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Guideline No: 2022/G-39

GUIDELINES FOR PROGRAMME ACCREDITATION

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**Maldives
Qualifications
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GUIDELINES FOR PROGRAMME ACCREDITATION

OCTOBER 17, 2022

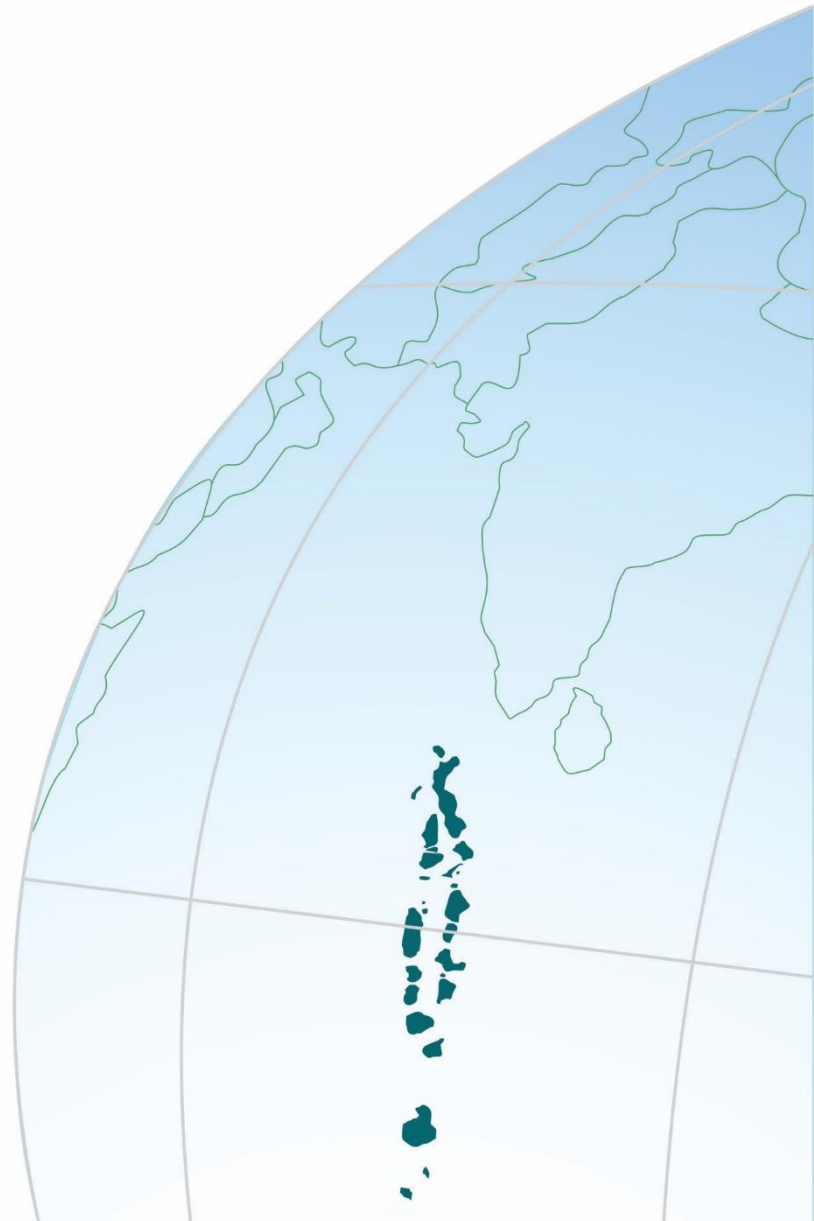


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Chapter 1: General Guidelines

1. Introduction

This Guidelines for Programme Accreditation is adopted by the Maldives Qualifications Authority (MQA) pursuant to Section 17 of the Maldives Higher Education and Training Act (Law No. 7/2021) and Section 5 of the Regulation for Programme Accreditation (Regulation No: R-77/2022) to set out rules for granting accreditation for higher education and training programmes offered in the Maldives through a process of evaluation and assessment to ensure that the programmes meet defined standards of quality.

This Guidelines is for registered higher education providers in the Maldives. It provides information to higher education institutions (HEIs) and other stakeholders about the process and procedures of Programme Accreditation carried out by the Maldives Qualifications Authority (MQA) and to assist review panels in their assessment work. This Guidelines provides instructions for making applications for the following processes:

- ▶ new Programme Accreditation, and
- ▶ renewal of Programme Accreditation

This Guidelines provides MQA's Criteria for Programme Accreditation and to have formal status of accreditation. Therefore, this Guidelines must be followed by the providers and MQA staff who undertakes assessment of accreditation to ensure consistency and coherence of MQA's decisions on Programme Accreditation.

Programme Accreditation is a major function of MQA's overall quality assurance regime. In this Guidelines, accreditation is defined as a process by which MQA evaluates a specific academic programme against a pre-determined minimum criteria or standards. This is done during the initial accreditation of a new programme or through periodic reviews required to renew a provider's programme for extension of the accreditation period¹. Hence, evaluation of a program is referred to as "programme accreditation". The accreditation process results in awarding a status (yes/ no) reflected in the accreditation decisions: "fully accredited" or "conditionally accredited", which are "yes" decisions or "accreditation denied", which is a "no" decision.

¹ Vlăsceanu et al., 2007

Quality assurance is often defined as an evaluation of academic programmes or a Higher Education Institution or a system against prescribed standards. The term quality assurance refers to all policies, processes and procedures through which quality of higher education is assessed, developed, maintained and monitored ².

