

# **National Commission for Academic Accreditation & Assessment**

## **Standards for Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions**

### **Evidence of Performance**

Judgments about quality based on general impressions could be accurate, but they could also be badly distorted for a number of reasons. Consequently general opinions without supporting evidence cannot be relied on in making assessments of quality in relation to specified standards. Because of this it is necessary to consider appropriate forms of evidence whenever a judgment is made about quality of performance in relation to standards.

What is appropriate evidence will vary widely for different things that are evaluated and an important element in any quality assessment is to decide on what kind of evidence is appropriate for the matter being considered.

In many cases several different forms of evidence should be considered to make a reliable judgment, and the evidence will need to be interpreted. For example high average grades in a course could mean that students have achieved very high standards because of excellent teaching. Alternatively they could mean that standards are low and grades have been inflated. To draw valid conclusions it would be necessary to check that tests were sufficiently rigorous and that criteria for allocating grades were appropriate and fairly administered.

Interpretations of evidence can also be unreliable, and to guard against this it is recommended that groups that undertake evaluations in relation to the standards include some people who have been involved in the activity concerned, some who are the recipients of the service provided (eg students, or members of departments who use services provided by central administrative units or centers) and also some who are familiar with that kind of work, but are not directly involved. As a further safeguard it is recommended that the final judgments be reviewed by someone who has not been involved in the initial evaluation as a check on whether the interpretations seem reasonable in the light of the evidence provided.

### **Performance Indicators**

A wide range of kinds of evidence can be considered. However as part of the evidence to be used decisions should be made about some specific items of information that can be expressed in quantitative terms and used as performance indicators. These should be identified in advance as part of planning processes. For example when major goals or objectives are established specific indicators should be specified so achievement of those goals and objectives can be monitored on a continuing basis. It is also important for an institution to identify some key performance indicators that will be used consistently by departments and colleges throughout the institution to monitor their own performance, provide for comparisons of performance between departments and colleges, and permit university committees and senior administrators to monitor overall institutional quality on a continuing basis. Data on these indicators should be collected in standard form and retained in a central data base so there can be comparisons within the institution and over time. An evaluation of the effectiveness of these processes will consider whether appropriate indicators have been identified, whether the data is consistently collected and recorded, and whether the information is used in monitoring and analysing quality of performance.

It is the responsibility of each institution to monitor and plan for improvement in relation to its own mission and objectives. However the Commission has also identified certain key performance indicators on which information should be collected in all institutions. This requirement has several

important objectives. It provides a common set of statistical data that can be used by institutions for comparisons of performance and benchmarking within the country (The Commission will publish information for groups of similar institutions, but individual institutional data will be confidential to each institution) It assists the Commission and other relevant Ministries and organizations in monitoring the quality of performance of the system of higher education as a whole, and it provides a sample of important information about institutions that makes it possible for the Commission to maintain accreditation of institutions in the interval between major external reviews.

These indicators established by the Commission should be used by institutions as part of their quality assurance processes, but they are also encouraged to add additional indicators which they select for themselves that relate to their own mission and objectives and their priorities for improvement.

## **1. Mission, Goals and Objectives**

The institution's mission statement must clearly and appropriately define its principal purposes and priorities, and be influential in guiding planning and action within the institution.

### **Evidence and Performance Indicators**

Evidence about the quality of the mission could be obtained from examination of the mission statement itself, copies of papers proposing the mission or modifications in it, interviews with staff, students, graduates and employers to find out how well it is known and supported, and consideration of other reports, proposals and statements to see the extent to which the mission is used as a basis for decisions.

Indicators that could be used include responses to questions on surveys to see how well the mission is known and supported, or the proportion of policy decisions that refer to the mission among criteria for the decision made.

## **Standard 2: Governance and Administration**

The governing body must provide effective leadership in the interests of the institution as a whole and its clients, through policy development and processes for accountability. Senior administrators must lead the activities of the institution effectively within a clearly defined governance structure. Their activities must be consistent with high standards of integrity and ethical practice. If there are separate sections for male and female student's resources must be comparable in both sections, there must be effective communication between them, and full involvement in planning and decision making processes. Planning and management must occur within a framework of sound policies and regulations that ensure financial and administrative accountability and an appropriate balance between coordinated institutional planning and local initiative.

