A Common Framework for Quality Assurance in Palestinian Higher Education

Despite attracting 40,000 teacher applicants a year, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MOEHE) in the West Bank reports that few of those candidates are competent in the delivery of student-centered teaching and learning approaches. This suggests that the Palestinian pre-service teacher education system is not yet structured to prepare young people with the skills and knowledge to be effective teachers.

As part of the Pre-Service Teacher Education Activity (PTEA) in the West Bank, IREX worked with the Accreditation and Quality Assurance Commission (AQAC) to develop a new Common Framework for Quality Assurance in Palestinian higher education to promote the collection and use of education data to drive transparency, accountability, enhancement and informed decision-making. The Framework includes:

- The Common Framework for Quality Assurance in Palestinian Higher Education Manual
- The Higher Education Institutional Quality Assessment Tool (HEIQAT)
- A Benchmark Statement for Teacher Education Diplomas [2]

The Common Framework

The Framework sets out a standardized process for quality assurance across all higher education disciplines which includes the use of "benchmark statements" to provide supplementary subject-specific criteria. The introduction of this approach allows for both sector-wide standardization and greater specificity in identifying critical factors unique to different program areas. For example, in the case of pre-service teacher
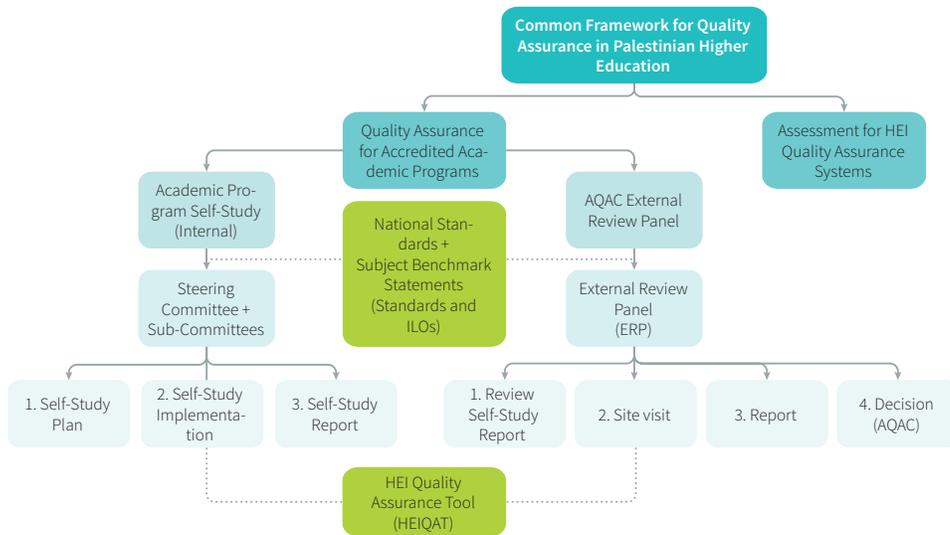
Key Principles of the Framework

Standards-tied

The Framework is standards-tied but not prescriptive. This ensures that key standards and objectives are met while allowing HEIs to plan and manage their quality assurance systems in alignment with their own institutional mission, goals, and circumstances.[1]

Performance Enhancement

The Framework aims to increase public trust in HEIs through greater accountability, but, most importantly, is designed to facilitate evidence-based decision-making to enhance the capacity of academic programs to adapt, innovate and maintain their fitness for purpose in the face of an increasingly competitive globalized knowledge economy.

Monitoring, Learning and Adaptation

The Framework promotes a continuous process of observation, planning and target setting, action, monitoring and adaptation founded on robust data collection and recording.

Self-evaluation

To promote HEI autonomy, self-reliance and ownership of continuous improvement, the quality assurance framework is led by HEI self-assessment.