It is highly recommended that higher education institutions study these guidelines carefully to simplify the review process, thus facilitating the work of MQA and its review process. Furthermore, it should be noted that adherence to these guidelines will also ensure that the review process will be most useful for the higher education institution and generally be of highest quality. The criteria and guidelines are supposed to enable higher education institutions to analyse and evaluate their quality performance in relation to an academic programme and guide them through the process of programme development and application.

The criteria for Programme Accreditation have been developed in consultation with the major stakeholders in higher education to ensure their acceptance in the academic community and their relevance to the labour market.

MQA undertakes Programme Accreditation on the basis of six categories, covering all areas of relevance for the Programmes, both in terms of their organisation and their contents. Hence, Programme Accreditation is based on the subject-specific and professional nature of the programmes, institutional arrangements for Programme delivery, faculty and staff as well as the programme's compliance with the formal regulations and requirements.

Quality assurance is a continuous process, for which the higher education institution carries the main responsibility. Higher education institutions are expected to further enhance the quality of their offerings through a rigorous internal quality assurance system, which also impacts on the programmes being offered. The mandatory accreditation of a programme is done on a cyclical basis. The validity of the accreditation granted in accordance with the Regulation for Programme Accreditation (Regulation No: R-77/2022) and this Guidelines is 5 (Five) years as stated in Section 7 of the said Regulation.

² Lim, 2001

The Programme Accreditation process applies to all programmes offered in the Maldives. Programme Accreditation is obligatory both for national and foreign institutions regardless of the delivery modality. In case of non-traditional delivery modalities, MQA pays special attention that criteria are met. This also necessitates, that providers clearly outline specifically in non-traditional modalities of delivery on how they ensure that the minimum criteria are met, and that both academic standards as well as the student experience are comparable to that of traditional full-time provision.

The delivery modality, which is indicated in the application for Programme Accreditation, whether it is face-to-face, distance learning or e-learning, blended learning that incorporates a hybrid system of face-to-face learning and e-learning as well as mode of study whether it is part-time or full-time cannot be changed or modified after accreditation for the Programme has been given. In case of a change of such aspects of a programme is needed, it is required to submit the necessary application for MQA's approval.

Higher education institutions applying for Programme Accreditation are requested to carefully examine that they provide all required information according to the eleven categories and that they cover all sub-topics. The application documentation has to follow the sequence as outlined in the Template and Criteria for Programme Accreditation Document. Furthermore, it has to be accompanied by the appropriate application form.

2. Background

While Programme Accreditation is being introduced on 16 May, 2022, it is important to note that the process of Programme Approval has been in place at MQA since the creation of the Maldives Accreditation Board (MAB) in 2000. MQA is the same body with a change of name.

With the enactment of the Act No. 7/2021 (Maldives Higher Education and Training Act), MQA is established as a new and distinct government institution under Section 5 (a) of the Act. Pursuant to Sections 7 (d) and 17 of the Maldives Higher Education and Training Act, MQA is required to form rules that regulate the process of accrediting higher education and training programmes conducted in the Maldives. Regulation for Programme Accreditation (Regulation No: R-77/2022) and this Guidelines are published for the said purpose of defining and regulating the accreditation process.

This Guidelines for Programme Accreditation is based on the process of Programme Approval previously utilized by MQA until the Higher Education and Training Act came into force. The process of Programme Accreditation would be an improvement to the Programme Approval. The main notable difference would be the cyclical process in the accreditation and the change of the name from Programme Approval to Programme Accreditation as well as the renewal process.

The Guidelines for Programme Accreditation have been developed as per the latest global standards and after consultation with the major stakeholders in higher education in order to ensure their suitability as well as their acceptance by the academic community and the labour market.

3. Objectives of Programme Accreditation

The objective of Programme Accreditation is to assess the quality of programmes in terms of their subject-specific and professional nature as well as their compliance with the formal regulations and requirements. The review is based on evidence provided in the programme application in relation to the fulfilment of the MQA Criteria for Programme Accreditation.

Programme Accreditation is given for five years, which is the duration of the validity of an accreditation. This criterion applies to all programmes offered in the Republic of Maldives. Programme Accreditation is obligatory for all higher education programmes offered in the Maldives.

Whilst MQA encourages innovative forms of delivery, it pays special attention that criteria are met. This also necessitates that, providers clearly outline specifically in non-traditional modalities of delivery how they ensure that the minimum criteria are met, and that both academic standards as well as the student experience are comparable to that of traditional full-time provision.

The process of Programme Accreditation has been designed based on the mandate assigned to MQA in the Maldives Higher Education and Training Act and follows the values that MQA stands for and abides by all its work. These values are transparency, objectivity, neutrality and excellence. It is part of the objectives of MQA to support the building of an effective national quality assurance system. Therefore, the process of Programme Accreditation follows internationally accepted good practices in the area

of quality assurance and provides for state-of-the-art adaptation of these practices in the context of the higher education system in the Republic of Maldives.

4. Process Overview

The process of Programme Accreditation, is explained below.

4.1 Submit application to MQA

The application for Accreditation or renewal of accreditation of an academic programme must be made in the relevant application form together with the Programme Accreditation document prepared according to these Guidelines and other related regulations.

Applications for renewal of Programme Accreditation should be submitted to MQA at least 6 months before the current accreditation period for the programme(s) is due to end.

Application for Programme Accreditation must be submitted to MQA via the set arrangements. Be sure to include:

- The application form.
- The Programme Accreditation document with any supporting documents as per this Regulation for Programme Accreditation (Regulation No: R-77/2022) as well as other related regulations by MQA and Ministry of Higher Education.

