This amount could be from a combination of internal and external sources) This expenditure could include special research grants, the institution's share of joint research and development projects, and the provision of support for specialized research equipment for staff and postgraduate student research. However, it should not include funding for the teaching of postgraduate research or other programs, or general program administration.

### Sustained Scholarly Activity

Active encouragement of teaching staff to participate in conferences in their field of study, and arrangements for seminars or workshops on current issues and research in every college or department. Annual publication of listings of all faculty refereed publications during the past year.

### Indicators

At least 10% of all teaching staff and 75% of staff teaching postgraduate programs are expected to have published articles in refereed journals in their field within the past three years (allowing some consideration for teaching by experienced senior practitioners in the professional field concerned).

Annual collection and analysis of research indicators for each college or department and the total institution including total research expenditure, research grants received, numbers of academic publications in refereed journals each year, proportions of teaching staff with refereed publications in the last three years.

# ATTACHMENT

## Concepts and Terminology for Use in Accreditation and Quality Assurance in Saudi Arabia

To assist in achieving common understanding of important concepts and terms used in the system of accreditation and quality assurance, the NCAAA has determined that for its purposes the terms identified below will have the meanings described. The definitions are shown in italics, followed by explanatory notes.

### Accountability

*The responsibility of an individual, an institution, or an organization to another authority for his or her, or its activities.*

In postsecondary education an institution is usually “accountable” and must provide reports to a government or government agency that provides it with funds or approves its establishment. Within an institution, faculty and staff are “accountable” to senior management and senior management in turn is responsible to a Board or Council.

In systems of accreditation and quality assurance there is usually a separation of the organizations responsible for institutional accountability and those responsible for independent quality assessment.

### Accreditation

*Formal certification by a recognized authority that a program or an institution meets required standards.*

To be accredited, institutions or programs must comply with generally accepted standards of good practice. The Commission has defined the standards it will apply in two documents, Standards for Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education Institutions and Standards for Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education Programs. Reference is also made to several other documents including the National Qualifications Framework that describes expected general standards of learning outcomes in four domains of learning and a statement showing the application of these standards to distance education programs. These statements are expressed in general terms applicable to all fields of study. It is also necessary for programs to meet requirements for professional practice in many professional fields. Details of these requirements are not yet available from the Commission. Until they are available institutions are expected to give consideration to the requirements of specialized international accreditors in the field of study concerned. Accreditation may be given initially on a provisional basis, and this will normally be done when plans for a new program or institution are considered. After a program has been in operation for sufficient time for the first group of students to complete their program, a review will be conducted, the provisional designation may be removed and the program given full accreditation. Accreditation will normally be valid for a period of five years after which programs will need to be reviewed for reaccreditation on a five yearly basis.

In the quality assurance systems of different countries there are several different forms of accreditation. See descriptions of institutional accreditation, program accreditation, professional accreditation, provisional accreditation, and international accreditation.

### Assessment

*A process of measuring performance in relation to established standards or criteria.*

Assessment is commonly applied in two different contexts: the assessment of student’s performance on tests or examinations or other assigned tasks in order to measure their achievement of intended learning outcomes; and the process of measuring the quality of performance of elements within an educational institution.

In the second of these instances the term is used for assessment of quality of teaching, the effectiveness of a program or a course in achieving its objectives, or the effectiveness of many other elements of an institution's operations. Standards of performance for the purposes of these assessments can be derived from different sources, but from the perspective of the Commission in carrying out its accreditation and approval responsibilities the standards are defined in the documents it has approved for these purposes, particularly the National Qualifications Framework and the Standards for Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions.

## **Audit**

*An independent review to verify that reports represent a true and correct record of activity, and that recognized standards have been met.*

The term "audit" is widely used for financial audits conducted by an independent authority to certify the accuracy of financial reports and compliance with accounting standards.

In postsecondary quality systems the term is used for external independent reviews of an institution's quality and the processes of quality assurance it has established. These reviews are principally based on reports of self-studies carried out by an institution, and, like financial audits, verify the conclusions of those self studies. Although standards of good practice are considered in this process, in a quality audit it is customary to give particular attention to the objectives established by an institution and to report on whether the processes used in an institution are effective in achieving those objectives.

