Experience Sharing on Good Practices - Pakistan

This policy document on *Good Practices for Quality Assurance for Accreditation Councils in Pakistan*[1] is the result of joining international networking on quality of higher education, consultations and discussions for learning with other countries especially under the umbrella of Asia Pacific Quality Network (APQN) with special guidance from publications of the INQAAHE Secretariat. The commonality of the accreditation process is based on the commitment of Accrediting Bodies or Councils to ensure that higher education students have access to high quality education across globe and that teaching, research, and services reflect knowledge of world-class standards. The implementation of these Good Practices in letter and spirit is aimed at Quality Assurance & Improvements in higher learning with continuity and consistency.

The Higher Education Commission of Pakistan is entering into era of quality assurance and enhancement especially in the area of accreditation. The accreditation will be a two tier process to work both at programme and institutional level. Accreditation Councils are being set up in various subject areas where these did not exist previously, with the objective of programme accreditation at undergraduate level across the country. These Accreditation Councils will be responsible for programme accreditation in the respective subjects with complete autonomy in terms of implementation under policy guidelines of the HEC. Institutional accreditation will remain responsibility of the HEC under its charter.

Furthermore, active linkages have been developed with already existing Accreditation Councils and Professional Accrediting Bodies in the country e.g. Pakistan Engineering Council (PEC), Pakistan Medical and Dental Council (PMDC), Pakistan Council for Architects and Town Planner (PCATP) and Pakistan Bar Council (PBC) to bring them at par with international and commonly agreed standards of quality and accreditation.

Primarily, the secretarial support and seed money will be provided by the HEC to initiate the process of programme accreditation smoothly and, afterwards, these Accreditation Councils will become financially sustainable to run their functions at their own. The growth of new Accreditation Councils in various academic disciplines and to guide the already existing Accreditation Councils in certain disciplines urgently calls for endorsement of the policy guidelines matching with international practices such as INQAAHE Guidelines to assure uniformity of quality standards across the board.

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[1] Full report follows.

The HEC is benefited from the INQAAHE guidelines in a very effective and practical way of practicing and sharing knowledge with the stakeholders. The INQAAHE guidelines were discussed with all the stakeholders in detail and a strategy to consider these guidelines as a milestone on the way forward to quality assurance across disciplines was developed. As in case of Pakistan, the higher education sector is represented by a single Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) working under the umbrella of HEC and there is no option of multiple quality assurance agencies. However, various accrediting bodies and professional councils are working in the area of accreditation and quality assurance at programme level. Thus, the guidelines were adapted accordingly after passing through an extensive consultation process with higher education institutions, policy makers, faculty members, the Vice Chancellors and Accreditors to reach at consent. Consequently, this policy document was developed to serve as a response to rising need for well defined and workable set of good practices of accreditation comparable with global standards for quality assurance in higher education.

The objective of implementation of these guidelines is to standardize the process of accreditation across councils and to achieve the higher level of international comparability. The document was well received by all accrediting bodies and professional accreditation organizations in the country and the guidelines provided are implemented for practicing.

The objective of this experience sharing exercise is to reflect the impact of effective Quality Networks of Quality Assurance in Higher Education, on development of processes across borders and to promote a culture of knowledge sharing on Good Practices[2] in Quality Assurance across the globe.

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[2] *The Higher Education Commission acknowledges the inspiration and ideas for this document derived from "GUIDELINES OF GOOD PRACTICE 2005" a document published by INQAAHE Secretariat and presented in the INQAAHE Workshop held at The Hague, the Netherlands on 17th to 19th May, 2005. And we are grateful to Dr. Fred Hayward, Ms. Dorte Kristofferson, and Dr. David Woodhouse whose guidance and intellectual input was helpful in writing of this document.*

GOOD PRACTICES
FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE FOR
ACCREDITATION COUNCILS
IN PAKISTAN

MS ZIA BATOOL

PROF. DR. RIAZ HUSSAIN QURESHI

Acknowledgements

Introduction:

This policy document on **Good Practices for Quality Assurance for Accreditation Councils in Pakistan** is the result of joining international networking on quality of higher education, consultations, discussions, and contacts for learning with other countries especially United Kingdom, Australia, United States, Netherlands and Germany with special guidance from INQAAHE Secretariat publications. The commonality of the accreditation process is based on the commitment of Accrediting Bodies or Councils to ensure that higher education students have access to high quality education across globe and that teaching, research, and services reflect knowledge of world-class standards. The implementation of these Good Practices in letter and spirit is aimed at Quality Assurance & Improvements in higher learning on sustained basis.