4.1.1 Copyright infringement

The Programme Accreditation document must be an authentic work done by the applicant. Infringement of another HEI's work is a copyright offence and any legal consequences must be borne by the offender. MQA has the right to reject such applications if a copyright issue is found either by MQA or by an institution that claims the copyright material. If a court case is submitted by a copyright claimant, MQA should change the accreditation decision in accordance with the court verdict. A Programme Accreditation document with copyright infringement must be regarded "non-compliant" and the accreditation decision therefore shall be "accreditation denied".

4.2 Accreditation Fee

Programme Accreditation fee, as published on the MQA's website, must be paid as per the Section 25 of the Regulation for Programme Accreditation (Regulation No: R-77/2022).

Once MQA reviews the application and decides in favor of granting accreditation, the applying higher education institution will be informed to pay the accreditation fee within 01 (one) month. Any repercussions for late payment or non-payment will be borne by the applicant only. Application for Programme Accreditation will be void if the respective HEI fails to pay the programme accreditation fee within 01 (one) year of notification by MQA to make the payment. Failure to make the programme accreditation fee will be considered as an indication that the respective HEI no longer wants to proceed with accreditation of the specific academic programme.

4.3 Review Process

Once the application is received and accepted by MQA, the relevant staff will carry out necessary reviews and assessments of the submitted application for Programme Accreditation as described in the Section 12 and 13 of the Regulation for Programme Accreditation (Regulation No: R-77/2022).

The 3 attempts allowed for amendments during the review process as stipulated under Section 13 (a) of the Regulation for Programme Accreditation (Regulation No: R-77/2022) shall be completed within the timeframe for accreditation of the specific qualification level as per MQA's "Timeframe for Programme Accreditation". Any amendment as per the review feedback shall be submitted to MQA within 1 month of sending review feedback by MQA to the respective HEI.

The review process consists of two types of reviews: Administrative Review and curriculum review.

4.3.1 Administrative Review

Administrative review is carried out by relevant MQA staff assigned to the task. Administrative review is conducted to determine if the Programme Accreditation document is developed according to this Guidelines.

4.3.2 Curriculum Review

MQA will undertake the curriculum review after the administrative review either by a qualified MQA staff or by an outsourced subject expert.

4.3.3 Integrity of the review process

The reviewers of the Programme Accreditation document, whether it is an administrative review or curriculum review, carried out either by MQA staff or outsourced subject experts, must maintain the integrity of the process. They shall maintain the confidentiality of the contents of the document and shall not share the document with a 3rd party or another HEI.

4.4 Compliance with criteria

Accreditation decision is taken after reviewing the submitted Programme Accreditation document. MQA assesses the compliance of the programme in relation to each individual criterion. In addition, MQA gives an overall assessment of compliance as stated below.

4.4.1 Full compliance

Full compliance indicates that the programme satisfies all aspects of the requirements of the criteria set in the Guidelines for Programme Accreditation to a large extent.

4.4.2 Substantial compliance

Substantial compliance indicates that the programme meets the majority of requirements relating to the criteria set in the Guidelines for Programme Accreditation to a significant extent. However, there are minor issues that need to be improved. Substantial compliance may also indicate that although currently the requirements of a criterion are met, it is likely that the situation changes so that the requirement will not be met until the time of the next review.

4.4.3 Partial compliance

Partial compliance indicates that important requirements of a criterion are not met and that the quality of the programme is compromised as a result of this. Immediate attention needs to be paid to mitigate the shortcomings.

4.4.4 No compliance

No compliance indicates that the majority of the requirements of the criteria of this Guidelines are not met and that the programme quality is not ensured.

4.5 Accreditation Decision

The overall judgement about compliance with the criteria provides for the indication whether a programme should be accredited, conditionally accredited or denied accreditation.

The overall compliance looks at the performance in relation to each individual criterion.

4.5.1 Full accreditation

Full accreditation can be recommended if the criteria are fully or substantially complied with. Hence, even if the overall assessment is that a programme only substantially complies with the criteria, full accreditation may be recommended. The accreditation decision in case of full accreditation, shall be “fully accredited”.

4.5.2 Conditional accreditation

Partial compliance with criteria can only lead to conditional accreditation, as immediate action is required so that the quality of the programme is no longer compromised. Conditional accreditation may also be recommended if the programme is non-compliant with regard to one criterion. Conditional accreditation may only be recommended if it appears reasonable that the shortcomings can be sufficiently addressed within a maximum time period of 6 months. Therefore, the validity period of conditional accreditation is 6 months. Failure to rectify the highlighted shortcoming in writing to MQA within the given 6 months, will lead to the expiry of the conditional accreditation and only ongoing student batches will be allowed under the given conditional accreditation. Re-submission of such programmes for Programme Accreditation, shall be done as per the conditions set under Section 13 of MQA’s Regulation for Programme Accreditation (Regulation No: R-77/2022). The accreditation decision in case of conditional accreditation, shall be “conditionally accredited”.

4.5.3 Denial of accreditation

Denial of accreditation will be recommended if the programme does not comply with more than one criterion. Accreditation will also be denied if partial compliance was established, but it would not be possible to sufficiently improve the identified shortcomings within a period of maximum two years. The accreditation decision in case of denial of accreditation, shall be “accreditation denied”.

4.6 Amending an accredited programme

Major aspects of an accredited academic programme cannot be changed without MQA's approval. If an amendment has to be brought, the respective HEI shall submit required application form together with the amended Programme Accreditation document. Examples of major changes are amendment to the delivery modality, mode of study, language of instruction, duration, number of credits, module changes, etc.