## **Benchmarks**

*Points of comparison or levels of performance used for establishing objectives and evaluating performance.*

Benchmarks may be current levels of performance at an institution (for example, the current completion rate for students in business studies), standards established by an external agency, or standards of performance at another institution or group of institutions selected for comparison. (For example, the number of research publications per full time of an academic staff member at the University of xxxxx). An institution may select another institution similar to itself as a benchmark against which it can compare the quality of its work, or particular parts of an institution against which equivalent groups within their own institution can be compared. It is usually considered desirable in making these comparisons to use indicators (such as those noted above) that can be stated in specific terms.

## **Blended Learning**

*A program in which students are taught through a combination of regular on campus instruction and distance education or packaged materials.*

Arrangements can be made for blended modes of instruction in a variety of ways including a regular on campus course in which sections of the course are taught using packaged self contained materials, or a program in which some courses are taught using distance education methodology and some through on campus lectures, tutorials or other face-to-face methodology. In situations where blended approaches are used appropriate forms of student assistance and support must be provided to support students learning in both forms of instruction.

## **Credits**

Points or hours allocated by an institution to specify the work requirements, or the volume or amount of learning expected for a unit, subject or program of study.

It is common practice to assign a number of credits to units or courses within a program and to specify a number of credits for a total program. Credits may be associated with program inputs such as hours of instruction, laboratory work, or expectations for time spent in self-directed study. The term “credit hours” is used in these systems based on formulae that give differing levels of recognition for formal instruction, laboratory or tutorial participation, and practical work. In some other systems the term “credit points” is used for the notional amount of learning achieved by an average learner over a period of time. The number of credits allocated for a particular amount of work or learning varies among countries. For example, some countries use the-American based Carnegie credit hour system which allocates 30 credit hours for the amount of academic work normally expected in a full time academic year of study at undergraduate level. Some other countries use 120 points for an equivalent volume of learning. Common practice in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is to use 30 credit hours (or slightly more depending on the number of contact hours and mode of instruction) for the work expected in an academic year.

## **Distance Education**

*A mode of teaching and learning in which students undertake a major proportion of their studies on an individual basis at a location or locations away from the campus of an institution.*

Student learning may be supported by print or electronic materials, and a variety of mechanisms are sometimes used for interaction between students, through the internet, video or radio linkages, or periodic study group activities in appropriate locations. Similarly interaction with faculty may take a variety of forms.

A distance education institution is one that offers all its programs by distance education (whether through print-based materials or through electronic learning or a combination of both) to students who do not attend classes on campus, but instead study in their own locations, often at a time of their own choosing. Where combinations of distance education processes or packaged self-contained materials are used within courses, or for different courses within a program, the terms blended learning or dual mode instruction are frequently used to describe these modes. Dual mode institutions are ones that offer a combination of distance education and campus based programs.

## **Domains of Learning**

*Broad categories of types of learning expected in a program of study.*

Descriptions of the knowledge and skill students are expected to gain in a program are grouped into broad categories called domains. Although the number and titles for these groupings vary, domains commonly include five to seven broad categories that involve different types of learning and strategies for teaching and assessment of learning in those categories. The domains used in the higher education component of the National Qualifications Framework for Saudi Arabia are Knowledge, (the ability to recall and present information), Cognitive Skills (the ability to apply concepts and principles in thinking and problem solving), Interpersonal Skills and Responsibility, (the ability to work effectively in groups, exercise leadership, and take responsibility for their own independent learning, and the ethical and moral development that is associated with these abilities), and Communication, Information Technology and Numerical Skills (including basic mathematical and communication skills and the ability to use communications technology). Psychomotor skills are very important in some fields of study and are considered as an additional domain where relevant to the program concerned.

## **Dual Mode Institution**

*Dual mode institutions are institutions that offer some programs to students through distance education and some through traditional campus based instruction.*

It is increasingly common for institutions to use electronic materials and learning packages as supplements to the methods of instruction in campus based studies and these may take a variety of forms. Where this is done

the approach may have many similarities to distance education methodology. However the terms “dual mode” is normally used for institutions that offer both off campus distance education programs and campus based instruction.

