GUIDELINES
ON INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE UNIT (IQAU)
FOR ALBANIAN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS
within the frames of EDUCATION EXCELLENCE AND EQUITY PROJECT
Ministry of Education and Science of Albania

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Driven by problems of access, equity, relevance and quality in higher education the Government of Albania is seeking for a reform framework to fulfil the society demand for higher education quality while promoting integration into the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

Considering the rapid expansion of higher education sector that takes such forms as establishment of private universities and alternative forms of education, a dire need arises to enhance both internal and external quality assurance systems. An important prerequisite for the success of external quality assurance is internal quality assurance of HEIs, the sole responsibility of which lies with HEIs.

In attempting to address this, the current Guidelines on Internal Quality Assurance for Albanian Higher Education Institutions were developed to bring in new approaches to internal quality assurance in general and those of teaching and learning in particular. The Guidelines aim to support the members of the QA Units in developing their procedures of internal quality assurance in line with the European Standards and Guidelines for Higher Education Quality Assurance (ESGs), and thus be able to provide the backbone for the needed improvements in the quality of teaching and learning in their higher education institutions.

The Guidelines address in detail, among other things, the following major points:

- Steps in revising and enhancing the internal quality assurance systems at institutions of higher education;
- Quality assurance of teaching and learning to bring in student-centred and learning outcome-based practices;
- Quality assurance of academic programmes.

To ensure a better application of the Guidelines, A Handbook on Internal Quality Assurance System Establishment in Albanian Higher Education Institutions has been developed to compliment and to provide more detailed insights on the system installation.
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I. Guidelines on Establishment of an Internal Quality Assurance System at Higher Education Institutions in Albania

1. Characteristic Features of Internal Quality Assurance System

1.1 The internal quality assurance system (IQAS) of Albanian higher education institutions should draw on a systemic approach evolving around process- and outcome-based methodology to ensure both effectiveness and efficiency of the processes and achievement of the qualifications set out by the institutional mission. Such an approach entails two major elements:

- **Quality assurance** - mainly concerns the processes undertaken by an institution. Quality monitoring and its assurance ensure that the processes and systems are developed and adhered in such a way that the deliverables are of good quality.

- **Quality control** - mainly deals with outcomes. Quality control is product-based approach. It checks whether the deliverables satisfy the quality requirements as well as the specifications of the customers or not. Depending upon the results, suitable corrective action is taken by quality control personnel.

1.2 Thus, each process and sub-process within teaching and learning should be managed through the PDCA quality management approach

- **P (plan)** – gathering of data to identify and define the issues/problems that need improvements and identify ways to achieve them.

- **D (do)** – implementing the plan by using a trial run, a test group, etc.

- **C (check)** – analysing the results to see if there is good agreement between the original goals and what was actually achieved; make adjustments if necessary.

- **A (act)** – depending on the results from the check step, acting on the plan on a full scale or conducting further work by beginning with the P (plan).

1.3 All activities related to quality assurance in higher education should respect the *fitness for purpose* principle, which entails mission- and evidence-based approach to quality assurance.

1.4 The internal quality assurance of higher education institutions in Albania should be in line with the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in European Higher Education Area*.

2. Key Principles of Internal Quality Assurance System

The quality assurance system, processes and activities of the Albanian universities are underpinned and shaped by a number of key principles. They are as follows:

- support regular reflective practice on the part of staff, teaching teams and academic managers;

- assess the use of modern teaching and learning methods with the aim to promote a student-centred interactive and questioning approach;

- create a culture of continuous improvement and enhancement;
• encompass the requirements of professional statutory bodies, when appropriate;
• facilitate communication of needs and priorities both from the 'bottom up' and from the 'top down',
• focus on customers through addressing the needs of students, labour market and society at large
• stakeholders should be engaged in the quality assurance processes of universities
  o students and alumni should be engaged as participatory partners in the management of their experience;
  o employers and alumni should be engaged as the end users of the qualifications offered;
  o academic and supporting staff should be engaged as direct implementers of the policies and procedures;
• aspects of the quality assurance framework should be informed through appropriate internal and external peer involvement;
• quality assurance processes and activities should be evidence based and, as appropriate, include elements of risk awareness/risk management;
• continuous improvement through recognising the commitment to respond to changing needs;
• the quality assurance framework should be informed by frequent self-evaluation and reflection.