Submission and review procedures for amendment of an accredited programme shall be followed as per the conditions set under Section 13 of MQA's Regulation for Programme Accreditation (Regulation No: R-77/2022). Amendment of an accredited programme will not prompt extension of the accreditation period of 5 years.

4.7 Renewal of accreditation

A provider may submit application to MQA for renewal of an accreditation of an academic programme for which accreditation was granted before. Application for renewal shall be submitted within 6 months of expiry of the existing accreditation granted.

4.8 Accreditation cycle

Accreditation is given for a period of 5 years.

4.9 Expiry of accreditation

Accreditation of a fully accredited academic programme will expire after the 5-year period. Accreditation extension for another period will only be granted with the success of an application for renewal of that specific accreditation.

Conditional accreditation will expire after 6 months and procedures for such programmes shall be followed as explained under Section 4.5.2 (Conditional accreditation) of this Guidelines.

4.10 Updating the Qualifications Register of Maldives

The Qualifications Register of Maldives (QRM) will be updated when an application for Programme Accreditation or renewal of Programme Accreditation has been successful. Also, the relevant entry in the Qualifications Register will be updated when an accreditation expires following a decision to reject an application for renewal. If any conditions are imposed on a Programme Accreditation or renewal of accreditation, that information will also be published.

5. Criteria for Programme Accreditation

Template and Criteria for Programme Accreditation is included in the Appendix 1. The intention of the information provided about Programme Accreditation criteria is three-fold.

- a) Firstly, it should give higher education institutions a clear guideline for their understanding of the criteria so that they are also in a position to better evaluate the study programme to be accredited.
- b) Secondly, reviewer(s) use the information so that they better assess the individual criteria in the programme.
- c) Thirdly, the information is used by MQA in order to ensure consistency and coherence of decision regarding the accreditation of study programmes.

Whilst due care is given to the preparation and training of reviewers, it is still essential that MQA retains the possibility to ensure that similar conditions are evaluated similarly and that differences between study programmes are also taken into account.

Academic programmes already approved before this Guidelines becomes effective, shall either be granted automatic accreditation or cancelled as per MQA's Regulation for Programme Accreditation (Regulation No: R-77/2022).

The criteria for Programme Accreditation address eleven areas:

- Criterion 1: Institutional capacity and management
- Criterion 2: Instruction and academic staffing
- Criterion 3: General student assessment policies and procedures
- Criterion 4: Student withdrawal
- Criterion 5: Admission requirements
- Criterion 6: Advanced standing
- Criterion 7: Programme description
- Criterion 8: E-learning readiness – if delivered through e-learning or blended learning
- Criterion 9: Learning outcomes and level descriptors
- Criterion 10: Programme summary
- Criterion 11: Module outlines

6. Testamurs and transcripts

Testamurs and transcripts shall be issued to students after graduation. Such documentation shall have typical necessary information and layout. A transcript shall provide information on a student's higher education qualification and the institution at which the qualification was obtained such as information about the graduate, the award, the awarding institution and the graduate's academic achievements.

7. Entry into force of this Guidelines

- a) This Guidelines shall come into force from the date it is published in the Gazette of the Government of the Maldives. During the process of granting accreditation for previously approved academic programmes, MQA has the right to ask a provider to amend existing accredited academic programmes if the compliance to these guidelines is partial or none.
- b) Any academic programme that fits the Maldives National Qualifications Framework; whether it is locally developed or affiliated to a foreign higher education institution, must be submitted to MQA for Programme Accreditation in accordance with the standards and criteria set in this Guidelines and the Regulation for Programme Accreditation (Regulation No: R-77/2022) as well as other related regulations and standards.
- c) MQA's basic standards such as duration, credits, semester duration shall not be compromised even in the design and delivery of affiliated programmes that are awarded by a foreign HEI.
- d) As stated in Section 29 of the Regulation for Programme Accreditation (Regulation No: R-77/2022), it is illegal to conduct academic programmes that claim to be a qualification of Maldives Qualifications Framework (MNQF) without obtaining Programme Accreditation by MQA.
- e) Academic programmes accredited by MQA shall be conducted as well as advertised in accordance with the Programme Accreditation document, the standards and criteria set in this Guidelines and the Regulation for Programme Accreditation (Regulation No: R-77/2022) as well as other related regulations and standards.

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- f) MQA's name and logo must only be used in advertisements with the approval from MQA.
 - g) As MQA's Programme Accreditation is given to a specific HEI, that accreditation cannot be transferred to any other HEI. If such a programme is to be conducted at another HEI, the affiliated HEI must obtain a separate Programme Accreditation with the information of a different awarding body. The awarding body must ensure that the affiliated HEI obtains Programme Accreditation from MQA.
 - h) If a HEI is found to be in breach of the standards and criteria set in this Guidelines and the Regulation for Programme Accreditation (Regulation No: R-77/2022), the actions stated in Section 30 of the Regulation for Programme Accreditation (Regulation No: R-77/2022) shall be taken by MQA.

Chapter 2: Template and Criteria for Programme Accreditation Document

1. Introduction

The purpose of this template is to provide information to higher education institutions (HEIs) about the contents of programme accreditation document. This template serves as a template for preparing Programme Accreditation document and provides standards and Guidelines for various elements of an academic programme, in addition to the guidelines in Sections 1 – 7 of the “Chapter 1: General Guidelines” of this Guidelines as well as MQA’s “Regulation for Programme Accreditation (Regulation No: R-77/2022)”.