## **Evaluation**

*The process of assessing and assigning value to a facility or activity.*

The term evaluation is sometimes used interchangeably with assessment but it has a slightly different meaning associated with judgments about the quality or value of the matter being considered. The “valuing” component of consideration may be more open-ended and interpretive than an assessment which is normally associated with measurement of performance in relation to fixed and predetermined standards.

## **External Quality Assurance**

*Processes of review and evaluation of institutions and their programs and activities by an independent external agency.*

External quality assurance normally involves periodic, independent peer reviews based on reports of internal self-studies and designed for the dual purposes of assessing quality and validating the conclusions of internal studies.

External quality assessments are usually more selective than internal reviews, and may pay particular attention to student learning outcomes and other matters identified as policy priorities by the institution, or by the government or governing body to which the institution is accountable. External quality assurance may involve consideration of selected key performance indicators to be used in reviews on a national basis.

## **Further Education**

*Education and training provided for members of the community other than through formal award programs.*

Further education programs do not lead to academic awards or technical qualifications such as a degree or diploma. However, a certificate may be given on completion of a further education program. Further education programs may be offered through formal classes or a variety of informal means to provide skills and information of value to members of the community.

## **Goals or Aims**

*General statements of desired developments, which apply a mission to broad areas of activity and provide a guide for establishing objectives and detailed planning.*

Goals or aims fall between mission, which defines a broad overall purpose, and specific objectives established as specific targets for achievement. Goals and aims may be broadly stated to give direction to the development of a program or implementation of planning initiatives and they may relate to any aspect of an institution’s activities. Effective use of aims or goals in planning normally requires statements of objectives that describe specific measurable outcomes by a specified time.

## **Higher Education**

*Formal programs of education provided for students at postsecondary level, normally leading to an academic degree or diploma.*

The term higher education is used for postsecondary education programs designed to provide generalized knowledge and skill in a field of study and to develop the ability to apply that learning to professional practice and the advancement of knowledge through research. Although requirements for professional practice and employment are important in development of programs, major consideration is also given to emerging research in their own and related fields of study.

Higher education may be provided through a university or a higher education college. The term University Education simply means higher education provided through a university. It may have a greater emphasis on research than a similar program offered in a college because of the greater expectation for research in universities. However, the nature of education provided in both kinds of institution should be the same.

## **Inputs**

*The resources available to and used by an institution to provide its programs.*

Inputs include financial resources, facilities and equipment, faculty, and students. Indicators of quality of faculty as an input could include the number of faculty and their levels of qualifications and staff/student ratios. Indicators of equipment as an input could include indicators; such, as the ratio of computer terminals to students, or proportions of down-time due to equipment malfunction.

Until recently quality assurance systems have relied heavily on input indicators as measures of quality, using things such as financial resources, qualifications of faculty, extent of library collections and availability of computer equipment. However although these are still important as enabling provisions, emphasis has shifted towards outcome measures relating to the quality of research and student learning outcomes.

## **Institutional Approval**

*The approval of an institution based on recognition that its resources, processes and learning outcomes meet required standards for an institution of its type and the level of its programs.*

Approval of an institution will normally specify the fields of study the institution is able to offer and the levels at which this can be done. The final license issued to permit the institution to operate will specify the levels and range of programs it is permitted to offer. For example, a college may be accredited to offer programs in business studies and engineering up to the level of bachelor, and in applied science up to the level of diploma. A university focusing on those particular fields may be approved to offer programs up to doctoral level in science, engineering, and business and up to master's level in social sciences.

Institutional approval indicates that an institution is considered to have the capacity to offer programs in designated fields of study up to the level specified. The final license will formally specify what is authorized. Each program offered within these limits must be accredited, to ensure that the program meets required standards.