### **Evidence and Performance Indicators**

Evidence about the quality of governance and administration can be obtained from terms of reference for the governing body and major committees, and samples of documents relating to decisions by these bodies. Evidence should be available to indicate that the governing body has evaluated its own effectiveness and taken appropriate action to improve its performance. Evidence, including performance assessments and survey results, should be available to assess the quality of administration. Evidence about the quality of policy and regulations, risk assessment analyses or oversight of controlled entities can be obtained by examination of relevant documents and discussions with teaching and other staff who might be expected to be aware of their contents. Organizational climate can be assessed by survey results or discussion with teaching and other staff and students. Evidence of dissemination of integrity expectations should include information on websites, advertisements and awareness of requirements on the part of staff and students in interviews or surveys.

### **Standard 3: Management of Quality Assurance and Improvement**

Quality assurance processes must involve all sections of the institution and be effectively integrated into normal planning and administrative processes. Criteria for assessment of quality must include inputs, processes and outcomes with a particular focus on outcomes. Processes must be established to ensure that teaching and other staff and students are committed to improvement and regularly evaluate their own performance. Quality must be assessed by reference to evidence and include consideration of specific performance indicators and challenging external benchmarks. Specific requirements in the institution's quality assurance system should be periodically reviewed to ensure that unnecessary requirements are not included and that data that is provided is actually used in an effective way.

#### **Evidence and Performance Indicators**

Evidence about the quality of management of quality assurance processes can be obtained by looking at the extent of involvement in quality assurance processes across the institution and the adequacy of responses made to evaluations that are made. The outcomes of those processes can be assessed by examining trend data to see whether there has been progressive improvement in the planning and administration of the institution and the learning outcomes achieved by students.

Evidence about the processes followed can be obtained from surveys or discussions with staff or students and the quality of reports on performance by units within the institution, including whether they are evidence-based and appropriately benchmarked in relation to external standards. Information about the quality of services provided by a quality centre can be obtained from sources such as client surveys, rates of participation in, and reports on the effectiveness of the center's activities.

The nature of evidence considered and the performance indicators used will vary according to the functions being considered. The key performance indicators identified by the Commission should be used, but additional indicators linked to the particular mission and of the institution should also be used. When goals and objectives are established for the institution or for organizational units within it appropriate performance indicators should be identified as part of that planning process.

### **Standard 4: Learning and Teaching**

The institution must have an effective system for ensuring that all programs meet high standards of learning and teaching through initial approvals, monitoring of performance, and provision of institution-wide support services. In all programs student learning outcomes must be clearly specified, consistent with the *National Qualifications Framework* and (for professional programs) requirements for employment or professional practice. Standards of learning must be assessed and verified through appropriate processes and benchmarked against demanding and relevant external reference points. Teaching staff must be appropriately qualified and experienced for their particular teaching responsibilities, use teaching strategies suitable for different kinds of learning outcomes and participate in activities to improve their teaching effectiveness. Teaching quality and the effectiveness of programs must be evaluated through student assessments and graduate and employer surveys with evidence from these sources used as a basis for plans for improvement. If programs are offered in different sections for male and female students required standards must be the same, equivalent resources must be provided, and evaluations must include data for each section.

#### **Evidence and Performance Indicators**

Evidence about the quality of learning and teaching may be obtained from ratings by students, graduates and employers of the quality of programs, statistics on course and program completions and employment outcomes, ratios of students to teaching staff, and statistics on teaching staff qualifications. Important sources of evidence might include independent expert advice on the appropriateness of teaching strategies and assessments for the different domains of learning in the *National Qualifications Framework*. Evidence should be available about the results of benchmarking of standards of learning outcomes in relation to appropriate external reference points. This could be done in several different ways including check marking of samples of students' work and independent assessments of the standards of test questions and students' responses.

The selection of performance indicators for quality of learning and teaching requires use of data in a form that can be quantified and used in comparisons across the institution, with other institutions, and with past performance.