The Programme Accreditation depends on meeting criteria of eleven categories relating to an academic programme (10 categories if E-learning is not a delivery modality):

PART A

1. Institutional Capacity and Management
2. Instruction and Academic Staffing
3. General Student Assessment Policies and Procedures
4. Student Withdrawal

PART B

5. Admission Requirements
6. Advanced standing
7. Programme Description
8. E-learning readiness – if delivered through e-learning or blended learning
9. Learning outcomes and level descriptors
10. Programme summary
11. Module outlines

In order to obtain Programme Accreditation, the requirements in all categories have to be met. The detailed requirements under each category are listed below.

PART A

1. Institutional Capacity and Management

The higher education institution has to demonstrate that it has the institutional capacity and adequate management capability to conduct the programme. It has to ensure that the process of managing the Programme is carried out effectively and efficiently and that the general study conditions conform to the needs and requirements of students.

1.1 Introduction of the HEI

In this section, the following information as an introduction to the HEI shall be provided.

- Brief introduction of the institution with information about the status of the institutional registration.

1.2 Organization

In this section, information that adequately describes the organisational structure must be provided as following.

- Organisational chart including key management functions, names and titles of key management staff.
- Financial forecast.
- Tuition fee structure and duration for fee payment.

1.3 Relevant facilities and resources

In this section, the facilities and resources used for the operation of the programme should be outlined as following.

- A chart of the HEI facilities and resources for the operation of the Programme.
- An assessment of the sufficiency and adequacy of the following facilities and resources.

1.3.1 Furnished classrooms

- Number of classrooms available for the Programme,
- Overall capacity of these classrooms.
- Description of the teaching and learning facilities (e.g., smart-boards, projectors, etc.).

1.3.2 Technical resources for e-learning – if accreditation is sought for e-learning delivery modality or blended learning

- Explanation of existing technical resources for e-learning as per the technical requirements outlined under Section 9 (technical requirements for e-learning delivery) of MQA's Guidelines for E-learning (Regulation No: G-28/2022). Technical resources for e-learning as per Section 9 of MQA's Guidelines for E-learning (Regulation No: G-28/2022) should be available for verification.

1.3.3 Laboratories

- The laboratories, their student capacity as well as the facilities.
- Health and safety features of the laboratories.

1.3.4 Computer rooms

- Number of computer rooms, accessibility of computer facilities for students, computer to student ratio, and operating hours.
- How students may use their own computers and devices.
- Information about Internet and Intranet access.

1.3.5 Library

- Library resources relevant for the programme.
- Physical library, physical books, journals available in the library.
- Electronic resources.
- The opening hours of the library.

1.3.6 Other Facilities

- Information about any other facility related to the programme shall be presented here.

1.4 Brief explanation of the internal quality assurance mechanism

In this section, the arrangements for assuring the quality of the study programme and the management of the quality assurance should be outlined. This information is expected to include the following.

- Outline of the quality assurance policy, processes and procedures.
- Mechanisms for gathering feedback about the study programme, both from internal and external stakeholders.

- The use of questionnaires, follow-up mechanisms to be used.
- How the quality assurance mechanisms for the programme are integrated into the institutional quality assurance procedures.

2. Instruction and Academic Staffing

In this section, information about the Instruction and academic staffing shall be provided as following. Such information can be included as annex.

- Academic staff active in the Programme.
- Staff arrangements in place before the Programme commences.
- All necessary teaching contracts and agreements, CVs of academic staff must be retained at the registered administrative office of the HEI.

2.1 Programme Co-ordinator

2.1.1 Minimum academic qualifications and teaching experience of the Programme co-ordinator

The following information shall be provided about the co-ordinator.

- The policy of choosing a Programme co-ordinator, i.e., the person who is overall in charge of the Programme as well as information about them.
- Description of the minimum academic qualifications, as well as the teaching experience, managerial experience and research record. Coordinators must meet the criteria set under the Section 20 of MQA's Regulation for Programme Accreditation (Regulation No: R-77/2022).

2.1.2 Responsibilities of the Programme Co-ordinator

- Describe the specific responsibilities of the Programme co-ordinator in relation to the operation of the Programme.

2.2 Teaching staff

2.2.1 Minimum number of teaching staff required for this Programme

- Information about the minimum number of teaching staff to be involved in the programme. The policy should be to allocate adequate number of qualified lecturers required for all modules.

2.2.2 Minimum academic qualifications and teaching experience of the teaching staff

- The policy as well as information about the minimum academic requirements and qualifications of the teaching staff involved in the Programme. Lecturers must meet the criteria set under the Section 20 of MQA's Regulation for Programme Accreditation (Regulation No: R-77/2022).
- Information about the ratio of qualifications of the teaching staff, i.e., which proportion of teaching staff hold a PhD or a Master's degree.

2.2.3 Responsibilities of the teaching staff

- Information about the specific responsibilities of the teaching staff.
- Include an overview of the workload of teaching staff in relation to the programme.

2.3 Staff performance and appraisal

2.3.1 Performance criteria and process to be utilized for staff appraisal

- Information about the assessment of staff performance and their appraisal.
- Description should include references to the regulations and policies about staff appraisal of the higher education institution.
- Any instruments used, such as observation checklists, questionnaires and self-assessment guidelines should be annexed.

2.3.2 Arrangements in place for students' evaluation of the Programme

- In addition to the overall information provided in section 1.4, information should be provided about how student evaluations of the Programme are organised, in terms of their regularity, types of evaluations and how the results of the evaluations are analysed and followed-up.
- Any evaluation instruments, such as questionnaires should be annexed.