3. IQAU Organizational Set-Up

3.1 The Internal Quality Assurance of Higher Education Institutions (IQAU) should take a form of a central office with specialized staff, which sets and manages a quality assurance network in all the faculties, departments and units of a university.

3.2 Senior management commitment to the process is a prerequisite to success of internal quality assurance.

3.3 The IQAU should take a form of an independent body and it should report directly or indirectly (through a vice-rector) to the rector, thus preventing lobbying from the faculties.

3.4 The IQAU should operate according to its Charter, Strategic Plan and Internal Quality Assurance Manual as approved by the Governing Board of a given university.

3.5 IQAU should not be yet another hierarchical structure or record-keeping exercise in the institution; it should be a facilitative and participative organ of the institutions and be a driving force for ushering in quality by working out strategies to remove deficiencies in and enhance quality of educational provisions.

4. IQAU Goals
IQANU goals should evolve around

- developing a quality system for conscious, consistent and catalytic programmed action to improve the academic and administrative performance of the HEIs;
- promoting measures for institutional functioning towards quality enhancement through internationalization of quality culture and institutionalization of best practices.

5. IQAU Roles and Functions

5.1 The main roles of IQAU should be as follows:

- **Production of an annual self-assessment report.** Internal quality assurance is one of the major elements of the education administration process that faculties and institutions in higher education have to perform systematically and continuously. As a result, higher education institutions are to prepare an annual report that assesses the educational quality internally and make the report public. Thus, the IQAU is to audit and assess the practice of faculties and units of an institution according to the system and mechanism established by the institution by analyzing and comparing the results based on indicators of all quality components according to predetermined criteria and standards.

- **Raising internal awareness on quality issues:** Another major function is to make faculties and educational units or equivalent aware of their status leading to the determination of methods to develop quality development programs to reach the established targets and goals. In particular, IQAU should guide the faculties and educational units or equivalent in realization of their strengths and weaknesses, together with suggestions received to develop their operations to enhance strengths and develop weak areas continuously.

- **Establishment of credibility for external evaluation** – The role of IQAU is to ensure credibility for external evaluation through linking university annual reports and annual self-evaluation reports with external quality assurance, since these two major reports lead to a basic document for the site-visit of the external assessment agency.

- **Training and development** on “quality” issues as well as other functional competencies of academic, non-academic staff, students and other stakeholders.

5.2 The IQAU has multifaceted functions and should serve the following set of primary functions:

- **Support and provide expertise:** the QA officers should visit every faculty and every department regularly and are invited by them to provide expertise in developing their quality assurance processes. In particular, the expertise should evolve around application of quality assurance mechanisms to explicitly assess the use of modern teaching, learning and student assessment methods with the aim to promote a student-centred, interactive and questioning approach to teaching and learning.

- **Coordinate:** since faculties and other departments and units are involved in the quality assurance network and, therefore, processes, the QA officers should coordinate the evaluation processes organized by them, e.g., data collection, analyses.

- **Interpret national and European quality assurance requirements:** one of the tasks of the QA officers should be to interpret the national and European quality assurance requirements so as to adapt them to the institutional context. Thus, the QA officers
should ensure that these national and European requirements are embedded in, and owned by, the university.

- **Monitor**: The QA officers should provide instructions, collect information, and flag problems. However, the solution of the problems is done solely by the faculties and units concerned with a given problem.

- **Administer**: the QA officers should organise and prepare external evaluation visits and process institutional questionnaires.
  
  o For these purposes the IQAU should develop a procedures manual describing the institution’s structure and processes for quality assurance; specifying criteria for selection and formats for indicators, benchmarks, and objectives; preparing standard forms for matters such as student and graduate surveys; and advising on operational procedures for the planning and implementation of quality processes;
  
  o maintain systematic collections of reports on performance including data on indicators and benchmarks that will be required for analysis and reporting on trends in performance and changes in the environment within which the institution is operating.

- **Facilitator**: the IQAU should facilitate creation of a learner-centric environment conducive to quality education and faculty maturation to adopt the required knowledge and technology for participatory teaching and learning process;

- **Provider of information on quality**: dissemination of information on the various quality parameters of the institution for internal and external stakeholders.