## **Internal Quality Assurance**

*Processes of quality assurance carried out within and by or for a higher education institution.*

Internal quality assurance includes not only the processes of monitoring and review that an institution manages itself, but also its use of external reviewers from other institutions, from industry, the professions, or from other accreditation or quality assurance agencies to review and provide advice on its programs and activities. Internal quality assurance is normally comprehensive, addressing inputs, processes, and outcomes, with all areas of an institution's activities, including faculty, staff, and students in all parts of the institution.

## **International Accreditation**

*Accreditation of an institution or of its programs by an accreditation agency established in another country.*

A number of institutions have arranged for evaluation and accreditation of their colleges or programs by international accrediting agencies as part of their quality assurance arrangements. This has proved valuable in stimulating rigorous internal reviews and enhancing quality, and in establishing their reputation. These activities are not required as part of the accreditation and quality assurance system in Saudi Arabia, but when they are carried out they are considered part of the institution's internal quality assurance and review processes, and the work done and conclusions reached will be considered and taken into account during the reviews conducted by the Commission.

## **Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)**

*Selected performance indicators regarded as particularly important for the purpose of assessing performance.*

An institution may identify a short list of KPIs that it regards as particularly important in assessing performance, and may require evidence on those KPIs from a number of sections of the institution in addition to any others that different groups may choose for their own purposes. Similarly, a national quality agency, such as the Commission, may identify a small list of KPIs reflecting national issues or policy objectives for use by all institutions.

## **Learning Outcomes**

*The learning that results from participation in a course or program.*

The term learning outcomes is commonly used to refer to the learning that results from a course or program undertaken by students. Learning outcomes are the result of the teaching process. Reference is often made to Intended Learning Outcomes to mean the learning objectives a course or program is designed to develop.

The NCAA has identified broad categories or types of learning outcomes in five groups or domains: knowledge, cognitive skills, interpersonal skills and responsibility, communication, IT and numerical skills, and psychomotor skills. It has described in general terms the level of knowledge and skill expected for different qualifications. There are differences in how these learning outcomes are developed by students and an important aspect of program and course planning is to plan for teaching processes and forms of assessment that will be appropriate for these different types of intended learning outcomes.

## **Level**

*The intellectual standard and complexity of learning expected as students progress through a program of study.*

The degree of difficulty or complexity of learning increases as students advance through a program and these increases are defined by descriptions of the learning outcomes that are expected. Levels may be defined for years of study—first year, second year, third year, and so on, or for academic awards such as a diploma, bachelor's, master's, and doctorate.

## **License**

*Formal approval, normally by a government or a government agency, to operate or carry out certain activities.*

A license may be given to an institution formally authorizing it to commence operation and offer programs in fields and at levels specified in the license. If the license is revoked the institution must cease to operate. A different type of license may also be given to individuals permitting them to engage in certain activities. A license may be granted to individuals who have completed professional programs and who wish to practice in that profession.

Licensing and accreditation are closely linked. The granting of a license for an institution to operate normally follows or is conditional on assessment of its quality through an approval and accreditation process. The granting of a license for a person to practice in a profession normally follows accreditation of the program that such a person has completed.

## **Major Change in a Program**

*A major change in a program is one that affects the basis for its accreditation.*

It is expected that adjustments will be required in programs and courses from time to time in response to changing circumstances and results of course and program evaluations. Such changes are highly desirable to ensure that programs are to be kept up to date. However if there is a major change to an accredited program it could affect the program's accreditation status and any such change should be approved by an institutions senior academic committee and notification to the Commission at least one full semester before it is introduced. The Commission can then assess the impact of the change on accreditation. Examples of major changes would be the addition or deletion of a major track within a program, (e.g. accounting or international finance majors within a commerce or business degree), the addition or deletion of a core course (e.g. mathematics in an engineering degree), a change in title that implied a new or different field of study or qualification in a different profession, re-orientation or development of a program to prepare students for a different occupation or profession, a change in the length of a program, or a new exit point within a longer program (e.g. the granting of a diploma within a bachelors degree program) The Commission should also be notified if a succession of minor programs has a cumulative effect that is equivalent to a major change as described above.