3. General Student Assessment Policies and Procedures

This section is intended to present general information relating to student assessment in the study programme.

3.1 Assessment and evaluation processes

- Information should be provided in a summative manner about the assessment methods used for the modules and units as outlined in section 6.10.10

- The required standards for assessment must be clearly specified in relation to each module /unit of the programme. Assessments must also be appropriate for the delivery modality of the programme.
- In general, students must be required to produce at least one piece of individual work (written or otherwise) from which the unaided capability of a student could be assessed. All modules of programmes from Level 1 to Level 9 qualifications (excluding Masters by research) must include assessment equivalent to at least 50% (fifty percent) of aggregate marks in assessment conditions – mainly exams – which are supervised, timed and controlled – regardless of the delivery modality.
- Exams should be conducted in a way that does not compromise integrity of the process.
- This assessment can include unseen written examinations, written open book/open notes examinations, structured multiple-choice questions, oral presentations in class, oral examinations, scheduled meetings with supervisors, demonstrations, laboratory work, in-class quizzes, etc.
- Duration for open book examinations must be carried out in a reasonable timeframe.
- Information must also be given about home-written assignment tasks and weightage. In general, to reduce incidences of third-party assistance or involvement in preparing assignments, no module should require all home-written assignments.

3.2 Proctoring mechanism – if the delivery modality is e-learning or blended learning

- If the programme is delivered through e-learning or blended learning or distance education, and the exams are designed to be held online, the assessment and evaluation process must meet standards set under section 13 of the MQA's Guidelines for E-learning (Regulation No: G-28/2022) including a proctoring mechanism, which is aligned to MQA's relevant standards. The referred proctoring mechanism should be clearly explained under this section – in addition to the general assessment policies and procedures and specific assessment methods for each module.

3.3 Procedure on reporting students' academic progress

- Procedures to report the academic progress of students including the periodicity of these reports.
- Mechanisms in place for regular feedback and to support students who underperform and any warning systems in use.

3.4 Graduation requirements

- General policies regarding graduation requirements, such as minimum attendance and participation, minimum credits, academic performance, completion of internships, or any other requirements stipulated by the institution.
- Attendance requirement shall be 80 % in general and 75% minimum in exceptional circumstances of ill health and unforeseen circumstances.

3.5 Policy on academic misconduct

- Policies on contract cheating as per the Section 65 (d) of the Maldives Higher Education and Training Act.
- Policies on the academic conduct of students.
- Policies on academic dishonesty and plagiarism.
- It should also be outlined what the consequences of potential misconduct and contract cheating are as per existing laws and regulations.
- How are students informed about the policies and procedures?

4. Student Withdrawal

This section is to provide general information about policies and consequences of student withdrawal.

4.1 Policy on the dismissal of a student and tuition fee reimbursement

- General policy relating to student dismissal relating to the programme. Include specific regulations on dismissal in relation to attendance, student performance and misconduct as well as policies with regard to tuition fee reimbursement.

4.2 Policy on voluntary withdrawal and tuition fee reimbursement

- Policy on voluntary student withdrawal. Include timelines and deadlines for the withdrawal as well as policies with regard to tuition fee reimbursement.
- Information about the issuance of transcripts of records of student achievements.

4.3 Policy on compensation for students and alternative arrangements

- Policy on compensation for students such as tuition fee reimbursement and alternative arrangements in case of discontinuation of accredited programme(s), closure and deregistration of the HEI for any reason.

PART B

5. Admission Requirements

5.1 General Entry Criteria

- Information about general minimum entry criteria for admission of students into the specific academic programme. This should comply with the “Minimum Entry Criteria for MNQF Qualifications” of MQA.
- Description of how the policy on academic requirements is practically implemented in the selection process.

5.2 Alternative Entry Criteria

- General policy of the provider’s alternative entry requirements expected from students.
- Percentage of applicants to be considered for enrolment under the alternative entry criteria.
- The provider should not use the alternative entry criteria as the main route of entry into a programme.

5.3 Language requirement

- General policy of the provider’s language requirement relevant to the programme in accordance with MQA’s Guidelines for Medium of Instruction.

6. Advanced Standing

6.1 Policy on providing advanced standing

- Information should be provided with regard to the overall policy on providing advanced standing and the recognition of prior learning. This should include information about the types of learning that can be taken into account. Advanced standing should only be given for prior study that has been undertaken at a higher level than the minimum entry qualification level. For example, advanced standing in a Bachelor’s degree cannot be given for a Level 4 Certificate 4, which is the minimum entry qualification for Bachelor’s degree. However, it could be possible to grant advanced standing for a MQA recognised Level 5 Diploma to give exemption of year 1 of a Bachelor’s degree

and for an MQA recognised Level 6 Advanced Diploma to give exemption of year 1 and 2 of a Bachelor's degree in the same field. Even with the mentioned advanced standing, the Bachelor's degree should be designed as a minimum 3 years Bachelor's degree with exemptions explained under this section.

- Advanced standing cannot be given for prior experience.