1.1   Background:

The Higher Education Commission of Pakistan is entering into new era of quality assurance and enhancement especially in the area of accreditation with. The accreditation will be a two tier process to work both at programme and institutional level. Accreditation Councils are being set up in various subject areas where these did not exist previously, with the objective of programme accreditation at undergraduate level across country. These Accreditation Councils will be responsible for programme accreditation in the respective subject with complete autonomy in terms of implementation under policy guidelines of the HEC. Institutional accreditation will remain the responsibility of the HEC under its charter.

Furthermore, active linkages have been developed with already existing Accreditation Councils in the country e.g. Pakistan Engineering Council (PEC) and Pakistan Council for Architects and Town Planners (PCATP) to bring them at par with international and commonly agreed standards of quality and accreditation.

Primarily, the secretarial support and seed money will be provided by

the HEC to initiate the process of programme accreditation smoothly and, afterwards, these Accreditation Councils will become financially sustainable to run their functions at their own.

The growth of new Accreditation Councils in various subject areas and to guide the already existing Accreditation Councils in certain disciplines urgently calls for endorsement of the policy guidelines matching with international practices such as INQAAHE Guidelines to assure uniformity of quality standards across board. This policy document is a response to rising need for well defined and workable set of good practices of accreditation comparable with global standards for quality assurance in higher education. The objective of implementation of these guidelines is to standardize the process of accreditation across councils under umbrella of the HEC and to achieve the higher level of international comparability.

1.2 Pre-Requisites for Good Practices for Quality Assurance, Improvement, and Accreditation:

These Good Practices for Quality Assurance for Accreditation Councils in Pakistan is designed to facilitate Accreditation Councils in accomplishment of the task assigned and improving their efficiency compatible with international standards of quality in performing their activities and carrying out the process of self assessment. Following are the internationally agreed pre-requisites[1] to be taken into consideration before practicing the Good Practices for Quality Assurance:

- ❑ The Good Practices are proposed to promote a culture of quality in programme accreditation in higher education and facilitate quality improvement through effective assessment of an Accreditation Council derived from existing experience.

◻ That each Accreditation Council has developed to serve a specific discipline or academic programme. Its work will be influenced by its subject area, its cultural and historical academic background.

◻ There are diverse approaches to, and rationale for, external quality assessment and accreditation of academic programmes, but these approaches have certain commonalities. (The word "Accreditation" or "Accreditation Council" will be used as generic terms to include all types of external quality assessment of academic programmes).

◻ The Good Practices should not be dominated or lead by any of the specific approach, but promote good practices with diversity and relevance to national needs and goals, while helping to eliminate poor quality in the academic programmes and fostering quality improvements in the country.

Thus, these prerequisites need to be agreed by all Accreditation Councils or bodies dealing with accreditation in different subject areas or academic programmes.

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1 INQAAHE Guidelines for Good Practices, Workshop, The Hague, the Netherlands, May, 2005.

The Good Practices for Quality Assurance for Accreditation Councils in Pakistan:

2.1 Clarity of Mission Statement:

The Accreditation Council has a written mission statement or a set of clearly defined goals and objectives that take into account the historical and academic background of the Council for the relevant programme. The mission statement should be a general statement of values, aims, and goals of the Council. An effective mission statement is clear, precise, and transparent about commitments, long-term goals, and values. It should include a commitment to high standards and high levels of performance. The statement makes clear that accreditation, with the objective of external quality assurance and improvement of the specific academic programme area, is the major task of the Council and that there exists a system of procedures and processes to achieve this mission. And the mission statement is completely translated into a clear policy framework and action plan in turn.