## **Mission**

*A brief general statement setting out the principal policy objectives for development of an institution.*

While stated in general terms a mission statement should be sufficiently precise to serve as a guide to planning and decision making at all levels of the organization, and should be used as a basis for decision making. (e.g., "To develop an international reputation for the quality of applied research and technology transfer, and for the creativity and entrepreneurial skill of graduates.")

## **Mode of Instruction**

*The form of instruction such as lecture, tutorial, laboratory, individual assignment, etc.*

Organization for instruction is normally based on planned modes of instruction with credit hour allocations based on the amount of contact time in each of these modes. Examples are lectures, tutorials, or laboratories. The term should not be confused with teaching strategies which are the techniques used by an instructor operating within one or more of those modes to present information, develop problem solving skills or habits of responsibility. Different strategies can be incorporated into various modes of instruction as part of educational planning to develop desired learning outcomes.

## **Objectives**

*Specific statements that apply the mission and goals to particular areas of activity and indicate intended results.*

Desirably objectives should be stated in specific measurable terms setting out intended levels of performance that are to be achieved within stated time periods. Objectives may relate to intended learning outcomes and may be referred to as learning, course or program objectives. Objectives may also be set for program or institutional developments not necessarily related to learning outcomes. Objectives may be expressed as specific performance levels on indicators. (For example, "That by 2008, 80% of final year undergraduate students will have achieved a score of at least xxxx on xxxx English language test.") Objectives may be criterion referenced (based on defined levels of performance) or norm referenced (based on comparisons of performance with other groups or institutions).

## **Outcomes**

*The results of teaching, learning and research processes of an institution.*

This term is usually used for qualitative descriptions of what is produced by an institution or in a program as a result of its processes. For example, reference to student learning outcomes normally means the quality of their learning and what they are able to do as a result of completing the programs in which they were enrolled. Similarly, research outcomes usually relate to the quality and impact of research rather than simply a count of the numbers of publications or research projects completed.

## **Outputs**

*The products of an institutions activities, normally expressed in quantitative terms.*

Outputs usually refer to quantitative measures of what is produced by an institution, such as the number of graduates or the number of faculty research publications.

## **Partner Institution**

*An institution with which a higher education institution has established a formal, contractual relationship for provision of services.*

The exact nature of partnership arrangements can vary. In some cases a partnership may simply involve provision of a number of support services to a local institution. In others arrangements are made for the academic awards of the partner institution to be granted for studies undertaken in a local institution under supervision. However, regardless of whether the awards are granted by a local institution or by an overseas provider, the requirements for operating an institution or teaching a program in Saudi Arabia must be fully met.

## **Peer Review**

*Evaluation and report on a program, institution or part of an institution by expert evaluators from similar institutions or professions who are specialists in the field concerned or with the organization and management of higher education institutions.*

An important element in this concept is that the evaluators are peers, with experience in similar programs or institutions, who understand the nature, purposes, and challenges faced by an institution. It is important that their understanding is recognized by the institution under review. It is also essential that those involved be completely independent of the institution being reviewed so there is no real or perceived conflict of interest, carefully trained for their task and committed to assisting in improvement. They should be sensitive to the mission and objectives of the institution and programs involved and familiar with international standards for the type of program or institution under review.

## **Performance Indicators**

*Specific (and normally pre-selected) forms of evidence used by an institution or other agency to provide evidence about quality of performance.*

Performance indicators should be specific and directly related to the aims and objectives to which they relate. However, direct measures of some of the most important objectives such as quality of students' learning are sometimes difficult to find. Consequently, indirect evidence such as student evaluations of programs, employment outcomes, and employer surveys must sometimes be used. Since indirect indicators can be subject to other influences, it is usual to use several different but related indicators for important objectives, and to interpret these using some independent system to verify the interpretations. The term triangulation is sometimes used where several indicators are used to provide evidence about an objective from different points of view. For example, evidence about quality of faculty could be obtained from several indicators such as levels of qualifications, research output, and student ratings of teaching effectiveness.