### 6. The Governance of Internal Quality Assurance

6.1 The governance of quality assurance should be expressed through setting up committees at all levels of a university – central, faculty level, departmental level;

6.2 To govern quality assurance it is necessary to establish processes for analysing the results, formulating recommendations and discussing them across the various committees (departments, faculties, university, including the governing boards);

6.3 A special Steering Committee should be established at institutional level if the evaluation concerns the university at large and at a faculty level if the evaluation concerns an academic programme under scrutiny;

6.4 Self-evaluation of the HEI in general and academic programmes in particular should be conducted annually;

6.5 Drawing on the annual self-evaluation reports for the last five consecutive years the IQAU should prepare a self-evaluation report for external evaluation;

6.6 To close the feedback loop the results of the annual self-evaluation should feed into the annual development and strategic plans;

6.7 Self-evaluation reports should be approved by the statutory body of the institutions, the Governing Board, for the follow-up action for necessary quality enhancement measures;

6.8 The IQAU should establish its exclusive window on its institutional web-site to regularly report on its activities and for making the self-evaluation reports public.
7. **Stakeholder Involvement**

7.1 Higher education stakeholders should be seen as one of the most important elements in the internal quality assurance of universities, therefore, special mechanisms should be established to make them pro-active participants of the internal quality assurance.

7.2 There are two types of stakeholders: internal and external. Internal stakeholders are: academic staff, students, administrative staff, and senior and middle management. External stakeholders are alumni and employers.

7.3 Involvement of external stakeholders, alumni and employers, is crucial for identifying the needs of the labour market and promoting relevance of qualifications to the labour market needs.

7.4 Stakeholder involvement should take a form of both their direct involvement in quality assurance committees and through such methods as surveys, meetings, interviews and overall discussion of the results gained from the quality assurance processes. Thus, both the Steering Committee and the quality assurance committees at faculty and department levels should have at least one representative per stakeholder group to bring in the requirements of the labour market.

7.5 Prior to involving the stakeholders in the quality assurance committees and Steering Committee the latter should be trained to make them pro-active participants of the process. The IQAU is responsible for preparing the stakeholders to productively contribute to the quality assurance.

8. **Quality Assurance Manual**

According to Standard 1 on internal quality assurance in higher education institutions (Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in European Higher Education Area) universities are supposed to have policies and procedures for internal quality assurance in place. Thus,

8.1 The universities should develop, maintain and follow a quality assurance manual (QAM), which should be the main document to describe all academic and functional operations of a university in a structured format.

8.2 The QAM should describe the structures, policies, procedures, performance measures and quality assurance mechanisms that facilitate a systemic approach to embedding a quality improvement approach to educational provisions. Thus, the QAM should, among other things, elaborate on

- Organizational structures, roles and responsibilities;
- Academic policies;
- Academic and organizational procedures;
- Evaluation of procedures;
- QA review procedures;
• QA mechanisms and tools;
• Detailed procedures for
  o validating new academic programmes;
  o efficient monitoring, evaluation and review of the academic programmes;
  o assessment of students
  o for on-going monitoring of programmes
  o evaluation of each programme at regular intervals,
  o selection, appointment, appraisal, and professional development of the academic staff
  o evaluating premises, equipment and facilities,
  o evaluating effectiveness of quality assurance procedures.

8.3 The QAM should be made publicly available to all the stakeholders.

II. Quality Assurance of Teaching and Learning

1. A process- and Outcome-Based Approach

1.1 To quality assure teaching and learning, a process- and outcome-based approach to quality assurance should be adopted to look at the implementation of the teaching and learning as well as achievement of intended learning outcomes.

1.2 Universities should use self-evaluation as one of the methods to explore the processes run by a university and the resulting outcomes. Self-evaluation is a comprehensive, systematic and regular review of the organization’s activities and results, which highlights strengths and the areas in need of further improvement.

1.3 Quality of teaching and learning should include three major perspectives:
   • stakeholder satisfaction rate from the services provided by the university;
   • the extent to which the intended learning outcomes have been achieved;
   • the extent to which quality assurance explicitly assesses the use of modern teaching and learning methods and a student-centred interactive and questioning approach to teaching and learning.

1.4 The quality dimensions that are to be in target for evaluation of teaching and learning are to evolve around tangibles, competence, attitude, content, delivery and reliability of qualifications awarded (see p.8 of the Handbook on Internal Quality Assurance System Establishment in Albanian Higher Education Institutions for the QA dimensions).

1.5 Identification of the quality assurance tools and mechanisms that best serve exploration of the university/academic programme needs should be done through mapping respective policies, procedures, sub-processes, KPIs and feedback
mechanisms of the processes subject to evaluation. This enables identification of the gaps along the above-mentioned quality dimensions (see p. 17 of the *Handbook on Internal Quality Assurance System Establishment in Albanian Higher Education Institutions* for mapping template and examples).