6.2 Methods of verifying the validity of prior learning to grant advanced standing

- Information should be provided on how the higher education institution is verifying the prior learning achievements of students in order to provide advanced standing. This should include information about how the achievements of specific learning outcomes, is being verified.
- Advanced standing should be granted for modules or a group of units/subjects/modules deemed substantially equivalent (similarity of 70% or more) to units/subjects/modules in the specific programme of study for which admission is granted by the institution. Once advanced standing is granted for units/subjects/modules, they should be clearly mentioned on student transcript as "Exempt". Provision of advanced standing (transfer of credit for prior learning) will lead the student to complete fewer subjects overall to receive the qualification and henceforth the duration may be reduced.
- Advanced Standing should only be given for prior study that has been undertaken at a higher level than the minimum entry qualification level for a given programme of study. For example, advanced standing in a Bachelor's degree cannot be given for a Level 4 Certificate IV, which is the minimum entry qualification for Bachelor's degree. Advanced standing for informal education or prior work experience cannot be taken into account.

Informal education is defined as unplanned and spontaneous learning of behaviors, norms, and values, which typically occurs outside of formal (university/ college/ institute) settings. Informal education comprises of any other thing that is outside the academic curriculum that fits an MNQF qualification by any HEI.

6.3 Maximum credits to be granted as advanced standing

- Information should be provided about the maximum number of credits that can be awarded as advanced standing. This should also include information about any units that cannot be replaced through prior learning, if applicable. It is expected that the maximum number of credits that could be awarded as advanced standing do not amount to more than 1/3 of the total number of credits. This does not apply to qualifications that are part of the same Programme and hence can be considered as integrated shorter qualifications.

7. Programme Description

This section is intended to present a description of the programme in relation to the overall goals of the programme. Information should also be provided about teaching, learning and assessment methods used, the modules or units that form the Programme and specific requirements thereof.

7.1 Goals of the Programme

- Information about the overall goals and objectives of the Programme.
- Information on how the goals and objectives fit in with the institution's Mission and Strategic Plan, the demand from the labour market and appropriately qualified potential students, and opportunities for graduates.
- Include an account of how the individual units build up to the overall goals.

7.2 Outcomes of the programme

- Information about the Programme outcomes.
- Include references to the level descriptors as outlined in the Maldives National Qualifications Framework. A description should be provided as to how the Programme outcomes ensure that the level descriptors are being met.

7.3 Method/ process utilized in programme development

- Information about how the Programme was developed, the committee and consultation processes engaged and the benchmarks and affiliations used in the process.
- If the help of another university was used, it should be mentioned here.

7.4 Mode of Study

- Explanation of how full-time and part-time (if relevant) study will be conducted in terms of duration, class times, etc.
- Full-time study is defined as a student achieving a minimum of 120 credits per academic year at the rate of minimum 40 learning hours a week, i.e., minimum 20 contact hours for Certificate 1, Certificate 2 and Certificate 3 and minimum 13.33 contact hours for Certificate 4/ Advanced Certificate and above qualifications, as per the Section 5.1 (d) (Credit Policy Under the Strengthened National Qualifications Framework) of the MNQF.
- Contact hours of face-to-face programmes shall be in contact with students in which students physically attend the classes, i.e., not online contact hours.
- As per the quality assurance standards of the MNQF, part-time courses can be offered “at times to suit workers so that a full qualification is achieved over time”. Part-time duration shall be double the duration of full-time.
- Programmes without weekly 40 learning hours shall be regarded and conducted as part-time programmes with matching duration.

7.5 Delivery modality

- Explanation of the delivery modality consistent with the application form whether face-to-face, e-learning, blended learning or distance education – in accordance with this Guidelines as well as the MQA’s “Guidelines for E-learning” (Regulation No: G-28/2022), as relevant.
- Face-to-face is defined as the delivery modality in which students physically attend classes in person. Face-to-face teaching includes lectures, tutorials, seminars, workshops, laboratory learning, group works, etc.
- E-learning, blended learning and distance education delivery modalities shall be interpreted as defined in the MQA’s “Guidelines for E-learning” (Regulation No: G-28/2022).

7.6 Medium of instruction

- Explanation of medium/ language of instruction consistent with the application form.
- Medium of instruction shall be relevant to the field of study.

8. E-learning readiness – if delivered through e-learning or blended learning

- Explanation of e-learning readiness with the inclusion of the following elements. What is explained here must be available for verification by MQA.

8.1 Technical readiness for e-learning

- Explanation of technical readiness for e-learning as per the technical requirements outlined under section 9 (technical requirements for e-learning delivery) of MQA's "Guidelines for E-learning" (Regulation No: G-28/2022). This Section shall align with the information provided in Section 1.3.2 under this Guidelines.

8.2 Institutional internal e-learning quality assurance policies

- E-learning policy as per Section 8.1 of MQA's "Guidelines for E-learning" ((Regulation No: G-28/2022).
- Outline the design and approval process with alignment to the guidelines set under Section 8.2 of MQA's "Guidelines for E-learning" ((Regulation No: G-28/2022).
- Explanation of learning, teaching and assessment of the e-learning programme as per Section 8.3 of MQA's "Guidelines for E-learning" ((Regulation No: G-28/2022).
- Explanation of specific published regulations regarding student admission, progression, recognition and certification as per Section 8.4 of MQA's "Guidelines for E-learning" ((Regulation No: G-28/2022).
- Explanation of the process for the recruitment and development of the staff for e-learning context as per Section 8.5 of MQA's "Guidelines for E-learning" ((Regulation No: G-28/2022).
- Explanation of Learning resources for e-learning as per Section 8.6 of MQA's "Guidelines for E-learning" ((Regulation No: G-28/2022).
- Explanation of the student support within the e-learning delivery Section 8.7 of MQA's "Guidelines for E-learning" ((Regulation No: G-28/2022).