## **Postsecondary Education**

*Education provided at levels and standards beyond completion of secondary school or equivalent.*

The term tertiary education is sometimes used to describe this stage as a third stage in education systems beyond primary (first stage) and secondary (second stage) education. Postsecondary programs fall into two broad categories, higher education and technical or vocational training. Note that vocational training is sometimes offered also at levels equivalent to senior secondary education.

## **Postgraduate Education**

*Education provided at advanced levels of complexity and intellectual demand for students who have completed requirements for a first degree and wish to proceed to more advanced studies.*

Postgraduate studies normally lead to an academic award of postgraduate diploma, master's degree or doctorate. A second bachelor's degree or other award in a related or different field of study is not regarded as postgraduate.

## **Processes**

*The administrative arrangements, policies, and organizational procedures carried out by an institution in planning, reviewing, and delivering its programs.*

Processes are what is done in an institution to use the inputs available to it to produce its outputs and outcomes. The term includes teaching processes, assessment procedures, and processes for managing research and community activities as well as a wide range of other activities that have direct or indirect impact on educational programs.

## **Professional Accreditation**

*The accreditation of a program to prepare students for a profession, certifying that it develops the knowledge and skills needed to practice in the profession concerned at the standard of proficiency required.*

Professional accreditation is designed to ensure that in addition to meeting general academic standards, programs develop the specific knowledge and skills to practice the profession concerned in the community. In most countries this applies in professional fields such as medicine and other health-related fields, engineering, accounting, psychology, law, and many others. In some countries this form of specialized professional

accreditation may be given by professional associations recognized by the government for this purpose, or by government agencies.

This form of accreditation differs from academic accreditation, which certifies that a program meets academic standards and conforms to requirements of a qualifications framework. In practice, both academic and professional accreditation is normally required for professional fields although the two may be combined in a single accreditation process.

## **Program**

***A coherent course of study followed by students in an academic or professional field or leading to a professional qualification, the successful completion of which qualifies them for an academic award.***

A program is regarded as an integrated package of courses and activities leading to a qualification, but the distinction between what is regarded as a single program or a cluster of related programs is difficult to define and may be best explained through examples.

A bachelor's degree program to prepare a student as a civil engineer would be regarded as a different program from one to prepare a mechanical engineer, even though there may be some courses that are common to both. Similarly, if a student had completed the bachelors degree program and wished to take a postgraduate program leading to a master's degree or a doctorate in the same general field that would be regarded as a separate program. The test in these examples relates to there being a qualification that is regarded as being complete in itself, and in the case of a professional program, qualifying the person who has taken the program for professional practice in the field. The distinction does not necessarily relate to organization of an institution or college into departments. In the particular example given it is likely that a civil engineering department would offer both the undergraduate and the postgraduate programs. It would also be possible if an institution wished to organize itself in that way for a single department to offer programs in both civil and mechanical engineering.

The title of an academic award is not necessarily a useful guide to what should be regarded as a program. For example, general titles such as Bachelor of Arts, or Business, or Science, could include many different programs. In an Arts degree there could be programs in history and or social sciences, in psychology, in social work, or many others. A Business degree could include separate programs for accountants, for economists, or for management and administration, and these would be different programs leading to quite different occupational skills.

While the programs that have been used in these examples should be regarded as separate entities, and should be accredited as such, groups of related programs can be considered together in the accreditation process provided it is possible for external review panels to include the necessary expertise.

## **Program Accreditation**

***Accreditation of a program of study certifying that it meets standards required for the delivery of a program in that field at the level concerned.***

Accreditation of a programs involves a judgment that the quality and standards are appropriate for the award to which it leads. The assessment of standards takes into account both the nature of teaching and learning in different fields of study, and the level, complexity, and quantity of learning required for the award. The general standards of learning outcomes for programs that lead to awards such as bachelor's, master's or doctorate are defined in the National Qualifications Framework and must be met in all programs leading to these awards, regardless of the type of institution offering the program. In addition to meeting the requirements of the Framework a program must meet the standards set out in the NCAAA, "Standards for Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Higher Education Programs", and in a professional program, must provide the particular knowledge and skill required for practice in the field concerned.