1.6 Having identified the tools and mechanisms necessary for assuring quality of a given process the committees should proceed with identification of indicators for assuring quality (see p.18 of the *Handbook on Internal Quality Assurance System Establishment in Albanian Higher Education Institutions* for sample quality indicators).

1.7 The next step in the process is to collect the necessary data using the tools developed for the purposes.

1.8 Having identified the tools and mechanisms for quality assurance and having obtained the necessary data for self-assessment the committees should analyse the processes bringing forth the strengths, weaknesses and the reasons for a particular outcome (see pp. 39-50 of the *Handbook on Internal Quality Assurance System Establishment in Albanian Higher Education Institutions* for the methods of quality assessment).

1.9 The mapping loop should be closed with drawing links between the outcomes obtained as a result of self-evaluation into the redevelopment of the existing and development of new plans, policies and procedures.

2 Quality Assurance and Learning-Outcome Approach

2.1 To make the educational provisions sustainable and balance the needs between accountability and improvement, the universities should shift their approaches to teaching and learning processes, and on a structural level, support teaching activities and their planning at faculty level.

2.2 To ensure comparability with European approaches and facilitate integration into EHEA,

- the focus in teaching and learning should be shifted from teacher-centred to student-centred approach;
- quality assurance should explicitly assess to what extent the universities use
  - modern teaching and learning methods thus promoting a student-centred interactive and questioning approach to teaching, rather than mere lecturing;
  - a diversified approach to student assessment modernizing and linking the latter to the intended learning outcomes.

2.3 The point of departure in designing and evaluating any academic programme and module should be the intended learning outcomes and all the inputs (teaching and learning methods, assessment methods, teaching staff and learning resources) should be linked to the intended learning outcomes and ensure achievement of those learning outcomes.

2.4 Student assessment methods should be designed to enable measuring achievement of the intended learning outcomes.

2.5 Teaching staff qualifications should be measured to the extent they allow formation of student particular learning outcomes;
2.6 Learning resources, their availability and effectiveness should be measured by the extent to which they allow achievement of learning outcomes.

2.7 The quality of educational provisions should be measured by looking at the extent to which the intended learning outcomes have been achieved;

2.8 Thus, the major quality indicators in teaching and learning should, among other things, concentrate on the

1. **teaching and learning methods**: when measuring the quality of teaching and learning special attention should be paid to the extent to which the university applies student-centred and interactive teaching and learning methods. This involves introduction of elements in teaching and learning leading to formation of such skills in students as problem-solving, team skills, learning how to learn, continuous improvement, interdisciplinary knowledge, interacting and processing information, technology integral learning. In this process the role of the teacher should be that of a facilitator and/or a guide, rather than instructor or lecturer.

2. **intended learning outcomes and student assessment**: when measuring intended learning outcomes special attention should be paid to (a) aligned teaching and student progression; (b) employability of the graduates; (c) teacher qualifications and teacher resources. When measuring the quality of teaching and learning special emphasis should be paid to promotion of a concept of “assessment for learning”, that is an approach to student assessment that promotes formation of learning outcomes in terms of knowledge, competencies and skills, rather than mere “assessment of learning”, which implies to assessing student performance only.

3. **achieved learning outcomes**: when measuring achieved learning outcomes the major point should be review of student independent projects (term paper, theses);

4. **student experience**: when measuring student experience student and alumni surveys should be undertaken.

2.9 To move onto a learning outcome approach to teaching and learning, the universities should, first of all formulate intended learning outcomes for each academic programme and make them visible through the design of relevant and fit-for-purpose assessment methods.

2.10 Next, respective grading system and assessment criteria should be developed.

2.11 The same logic should be applied to the quality assurance of teaching and learning. Thus, the first step should be identification of the key components for good quality in relation to aligned teaching needs. For example, the key components for quality indicator 1 (teaching and learning approaches) should be interaction, independent work, solving problems, working in teams, interacting and processing information.

2.12 The key components for quality indicator 2 (intended learning outcomes and student assessment) should be (a) coverage, (b) assessability, (c) content and level of intended learning outcomes and (d) relevance/fitness for purpose of examination tasks.

- **Coverage** refers to what extent the intended learning outcomes in the National Qualifications Framework of Albania are covered by the combined intended learning outcomes at academic programme level.

