

1.2 Internal Quality Assurance Processes

All post secondary 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 centre 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 post secondary education. In some cases institutions 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 will establish 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 advice 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 need to be made 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 the Commission will review the plans. This review is designed to ensure that if the plans are properly implemented the institution and its quality assurance systems is likely to meet required standards and that programs will meet accreditation requirements. At that stage the institution and its programs will receive provisional accreditation, and 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 programs have been offered for the first time. 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).

For existing institutions, the Commission will conduct initial reviews of institutions and programs following a planned schedule. This schedule will be developed in consultation with institutions, with the reviews commencing as the necessary internal processes have been put in place and initial self-studies completed. The accreditation may be either provisional or full, depending on the stage the institution has reached in developing its quality assurance processes.

After institutions and programs have been accredited, the same process will be followed as for new institutions. Programs will need to be re-accredited every five years and external reviews of the institutions will also be conducted on a five yearly basis. As for private institutions, the Commission may conduct earlier reviews if it believes it needs to do so.

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 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.