## **Provisional Accreditation**

*Accreditation granted on a temporary basis for a new institution or program after assessment of plans for development.*

For a new institution or program provisional accreditation may be given on the basis of detailed plans. This allows the institution to start operating, or to teach the program, with reasonable confidence that if the plans are implemented as proposed accreditation is likely to be granted. This process means that students can rely on the quality of the institution and of the provisionally accredited program when it is first introduced. The actions of the institution during this preliminary stage are monitored and reports on progress must be provided. Full accreditation must be applied for when the first group of students have completed their programs. If the plans are not implemented at an acceptable level of quality within the time specified, the provisional accreditation will lapse and the license to operate or offer the program will be revoked.

## **Qualifications Framework**

*A document setting out the nature, amount, and levels or standards of learning required for academic or technical awards.*

Qualifications frameworks specify increasing levels of mastery of knowledge and skills that are required for academic, vocational, or technical awards.

Learning expectations are described in broad areas or domains, such as knowledge and the ability to recall information, cognitive skills such as the mastery of concepts, principles and theories and ability to apply them in problem solving and critical thinking, skills in communication and information technology, capacity for self directed learning, and ability to work effectively and constructively in group situations. Qualifications frameworks may also incorporate student attributes relating to values and cultural awareness that reflect national culture and educational policy.

In many cases, the broadly defined frameworks are associated with more detailed specification of the particular knowledge and skill required for specific professional fields or disciplines of knowledge. These may be used as basic reference points for programs leading to professional accreditation and for the registration or licensing of graduates to practice in professional fields such as medicine, engineering, accounting, law, or education.

## **Quality**

*The value, worth, or standard of an institution or program in relation to generally accepted standards for an institution or program of its type.*

Assessments of quality are generally based on performance in relation to generally accepted standards of good practice, but also “fitness for purpose”, which recognizes that there are differing requirements for different types of institutions or programs, and important differences in mission that are relevant to consideration of an institution’s quality. Consideration is also given to “fitness of purpose” taking into account the appropriateness of the mission of an institution for the environment within which it operates.

The term “quality” is a relative one comparable to “value”, “worth” or “standard” in other contexts. To be of use in planning and evaluation in postsecondary education the term should be related to some defined characteristics, and to some levels or benchmarks of performance.

When used as a general term without specification of any particular characteristics of the system (for example as in “the quality of higher education” or “the quality of an institution”) it will be taken to refer to a range of elements including but not limited to the level of student achievement, the ability and qualifications of faculty, the standard of facilities and equipment, the effectiveness of teaching, planning and administrative processes,

and the relevance of programs. In the system of quality assurance and accreditation in Saudi Arabia, reference in assessing quality should be made to the standards identified by the NCAAA in eleven areas of activity.

In any specific situation some aspects of performance may be of relatively high quality and others of relatively low quality and the balance may depend on the mission and priorities of an institution. Consequently an overall assessment must take into account value judgements about the selection and relative importance of characteristics for consideration, and an understanding of what should be regarded as good practice in relation to each of them.

“Quality” is sometimes defined by quality agencies as meaning the single dimension of “fitness for purpose”, an approach that gives particular prominence to the importance of diversity between institutions in mission and objectives. Under this definition the standard of performance is meant to be subsumed within the concept of fitness for the purposes (or mission and objectives) defined by institutions.

Because of potential confusion arising from differing interpretations and a need for clear guidance for institutions about criteria for evaluations of quality, most quality agencies make specific reference to “general criteria of good practice” in defining criteria for evaluation, and provide guidelines or reference documents that spell out matters for consideration and descriptions of what is regarded as good practice.

## **Quality Assurance**

*Processes of assessment, evaluation, and follow-up relating to quality of performance, which serve two distinct purposes:*

- *To ensure that desired levels of quality are maintained and improved; and*
- *To assure stakeholders that quality is being maintained at levels comparable to good practice in highly regarded institutions elsewhere in the world.*
- *Stakeholders in this context include students, the government, and the wider community, including parents, professional associations, and industry.*

Quality assurance normally involves both internal and external processes. Mechanisms for quality assurance are expected within each institution on a continuing basis as part of normal program provision and usually involve some external input. However, the public credibility of claims of quality requires periodic external validation by an independent authority and the independent external advice is also an important element in strategies for improvement.