- **Assessability** must be seen as the main sign of quality in intended learning outcomes. It refers to the extent to which the intended learning outcomes are assessable and in order to make them assessable they must describe “visible use of knowledge”, that is competencies – the unique combination of knowledge and skills. Thus, when writing learning outcomes particular attention should be paid to making them visible (the learner “knows and understands”) and assessable (the learning is “able to do” something with this knowledge).
• Academic content and level of a programme should be in line with the programme objectives and be on the right academic level, not too high or low.

• Relevance/fitness for purpose of examination tasks refers to the student assessment, which must be designed in a relevant manner to ensure that the students achieve the intended learning outcomes. While evaluating the quality of a programme the evaluation of assessment methods/examination tasks with regard to both content and form is necessary. Thus, also according to one of the ESG standards, written grading criteria should be made publicly available to enhance student learning.

2.13 The key components for quality indicator 3 evolve around the evaluation of the study programme, that is, the quality of work with students instead of the quality of student work.

• To include achieved learning outcomes in quality assurance systems, the universities should first of all develop a model where a subset of student work (e.g. term papers, theses, diploma papers, independent projects, other degree projects) are assessed in order to generate conclusion about the overall quality of the academic programme under scrutiny.

• In order to draw statistically sound generalisations about the quality of individual programmes, random samples of sufficient quantity are necessary. Achievement of learning outcomes should also concern whether students with poor results on their degree projects (that is, not achieving the intended learning outcomes) are allowed to pass through the system or not.

2.14 The key components for quality indicator 4 evolve around student satisfaction rates with the programme delivery and, qualifications obtained and to the extent the qualifications are required by and are relevant to the labour market.

3 Information for Students and Wider Community

3.1 The internal quality assurance systems of Albanian higher education institutions should provide for reliable information on and transparency of the educational provisions;

3.2 Each institution should make detailed and reliable information on individual study programmes, faculties and, especially, on quality at programme and institutional levels publicly available;

3.3 The HEIs in Albania should ensure the quality information meets interests of a wide spectrum of specific interests, which depend on the differentiation of perspectives of internal and external stakeholders, students and public authorities, in particular. The differentiation relates to the purpose for which the information is requested, which determines the type of information to be made publicly available.

3.4 The HEIs in Albania should provide information for the following purposes:
  • To choose an academic programme;
  • To choose an institution;
  • To make strategic decisions at institutional and system levels;
  • To provide confidence in the outputs of HEIs.

3.5 Thus, the following types of information should be provided:
  • Information on the profile and quality of programmes and qualifications
  • Information on the performance and potential of the institutions;
• Information on the overall performance and potential of the higher education system;
• Information, recommendations or accreditation outcomes to be used by decision-makers in charge of steering higher education policies;
• Information and guidance for students;
• Evaluations (internal and external) and recommendations devoted to help HEIs and programmes in their continuous improvement strategies and actions;
• Benchmarking or rankings developed for the purpose of external communication.

3.6 All activities related to quality assurance in Albanian HE or production of information on the quality of higher education should respect the fitness for purpose principle.

III. Design, Approval, Monitoring and Review of Academic Programmes

1. Design and Approval of Academic Programmes

1.1 When developing policies and procedures for programme design, approval and review, first, it is important to consider whether due account is taken of:

- external reference points (e.g. NQF), academic standards, national frameworks for higher education qualifications and, where appropriate, the requirements of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies, employers and any relevant national legislation/national commitments to European and international processes;
- labor 'market' factors as the main rationale for proposing a new course/programme;
- the compatibility of programme proposals and developments with institutional goals and mission;
- strategic academic and resource planning;
- existing provision within the institution, including any awards that may be offered jointly with other Albanian or foreign institutions;
- the level of risk involved in each approval/review process and the optimal level of resource necessary to ensure that the required outcomes of the process are achieved.

1.2 The university should ensure that the overriding responsibility of the academic authority (e.g. senate or academic board) to set, maintain and assure academic standards is respected and that any delegation of power by the academic authority to approve or review programmes is properly defined and exercised.

1.3 It is important that the respective roles, responsibilities and authority of different bodies involved in programme design, approval, monitoring and review are clearly defined in order that staff and students involved in such processes are clear about the hierarchy of procedures and about which body will take final responsibility. The evaluation of any delegated power is important in allowing the institution to ensure that it is continuing to operate its processes in an effective manner.

