



Maldives Qualifications Authority

Ministry of Higher Education
Male', Maldives

Ref No.: (IUL)218-Audit/2018/2023/56

Terms and References on Institutional Audit

Background

The process of institutional audits has been designed on the basis of the mandate given to MQA Act No. 7/2021 (Maldives Higher Education and Training Act). and follows the values that MQA stands for and abides by in all its work. In particular, 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 institutional audits 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.

Institutional Audit ensures continuous enhancement of higher Education.

Objectives of Institutional Audits

The objective of institutional audits is to strengthen the operations of higher education institutions by providing them with feedback on their performance. Therefore, the intention is also to strengthen the higher education sector in Maldives as a whole.

Institutional audit represents an activity by which a higher education institution is assessed in terms of a set of established criteria as well as against the achievement of its own mission, on a three-year cycle.

An institutional audit is not a process that results in a yes/ no decision. Rather, it builds strongly on the principles of continuous quality enhancement. The institutional audit is coordinated by MQA and includes cyclical site-visits undertaken by appointed audit panels that comprise experts in quality assurance and institutional leadership. The focus of audits is at the systems level, with a particular focus on policies, processes and procedures. Thus, institutional audits differ substantially from accreditation processes that take place at the level of study programmes.

The audit is based on the concept of a peer-review process. The audit panel base their opinion on evidence gathered in relation to the institutional capacity and performance in terms of the MQA Criteria for Institutional Audits, which give a substantial role to the achievement of the mission of a higher education institution.

The obligation to undergo an institutional audit applies to all higher education institutions operating in the Republic of Maldives, regardless of whether they are public or private, or whether they are Maldivian or a foreign institution.

MQA will appoint a panel of reviewers. This panel comprises of 3 to 5 members; 5 for universities and colleges and 3 for institutes. One of the members is appointed by MQA to be the Chair of the audit panel. The members should have substantial experience in higher education and understand the diversity of higher education institutions. It is ensured that the panel has adequate competence in terms of teaching and learning processes, including learning outcomes, and of other regulations or processes such as qualifications frameworks or quality assurance.

MQA's Institutional Audit process is designed on par with worldwide best practices in higher education quality assurance.

MQA organises a regular selection process for new reviewers to become members of the pool. The pool consists of both national and international reviewers. MQA seeks nominations for the pool of reviewers from higher education institutions as well. Therefore, Maldives Qualifications Authority invites interested candidates to apply to be in the pool, from which Audit Panels will be selected after an interview for the Institutional Audit process.

Selection of Audit Panel Members

Selection of Institutional Audit Panel members will be based on the following 3 main criteria of Education and Experience. MQA appoints the reviewers, using several criteria, including gender balance and a mix between more experienced and new reviewers.

1. Conflict of Interest and declaration

It is of utmost importance for MQA to ensure the objectivity of the reviewers. Therefore, specific measures are taken to prevent possible conflicts of interest.

- a. Reviewers cannot have an affiliation with the higher education institution under review.
- b. Reviewers have to sign a declaration of no-conflict-of-interest.
- c. The Audit Panel members also have to agree to and sign a non-disclosure statement. In this statement the reviewers declare that all information obtained during the process of the institutional audit remains confidential and is only used for the work of the Audit Panel internally as well as to inform the writing of the Audit Panel report.

2. Higher Education and Training qualification

- a. Notable scholar/academic from the respective discipline with appropriate credentials (a Bachelor's Degree **AND** a Master's Degree qualification);
- b. Knowledge and understanding of the Maldivian higher education and training sector and its broader context;

- c. Knowledge of Institutional Audit Regulations and policy, processes, methods and terminologies;

3. Experience and Professional Expertise

- a. Experience in curriculum design and delivery in higher education including teaching experience in higher education and training sector;
- b. Experience of undertaking quality reviews (audit, assessment, accreditation, etc.) in educational, professional or industrial settings;
- c. Experience in research and scholarly activities or professional practice in a relevant field in combination with academic activity;
- d. Institutional leadership or management experience in higher education sector;
- e. Commitment to the principles of quality and quality assurance in higher education demonstrated through experience in programme /subject reviews, accreditation and /or academic audit processes;
- f. Ability to understand and assess information provided by HEIs in an objective and impartial manner that is sensitive to the particular context in which programmes and services have risen;
- g. Demonstrated expertise in the analysis and interpretation of data in forming and validating conclusions.

In addition to the above, the Selection Committee will also consider other Personal Qualities including;

- a. Commitment and diligence;
- b. Reliability in meeting commitments;
- c. Ability to communicate effectively;
- d. Willingness and ability to commit for site visits;
- e. Ability to keep high standards of ethics in dealing with sensitive and/or confidential matters.
- f. Demonstrated ability (and experience) to work cooperatively in a team.