## **Quality Improvement**

*Changes in inputs, processes, and outcomes that improve the quality of performance, usually across the whole range of an institution’s activities. The term may be used to describe the strategies used by an institution or other organization to bring about these changes and verify their results.*

While principal responsibility for quality improvement necessarily rests with an institution delivering programs, actions taken by an outside authority through support services, incentives, or regulations may assist in a number of ways, and may also be described as quality improvement strategies. The term “quality enhancement” used in some quality assurance systems is considered to have the same meaning as “quality improvement”.

## **Responsible Ministry**

*The Ministry responsible for the establishment, regulation, or supervision of a higher education institution.*

A number of different Ministries have responsibility for postsecondary institutions in their field of activity, and have established regulations for their activities. They may provide funding support, assist with quality improvement, and normally have systems for accountability including annual reporting arrangements. In its assessments of quality for purposes of accreditation and quality assurance, the Commission considers both the activities of the institutions and the results of their interactions with the responsible Ministry with which they are involved.

## **Substantial Equivalence**

*A judgement that a unit, subject or other component of a program is equal in quality and equivalent in scope to one offered elsewhere.*

This concept is particularly important when consideration is being given to allocation of credit for studies done at another institution, either within the country or elsewhere. The details of what is taught and the approach taken in teaching vary according to the needs and background of different groups of students and the environment in which they live. Adaptations to meet these needs should not become a barrier to recognition for credit provided essential skills and understandings are developed and standards maintained.

## **Student Attributes**

*Special characteristics of students developed as a result of the particular policies and teaching strategies of an institution.*

The development of particular student attributes is often an important part of the mission of an institution. For example an institution may adopt procedures to ensure students are particularly self-reliant, more creative and entrepreneurial, or more effective than would normally be the case in group situations. The term is normally reserved for attitudes, skills, and habits of behaviour or personality characteristics that are exhibited in students' behaviour in outside situations rather than for purely academic learning outcomes which may refer to abilities rather than actual behaviour.

## **Teaching Strategies**

*The strategies used by an instructor to develop student learning.*

Teaching strategies are the specific techniques used to develop student learning in various domains. Strategies may include; for example, question sequences to develop or apply concepts to new situations, value clarification, use of advance organizers to assist with memorization and recall of information, case studies, and group problem solving tasks, simulations, role playing and so on. The term should not be confused with "modes of instruction", a term used to describe the form of organization for teaching or the delivery of training, such as lecture, tutorial, or laboratory.

## **Technical Training**

(See Vocational and Technical Training below)

## **Tertiary Education**

*Education programs offered beyond the level of secondary school.*

Tertiary education is education at the third level that is beyond the first level (primary school), and second level, (secondary school). Tertiary education is offered in two broad categories, higher education which normally leads to academic degrees in a university or higher education college, and technical or vocational education and

training designed to provide the knowledge and skills required for employment in specified trades and industries.

## **Value-Added**

*The process of adding value (normally applied to the value of students knowledge and skill) as a result of the teaching and learning activities of an institution or program.*

The general level of knowledge and skills of students entering programs can vary widely between institutions. Consequently the concept of “value-adding” is important in considering the contribution an institution makes to students learning. While an important concept in considering the quality of an institution’s activities, it is difficult to apply objectively since documenting the extent of “value-added” depends on accurate measures of incoming knowledge and skills and valid attribution of causes of growth.

## **Vocational and Technical Training**

*Training programs designed in cooperation with industry to provide the knowledge and skills needed for employment.*

The terms vocational training and technical training are used for training or educational programs designed to provide the specific knowledge and skills for employment in specified trades and occupations. Programs are usually competency-based with competencies defined in consultation with employers.

In many systems the terms vocational and technical training are interchangeable. However practice in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has been to use the term “vocational” for the type of program offered at levels equivalent to senior secondary school, and to use the term “technical training” for programs at postsecondary levels.