1.4 Participation of external experts in the field at key stages for the approval and review of programmes should be ensured, as independence and objectivity are essential to provide confidence that the standards and quality of the programmes are appropriate. Participation of external experts is important for ensuring that programmes are designed, developed, approved and reviewed in the light of independent advice and for ensuring both transparency of process and confirmation of standards. Such external participation provides assurance at
various levels: to the team delivering the programme and to the institution itself in monitoring the independence and objectivity of decisions taken under its procedures; to its students; and to any reviewers who may carry out reviews/audits that are external to the institution's own processes.

1.5 The university should ensure external contributions of an appropriate kind when developing, approving and reviewing programmes. The panel of external examiners invited to conduct final exams of the university graduates should be consulted for obtaining useful contributions at various stages of approval and review processes. It is also important that this external participation is proportionate to the level, importance and complexity of the process being followed.

1.6 The universities should seek useful contributions from, for example:

- external advisers who provide relevant information and guidance on current developments in the discipline(s);
- academic peers from other disciplines within the institution;
- any programme partners, for example, institutions with which there are collaborative arrangements;
- students, either studying on the programme or with an appropriate representative role;
- alumni of the programme, their employers, appropriate professional associations and employers’ unions to promote relevance of the programme/course to the labor market needs;
- external sources and advisers who provide relevant information and guidance on current developments including, for example, in the workplace.

By using appropriate externality in processes for programme design, approval and review an institution avails itself of opportunities for enhancement, as well as for assurance.

1.7 The university should ensure that the processes for approval and review of programmes are understood by all those who are involved or who have an interest in them, thus the university should make:

- clear principles and procedures for the approval and review of programmes available to all staff and students in the institution and to external participants in the processes, including the institution’s own processes for deciding whether to group programmes together for review purposes or to scrutinize them in a more detailed, individual way;
- clear statement of the different stages of approval and review and the clear definition of the roles and responsibilities of participants;
- clear definition of the responsibility for initiating the process of primary consideration, monitoring and review of programmes;
- clear how staff development strategies and activities include the dissemination of good practice in relation to programme design, approval, monitoring and review.

1.8 The design of the programme should be done in a way that facilitates the delivery of the intended learning outcomes and required standards, and is fundamental when institutions approve new programmes or review the effectiveness of existing provision. The initial design and approval of programmes should rigorous and effective so that subsequent evaluation could be relatively straightforward. Duplication of effort and documentation can be reduced if the requirements of external bodies, such as professional unions and PAAHE, are taken into account when programmes are designed, approved and reviewed.
1.9 Proper design and development of a programme is crucial for ensuring that it is relevant and sustainable. It is also important for its successful delivery. Thus, the design processes should be well thought through and operate effectively to ensure the successful operation of later approval, monitoring and review procedures. The principles and reference points, which should be considered when designing and developing a new programme include, but are not limited to:

- the institution's goals and mission;
- labor market needs and student needs;
- the intended aims of the programme;
- the level of the programme - its intellectual challenge and value- and its place in a national and/or European qualifications framework;
- external reference points, including any relevant academic standards/learning outcomes, any European reference points, national qualifications frameworks for higher education;
- the role of students in the design and development of programmes;
- the concept of progression, so that the curriculum imposes an increasing level of demand on the learner during the course of the programme;
- opportunities, which might be available to students on completion of a programme academic and practical elements, personal development and academic outcomes, breadth and depth in the curriculum;
- the coherence of the programme, to ensure that the overall experience of a student has a logic and an intellectual integrity that are related to clearly defined purposes;
- the award title, to ensure it reflects the intended learning outcomes of the programme;
- how the intended learning outcomes of the programme will be promoted, demonstrated and assessed;
- that the necessary resources are available to support the programme.

1.10 The university should ensure that programme approval decisions are informed by full consideration of academic standards and of the appropriateness of the learning opportunities, which will be offered to students. The final decision to approve a programme should be taken by the academic authority, or a body acting on its behalf that is independent of the academic department, or other unit that offers the programme, and has access to any necessary specialist advice.

1.11 There should be a confirmation process, which demonstrates that a programme has fulfilled any conditions set out during the approval process and that due consideration has been given to any recommendations.

1.12 With regard to the responsibility of an individual institution for the assurance of the quality and standards of its awards, and in the interests of transparency, it is important that there is a clear designation of the body responsible for approving a programme and for ensuring that all conditions have been met before the programme begins.