Possible evidences:

- Mission statement of the Council
- Objectives and Goals of the Council
- Future Vision of the Council
- Policy Framework of the Council
- Action plan
- Periodic progress reports of the Council

2.2 Amicability of relationship between the Accreditation Council and Higher Education Institutions:

The Accreditation Council acknowledges that quality improvement and quality assurance of academic programmes are first and

foremost the responsibility of the higher education institutions and respective departments themselves. The Council respects the autonomy, identity and integrity of the higher education institutions at programme level while formulating the policies for quality assurance and improvements. The Council applies the accreditation standards and criteria for accreditation, which have been developed in consultation with broader range of programme/ subject specialists, academicians and all other stakeholders, in a clear and unbiased manner. The Council works with the aim to contribute and facilitate both quality improvement and accountability simultaneously.

Possible evidences:

- Criteria for candidacy for accreditation
- Academic Standards for accreditation
- Policies/ Manuals/ Guidelines (scripted)
- Feedback from institutions/ departments and other stakeholders
- Reports from external reviews or quality reviews of the Accreditation Councils by the HEC
- Reports of self review of the Accreditation Councils

2.3   Transparency of Decision Making:

The Accreditation Council carries out accreditation with reference to self assessment of the programme and to external quality assessment standards. The Accreditation Council is independent to the extent that it has autonomous responsibility for its operations and that judgments made in its reports cannot be influenced by a third party. The Council carries out programme accreditation and makes decisions in an independent, unbiased, reliable and transparent manner with consistency. Subsequently, the accreditation council is

accountable to the HEC for transparency and efficiency of all processes and procedures followed while making these decisions.

Possible evidences:

- Manuals and instructional guidelines for accreditation to the relevant programme experts
- Criteria for selection, appointment and training of the programme accreditation experts
- Legal Frameworks, procedures, questionnaires/ forms
- Documents, e.g. record for accreditation decisions and appeals against decisions, codes of ethics used to avoid conflicts of interest
- Accreditation Standards and Criteria

2.4 Excellence in Selection of the Panels of Experts and Committees:

Wherever the Accreditation Councils use peer reviews, external panels, teams and committees of subject specialists and stakeholders to carry out the programme accreditation, the internal systems and procedures of the Council are well equipped to assure diversity and high quality. The composition of panels, teams or committees is in compliance with the guidelines committed by the Council to achieve diversity and excellence in quality of standards in selection through broad and equitable participation from academia and other stakeholders and its adequacy to meet the needs of world class accreditation. Conflict of interest is eliminated to the extent possible.

The committees, panels or accreditation teams of the subject experts and stakeholders are clearly instructed and trained to conduct the

process of programme accreditation. The panels or accreditation teams of the Councils work independently while carrying out accreditation, making recommendations for decisions and deriving conclusions from the procedures adopted.

Possible evidences:

- ❑ Procedures adopted for selection and appointment of programme experts
- ❑ Criteria applied for selections and nominations
- ❑ Methods and training material used for briefing and training of subject experts on accreditation of relevant programme
- ❑ Description and division of responsibilities between the Council staff and the external panel/team/committee

2.5   Frequency of Public Sharing;

In its performance, the Accreditation Council shares information frequently and responds to public in accordance with the legislation or cultural context relating to the Council. The Council has an efficient mechanism of publicizing and public sharing for its documentation e.g. policies, decisions, procedures and criteria while maintaining confidentiality in personnel matters and in terms of internal deliberations about decisions to assure transparency and independence of decisions.

The Council also integrates the element of public accountability into policy framework by reporting openly on its accreditation decisions and sharing the outcomes of accreditation with public in an appropriate manner in line with the legislation applied and prevailing cultural context of academia in the country. Consequently, the contents of reports may differ depending on the cultural context and

under the requirements of accountability for the council set by the Higher Education Commission being "Accreditor of the Accreditors".

Possible evidences:

- ❑ URL address to the Accreditation Council website and summary of the types of information provided here
- ❑ List of publications and documents of the Council
- ❑ Press releases
- ❑ Reports and recommendations of the Council
- ❑ Other ways and means of information sharing, e.g. newsletters etc.

2.6 Accuracy of Documentation:

The Accreditation Council has clear and consistent documentation concerning the self-evaluation and the external evaluation of the Programme under accreditation review by the Council. The documentation concerning the self evaluation provided to the relevant department or programme clearly states the objectives, procedures and expectations of the self evaluation process. The documentation should distinguish clearly between recommendations and requirements.