- Explanation of the information management system related to e-learning as per Section 8.8 of MQA's "Guidelines for E-learning" ((Regulation No: G-28/2022).
- Explanation of the existing mechanism for publishing information about the activities of the HEI as per Section 8.9 of MQA's "Guidelines for E-learning" ((Regulation No: G-28/2022).
- Explanation of the monitoring and periodic review of the e-learning programmes.

8.3 Proof of readiness to deliver an e-learning programme

- Explanation of e-learning materials to be delivered to students through LMS/ e-learning platform that cover topics written in module outlines submitted under this Guidelines. E-learning materials should be shared with MQA as per Section 14.1 (b) of MQA's "Guidelines for E-learning" ((Regulation No: G-28/2022).

9. Learning outcomes and level descriptors

- Information about how the learning outcomes of each individual module or unit relate to the corresponding level descriptors in the Maldives National Qualifications Framework (refer latest version), using a mapping grid.
- Explain any overlap between learning outcomes (Refer Annex 1 "Notes to Programme Developers on Linking Level Descriptors to Learning Outcomes").

10. Programme Summary

- A brief outline of the programme should be provided. This should include:
 - A list of all modules or units with allocated credits, learning hours and contact hours – with the semester breakdown, in accordance with MQA's Policy for the and with the respective language of instruction and the delivery modality whether face-to-face, e-learning, blended learning or distance education.
 - Semester duration must be minimum 15 weeks as per the Policy number G-6/2022 (Policy for Student enrolment and teaching).
- The list should be presented in a table format as suggested below.

#	Module Code (if applicable)	Module Title	Credits	Total Learning Hours	Contact Hours
1.					
2.					
Total					

11. Module outlines

Information should be provided about the outlines for each individual module or unit. For each module or unit, information needs to be given on the eleven sections listed below.

11.1 Modules/ unit name

- Name of the module or unit.
- A short description of the module or unit.

11.2 Module Code Number

- If applicable, the module code number should be provided.

11.3 Credits, learning hours and contact hours

- Information relating to credits of the module or unit should be provided. The relation of contact hours to individual learning should be outlined. It is expected that contact hours should be 50% (1/2) of learning hours for qualifications from Certificate 1 to Certificate 3, and 33% (1/3) of learning hours for qualifications from Certificate 4 and above.
- One credit equals 10 learning hours.

11.4 Delivery Modality

- Details about the delivery modalities of the module such as face-to-face, distance education, blended learning, e-Learning.
- Explanation about why and how the chosen Delivery Modality best contributes to the achievement of the learning outcomes of the specific module.
- Information about every delivery site of the Programme.

11.5 Minimum qualification and experience of instructors/ lecturers

- Information about the minimum academic qualifications required from teaching staff involved in the module or unit. This policy should be consistent with the policies described under 2.2.2.

11.6 Pre-requisites

- If the module or unit requires any pre-requisites, these should be outlined.

11.7 Co-requisites

- If the module or unit requires any co-requisites, these should be outlined.

11.8 Expected learning outcomes

- Information should be provided about the expected learning outcomes of the module or unit consistent with the information provided under Section 6.9 of this Chapter. This should include a description of how the specific teaching and learning methodology is best suitable to acquire the intended learning outcomes.

11.9 Curricula content

- Information should be provided about the specific curricula content that is covered in the module or unit. This should include an overview of the individual weekly sessions that form part of the module or unit and allocated credits, learning hours and contact hours; either for individual units/ topics or the total for the module, as appropriate. This information should be presented in a table format. The following table example can be used to present this information.

#	Week	Topics	Pedagogy	Credits	Learning Hours	Contact Hours
1.						
2.						
Total						

- Information about any practical or work-based involvement, if any, should also be provided. These components must be linked directly to the expected learning outcomes of the Programme.

11.10 Specific assessment methods and grading criteria

- Information about the specific forms of assessment and the grading criteria in the module or unit, which is aligned to Section 3 of this Guidelines. In general, the amount of work expected from any student across all assessment tasks should relate to the credit value of the subject and with the complexity of the material studied.
- Give an account as to how the chosen form of assessment best relates to the learning outcomes of the module or unit.

11.11 List of reference materials, if relevant.

- Information about the reference material to be used in the module or unit.
- If available, documents such as hand-outs, workbooks, teacher guides, lecture notes or textbooks should be annexed as a list.

Annex 1: Notes to Programme Developers on Linking Level Descriptors to Learning Outcomes

- Level Descriptors set out the characteristic generic outcomes of every level.
- They are intended to provide a general, shared understanding of every level and to allow broad comparisons to be made between qualifications and learning at different levels.
- They are not intended to give precise or comprehensive statements. There is not expectation that every qualification should have all the competencies in each domain.
- Programme Accreditation Documentation should provide a matrix (as below) that could be used to link intended learning outcomes/ objectives to the level descriptors.

Level descriptor domains	Knowledge and understanding	Practice: Applied knowledge and understanding	Generic cognitive skills	Communication, ICT and numeracy skills	Autonomy, accountability and working with others
Subjects/modules and units that lead to learning outcomes specified for this level					
1. Subject/module/unit 1					
a. Outcomes/objectives 1	X	X	X		
b. Outcomes/objectives 2	X	X	X		
c. Outcomes/objectives 3	X	X	X		X
2. Subject/module/unit 2					
a. Outcomes/objectives 1	X	X	X	X	
b. Outcomes/objectives 2				X	
3. Subject/module/unit 3					
4.					

Programme Accreditation Documentation should provide how achievement of intended learning outcomes specified under level descriptors, will be assessed.