1.13 The university should be clear about the type of process that is appropriate to different kinds of approval; for example, for a new programme, a new module/unit, or a change in the balance of assessment within a module/unit. It may be helpful for this decision to be based on proportionality and risk analysis, with institutions making informed decisions about the kind of process and level of externality that will be appropriate.
1.14 During the period of design, approval and commencement of a new programme, the following should be considered:

- the design principles underpinning the programme;
- the definition and appropriateness of standards in accordance with the level and title of the award;
- the necessary resources to support the programme;
- anticipated demand for the programme at labor market level;
- monitoring and review arrangements for the programme;
- the length of time for which approval is granted;
- the contents of the programme specification;
- the nature of the learning opportunities offered by the programme;
- the development of the programme between its approval and start;
- the relationship between the programme's curriculum and current research in the same area.

2. Monitoring and Review of Academic Programmes

2.1 To ensure there is a continuous development cycle, the university should consider the appropriate balance between routine monitoring and periodic review of programmes.

- Routine monitoring is an activity to be undertaken within the providing unit.
- Periodic review is an institutional process, involving external participants of high calibre and with academic/professional credibility. In developing and evaluating such processes, institutions will want to be assured that they are monitoring the cumulative impact of small/incremental changes.

2.2 The universities should routinely monitor (in an agreed cycle) the effectiveness of their programmes:

- to ensure that programmes remain current, valid and relevant to the labor market needs in light of developing knowledge in the discipline, and practice in its application;
- to evaluate the extent to which the intended learning outcomes are being attained by students;
- to evaluate the continuing effectiveness of the curriculum and of assessment in relation to the intended learning outcomes;
- to ensure that recommendations for appropriate actions are followed up to remedy any identified shortcomings.

2.3 Routine monitoring activity is the responsibility of people who appraise their own performance at the end of each academic year and during this process the following, for example, should be taken consideration of:

- external examiners' reports;
- any reports from accrediting or other external bodies;
- staff and student feedback;
- feedback from former students and their employers on the applicability of the qualifications in the labor market;
- student progress and other relevant data;
- material available to students such as programme specifications, student handbooks and websites.

2.4 The universities should engage in an effective and prompt follow-up of any recommendations made by external bodies to protect the interests of current students and ensure that any staff and resource development are addressed.

2.5 Reviewing academic programme is another quality assurance mechanism. The timing and nature of reviews depends on a number of factors, including the rate of development of knowledge and practice in the discipline, the extent to which wider questions of overall aims are dealt with in routine monitoring, and overall institutional policy on such reviews.

2.6 The universities should ensure that the evaluation processes are not carried out in isolation from one another or from other institutional priorities.

2.7 During the periodic review the universities should assess the continuing validity and relevance of the programme to the labor market needs in the light of, for example, the following:
- the effect of changes, including those which are cumulative and those made over time, to the design and operation of the programme;
- the continuing availability of staff and physical resources;
- current research and practice in the application of knowledge in the relevant discipline(s), technological advances, and developments in teaching and learning
- changes to external points of reference;
- changes in student demand, employer expectations, employment opportunities and labor market trends;
- data relating to student progression and achievement;
- student feedback.

2.8 If the university considers discontinuing a programme, it should take measures to notify and protect the interests of students registered for, or accepted for admission to, the programme. Thus, institutions are responsible for managing their portfolio of provision, including any awards that are offered jointly with other institutions, and other collaborative partners. This may involve the withdrawal of existing programmes as well as the design and development of new ones.

2.9 The universities should ensure that the process for the orderly withdrawal of programmes is well embedded, articulated and understood as those for design, approval and review.

2.10 In the event of significant changes to the character of the programme, an institution should have a process in place to manage this change effectively. It also needs to be clear about what, in its own institutional context, constitutes a significant alteration to the character of the programme, and how any collaborating partners are kept informed.

2.11 The universities should have a means of assessing the effectiveness of their programme design, approval, monitoring and review practices. Evaluation of processes can provide a focus for enhancement and should allow institutions to consider:
• the benefits gained by the institution, staff, students and other stakeholders from the approval, monitoring and review activities undertaken;
• how the outcomes of processes promote enhancement of students' learning experiences;
• the identification and dissemination of effective practice, both internally and externally;
• opportunities to make approval and review practices more effective and efficient
• whether the institution, through its processes, is managing risk appropriately and proportionately for its portfolio of programmes.