The documentation for programme accreditation sets out the areas discussed in this document of Good Practices for Quality Assurance for Accreditation Councils in Pakistan, such as the accreditation standards used by the Council, the decision making criteria, the assessment methods, the reporting format etc. The accreditation frameworks and standards are public and the criteria for accreditation clearly formulated. The principles and rules leading to an accreditation decision are transparent, public and guarantee

impartiality of treatment.

The documents indicate clearly what the Council expects from the programme being conducted by the higher education institution. These expectations are in accordance with for an institution of higher education or its core activities.

The documents of the Accreditation Council reflect clearly that the policy framework and action plan assures that each programme in the subject area will be reviewed for accreditation in an equivalent way across institutions and departments.

Possible evidences:

- Manuals for guidelines including instructions for experts and/ or departments conducting the relevant programme
- Protocols/ Standards/Criteria for Candidacy
- Accreditation frameworks
- Statement of adherence to internationally accepted guidelines, conventions and practices

2.7   Adequacy of Resources:

The Accreditation Council has adequate and accessible human and financial resources to be able to organize and conduct the process of programme accreditation in an effective and efficient manner in compliance with its mission statement and the chosen methodology and with appropriate provision for sustained development.

Possible evidences:

- Budget
- Accounts

- Activities, tasks, workloads
- Registration and accreditation fee structures
- Fee structure for the experts in the subject area
- Average cost of accreditation per programme/ department
- Human resources profile or professionals data bank (members, staff, peer reviewers, experts and committees etc.)

2.8 Efficiency of the System of Appeals:

The Accreditation Council has an appropriate and effective system of appeals to assure accountability and transparency of its decisions. It is responsibility of the accreditation Council to assure the representation of the HEC in the appeal board to make it more transparent and effective.

Possible evidences:

- Policy and procedures of appeal
- Statistics regarding number of appeals submitted, number of appeals granted or denied.
- Analysis reports of the available statistics on appeals

2.9 Quality Assurance of the Accreditation Council:

The Accreditation Council has a system of continuous quality assurance and enhancement of its own policies and processes focusing flexibility in response to the global advancements in higher education and quality improvements.

The Accreditation Council caries out self review of its processes and

performance including its impact on improving the quality of higher education at programme level across country. The Accreditation Council is subject to external review or quality review by the Higher Education Commission at regular intervals of three years. The HEC will serve as the **"Accreditor of the Accreditors".** The Quality Assurance Committee (QAA) and Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) of the HEC will be responsible for external assessment of the accreditation councils. The results of self studies and quality reviews of the Council will be used as evidence by the HEC to make appropriate decisions.

Possible evidences:

- Quality assurance policy/systems/activities/plans of the Accreditation Council

- Reports of self studies

- Reports of external reviews or quality reviews of Accreditation Council by HEC

- Examples of follow up activities to assure the continuity of quality assurance activities

- Internal feedback (Members, staff, teams of experts etc.)

- External feedback from concerned departments of higher education institutions or other stakeholders

2.10   Efficacy of Networking:

As far as possible, every Accreditation Council collaborates with other Accreditation Councils or bodies through effective networking with similar academic bodies. The collaborative efforts will be made in order to experience the exchange of good practices, sharing of accreditation experience/documents, review decisions, joint projects or activities and staff exchange etc. The networking at national and

international level assures the globalization in higher education to achieve the maximum benefit of available resources of knowledge.

Possible evidences:

- Accounts of meetings and visits to and from other Accreditation Councils/ bodies

- Staff exchanged

- Joint participation in activities e.g. projects, seminars, conferences and workshops etc.

- Written contacts between Councils on the solution of specific common issues

- Membership of the networks/ organizations at national and international level.

2.11 Comparability of Standards amongst similar Departments:

In general, every Accreditation Council develops the system to make comparison of similar departments to arbitrate and refer the standards of Quality Assurance. The Council intends to improve the quality of higher education in the relevant area through healthy competition for improved quality amongst departments conducting the similar academic programmes. The criteria for comparison followed by Accreditation Council are rational, derived from the specific cultural and historical background of the disciplines/programmes and meeting the respective international requirements.

Possible evidences:

- Lists of clustering of the departments to make comparison

- Criteria for comparison among similar departments.
- Basic evaluation reports for developing the rating/ranking lists at department level
- Rating/Ranking lists for similar departments based on the accreditation reports