



جامعة السلطان قابوس  
Sultan Qaboos University

# External Review Guide for Academic Programs' Reviewers

## **1. Introduction**

This guide contains a number of guidelines, standards and specifications for the external review process for academic programs, which are designed for use by the review team to complete the review process with accuracy and high precision. The team is appointed by the Quality Assurance Office to conduct the review of the academic program at the University. The academic program review procedures which constitute the reference point of the review program, are publicly available on the official website of QAO (<https://www.squ.edu.om/qao/Policies-and-Procedures>).

## **2. Responsibilities**

### **2.1. Head of the review team:**

- 2.1.1. Preside over the team's work and meetings before, during and after the visit.
- 2.1.2. Agree with the team's members on the meetings that will be held before and after the visits within the review processes.
- 2.1.3. Communicate directly with the Quality Assurance Office regarding all review work. The head of the team is the only person authorized to communicate with the Office, and it is not permitted to communicate with the program, the college, or any other party to obtain any information or documents.
- 2.1.4. Ensure that the necessary steps are taken to ascertain that the visit goes according to plan, and to ensure that the team's reviews, interviews and meetings are in line with the process outlined in this guide and any documents or correspondences provided by the Quality Assurance Office.
- 2.1.5. Ensure that the review process is conducted objectively and realistically in accordance with the Review Standards of the Academic Program.
- 2.1.6. Complete, in cooperation with the team's members, the review report according to the specified controls, and then submit it to the Quality Assurance Office on time.

### **2.2. Review team members:**

- 2.2.1. Conduct the review process and related interviews and meetings objectively and realistically in accordance with the review standards of an academic program.
- 2.2.2. Check the specializations and responsibilities of the groups that will be interviewed (such as students, faculty, etc.) to ensure that interviewees are only asked standard-related questions that are within their roles and responsibilities.
- 2.2.3. Prepare a brief closing statement to be delivered during the closing session of the visit, reflecting the main recommendations. The closing statement should not exceed 2 minutes as time is limited.
- 2.2.4. Contribute to writing the review report with substantive and evidence-

based results.

### **3. Review Methodology**

The review methodology of the academic program consists of the following methods:

- 3.1. **Document review:** including the self-study report prepared by the program and the documents attached. The review team can request any other documents for review by communication with the Quality Assurance Office which in turn will hand them over to the head of the team if they are available and there is no obstacle to be shared.
- 3.2. **Interviews:** The review team holds several individual and group interviews with internal and external stakeholders of the program during the visit, including students, alumni, faculty members, administrators, external partners and others.
- 3.3. **Observations:** The review team is allowed to visit some facilities to get acquainted with the facilities and available resources for the program and students. The visits may be conducted virtually based on the circumstances.

### **4. Stages of the Review Process**

The review process is carried out in five stages. The review team undertakes stages from 2 to 4 as follows:

- 4.1. **Preparation for the program's self-study report:** The academic program prepares the program's self-study report according to the form prepared for that.
- 4.2. **Initial review (preparation for the visit):** It includes the review team's revision of the program based on the self-study report and its appendices, and the preparation of questions and inquiries in the interviews and meetings during the visit. The final program for the actual visit is also designed, in an agreement between the review team, programs and the Quality Assurance Office. The Quality Assurance Office shall coordinate one or more meetings for the review team to complete the requirements of this stage.
- 4.3. **The review stage (actual visit):** It includes the review team conducting an actual (or virtual) visit to the program for two days, during which several interviews and visits are conducted, any additional documents (if needed) are

reviewed, and the matching between what was included in the self-study report and the responses heard during the meetings and interviews, and other details during visits.

4.4. **Report preparation stage (post-visit):** After the visit, the review report shall be prepared according to the mentioned elements, and then submitted to the Quality Assurance Office for a maximum of 21 days after the end of the actual visit. The team can hold virtual meetings to facilitate the preparation of the report, and the Quality Assurance Office can coordinate these meetings if needed.

4.5. **The preparation of the implementation plan:** The program prepares an implementation plan for the recommendations contained in the report of the review team, with determining the mechanisms and priorities for implementation implementing the recommendations, within 21 days of receiving the report, and then implementing the plan after approval by the councils of the department and the College and submitting an annual report to the Quality Assurance Office.

## 5. Program Review Criteria

The program review is structured into the following criteria:

### 5.1. STANDARD 1: Program Management and Support Services

- Criterion 1.1: Program Planning and Management
- Criterion 1.2: Program Monitoring and Review
- Criterion 1.3: Academic Integrity, Ethics and Biosafety
- Criterion 1.4: Risk Management
- Criterion 1.5: Academic Support Services and Resources
- Criterion 1.6: Student Induction, Academic Advising, Progression, and Retention

### 5.2. STANDARD 2: Coursework Program Design and Delivery

- Criterion 2.1: Program Design and Learning Outcomes
- Criterion 2.2: Curriculum
- Criterion 2.3: Student Entry Standards
- Criterion 2.4: Teaching Quality
- Criterion 2.5: Research Components of the Coursework Program
- Criterion 2.6: Assessment Methods, Standards and Moderation
- Criterion 2.7: Student Placements

### **5.3. STANDARD 3: Research Program Design and Delivery**

- Criterion 3.1: Research Program Design and Learning Outcomes
- Criterion 3.2: Research Student Entry Standards
- Criterion 3.3: Research Supervision
- Criterion 3.4: Research Supervisors
- Criterion 3.5: Coursework Components of the Research Program
- Criterion 3.6: Research Student Assessment
- Criterion 3.7: Research Ethics and Intellectual Property

### **5.4. Program continuation (Applicable only when reviewing multi programs from the same specialization)**

- The existence of the continuation nature and whether this continuation is facilitating the achievement of the program outcomes.

- The possible unfavorable overlap between the programs in terms of course outcomes, course contents, and etc.

## 6. Characteristics of Review Report Writing:

- 6.1. Reviewers should only comment on the performance of the program for each criterion within the standards.
- 6.2. The following characteristics are considered while writing the review report:
  - 6.2.1. **Content:** The report shows the strengths and the areas that need improvements in each standard of the program review criteria set out in the fifth item of this guide providing development proposals clearly and practically.
  - 6.2.2. **Accuracy:** It is important to use accurate and coherent terminology which shall comply with related legislation and instructions in writing the report. Definitions and terms such as colleges, departments, committees and course names must be referred to in the same manner as they are indicated in the program.
  - 6.2.3. **Impartiality:** The results of the evaluation should be reflected without any exaggeration, distortion or criticism. and the opinions should express a compromise among the review team members, away from individual bias.
  - 6.2.4. **Evidence-based:** Assessments should be supported by evidence (e.g. documents, interviews, visits) without using any assumptions or personal viewpoints.
  - 6.2.5. **Format:** Provides constructive criticism that will contribute to the development of the program.
  - 6.2.6. **Language and Punctuation:** Grammatical rules should be observed, ambiguous expressions should be avoided during report writing, punctuation rules should be observed, and the language should be clear and concise.
  - 6.2.7. **Writing Format:** The format should be consistent with the academic program review procedures in each part of the report. Where writing is formatted in **Times New Roman** font, 12-point size, 1.5-line spacing, and minimum margins of 2.5 cm. Each criterion should not exceed 350 words.

*Note: All reviewers are required to disclose any conflict of interest and assure the*



*confidentiality of the information and all details of the review process.*