Participation and Collaboration

The overarching goal of the Framework is to promote a quality culture in which all stakeholders — students, alumni, parents, academic faculty, donors, employers, government, policymakers, professional associations — share a commitment to values, attitudes and behaviors that foster accountability, and continuous improvement. To promote this, the approach is highly collaborative, designed to engage stakeholders in quality assurance, produce rigorous data and facilitate transparency.

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1   In the Palestinian context, the Framework is based on the National Standards for the Accreditation of Academic Programs and the Teacher Education Benchmark Statement is tied to the Professional Standards for New Teachers for Palestine.

2   Since the focus of PTEA was teacher education (Grades 5 – 9) a Benchmark Statement was produced for this discipline only. It is anticipated that AQAC will work with subject specialists to produce similar benchmark statements in other fields as necessary.

education, establishing what pre-service teachers are expected to know and do, in line with the Professional Standards for New Teachers for Palestine. The Framework promotes continuous internal and periodic external assessment of quality assurance at both the program and institutional levels. The Framework manual contains the conceptual and technical foundations underpinning the Framework, lays out the scope of the Framework's main activities, describes the chief roles and responsibilities to conduct standards-based internal and external assessment of the quality of academic programs and institutional procedures, and presents a set of detailed templates for organizing and presenting the content of reports produced by the self-evaluation and external review processes.

Common Framework for Quality Assurance in Palestinian Higher Education

Quality Assurance for Accredited Academic Programs

Assessment for HEI Quality Assurance Systems

Academic Program Self-Study (Internal)

National Standards + Subject Benchmark Statements (Standards and ILOs)

AQAC External Review Panel

Steering Committee + Sub-Committees

External Review Panel (ERP)

1. Self-Study Plan
2. Self-Study Implementation
3. Self-Study Report

1. Review Self-Study Report
2. Site visit
3. Report
4. Decision (AQAC)

HEI Quality Assurance Tool (HEIQAT)

The Higher Education Institutional Quality Assessment Tool (HEIQAT)

This assessment matrix, adapted from IREX's Higher Education Institutional Capacity Assessment Tool (HEICAT), provides a framework for both the internal and external review of academic programs and institutional quality assurance systems. It is designed to facilitate in depth reflection and provide a structured framework for a broad qualitative review of evidence. Aligned to AQAC's 2018 Licensure and Accreditation Manual and informed by international good practice, it is divided into performance categories. Within each category, the matrix presents a series of criterion and a rubric to score the institution using evidence from interviews, observation and document review. The review team identify whether the criterion represents a serious weakness that puts the institution at risk (0), practice is inadequate and opportunities for improvement are evident (1), practice is adequate for institutional progress (2), or the practice represents an institutional strength (3). Once scores are manually inserted into the scoring matrix, a Performance Dashboard auto-populates providing a snapshot of the institution's strengths and weaknesses. The institution is required to identify a set of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to measure progress toward identified performance improvement goals.

HEIQAT CATEGORIES

Program Quality Assurance

- Program Development and Approval
- Program Characteristics
- Program Management, Monitoring and Enhancement
- Program Entry, Progression and Graduation Standards

Institutional Quality Assurance

- Quality Assurance and Enhancement
- Student Affairs and Support Services
- Learning Resources and Facilities
- Strategic Planning and Effectiveness
- Transparency and Integrity
- Staff Management and Professional Development

Benchmark Statement

The Statement and its associated set of principles identify what student teachers of upper basic subject-area specialization should know and be able to do by the end of their program of study and establishes a basic set of criteria which must be reflected in program design. The Statement provides HEIs with external reference points for assuring the quality of the design, delivery and improvement of pre-service teacher education. For AQAC, it provides a benchmark against which to review new and accredited provision. The Benchmark Statement should be used alongside the general criteria in the HEIQAT to assess discipline specific expectations, including school engagement in course development, the characteristics and management of practicums, and entry requirements. Providers of teaching diplomas must ensure they demonstrate their adoption of these principles and criteria to remain compliant with the terms of their accreditation.