### **Standard 5: Student Administration and Support Services**

Administration of admissions and student record systems must be reliable and responsive, with confidentiality of records maintained in keeping with stated policies. Students' rights and responsibilities must be clearly defined and understood, with transparent and fair procedures available for discipline and appeals. Mechanisms for academic advice, counselling and support services must be accessible and responsive to student needs. Support services for students must go beyond formal academic requirements and include extra-curricular provisions for religious, cultural, sporting and other activities relevant to the needs of the student body.

#### **Evidence and Performance Indicators**

Evidence about the quality of student administration and support services can be obtained from surveys of students about the quality and responsiveness of services provided, usage rates for particular services, response times for communicating decisions on admissions and results and the frequency and results of discipline procedures. Performance indicators can be based directly on this information, but additional evidence in a review might include such things as visits to facilities and discussions with students and staff.

### **Standard 6: Learning Resources**

Learning resources including libraries and provisions for access to electronic and other reference material must be planned to meet the particular requirements of the institution's programs and provided at an adequate level. Library and associated IT facilities must be accessible at the times required to support independent learning, with assistance provided in finding material required. Facilities must be provided for individual and group study in an environment conducive to effective investigations and research. The services must be evaluated and improved in response to systematic feedback from teaching staff and students.

#### **Evidence and Performance Indicators**

Evidence about the quality of learning resource provision and performance indicators derived from this evidence can be obtained from user satisfaction surveys, success rates for students in accessing course reference material, documents describing processes for identifying and responding to course requirements, and details of times when facilities are available for use by students and teaching staff. Information should be available about provision of orientation programs for new students and responsiveness to requests from groups of stakeholders. The institution should be able to provide information about comparisons of level of provision through books, periodicals and web-based resources with comparable institutions offering similar programs and an appropriate performance indicator would be whether that level of provision was equalled or exceeded.

### **Standard 7: Facilities and Equipment**

Facilities must be designed or adapted to meet the particular requirements for teaching and learning in the programs offered by the institution and offer a safe and healthy environment for high quality education. Use of facilities must be monitored and user surveys used to assist in planning for improvement. Adequate provision must be made for classrooms and laboratories, use of computer technology and research equipment by teaching staff and students, and appropriate provision made for associated services such as food services, extra curricular activities, and where relevant, student accommodation.

#### **Evidence and Performance Indicators**

Evidence about the quality of provision of facilities and equipment can be obtained from planning documents, user satisfaction surveys, comparisons of provision with comparable institutions offering similar programs and direct observations by independent evaluators.

Condition assessments and maintenance schedules provide information about the quality and maintenance of facilities and major equipment. Regulations and codes of practice relating to the use of facilities and expensive equipment provide evidence of sound management practices and security arrangements. Performance indicators could include such things as ratings on surveys of user satisfaction, statistics on equipment breakdowns, comparisons of provision in relation to other institution.

### **Standard 8: Financial Planning and Management**

Financial resources must be adequate for the programs and services offered and efficiently managed in keeping with program requirements and institutional priorities. Budgetary processes should allow for long term planning over at least a three year period. Effective systems must be used for budgeting and for financial delegations and accountability, providing flexibility for managers at different levels in the institution combined with institutional oversight and effective risk management.

#### **Evidence**

Evidence about the quality of financial planning and management can be obtained from budget statements and audit reports together with relevant expenditure ratios such as staff and faculty salaries to total costs, and trends in expenditure on items such as student services, learning resources, and equipment. Reports on risk assessment should be available together with strategies for risk minimization. If the institution is involved in commercial activities the short and long term total financial impact should be identified and evaluated in relation to the institution's mission and priorities. Performance indicators in this area commonly rely to a considerable extent on ratios of categories of expenditure with comparisons made with other institutions.

### **Standard 9: Employment Processes**

Teaching and other staff must have the qualifications and experience required for effective exercise of their responsibilities. Professional development strategies must be followed to ensure continuing improvement in the expertise of teaching and other staff. Performance of all teaching and other staff must be periodically evaluated, with outstanding performance recognized and support provided for improvement where required. Effective, fair, and transparent processes must be available for the resolution of conflicts and disputes involving teaching or other staff. (Note: Teaching staff refers to all staff with responsibility for teaching classes including full and part time staff, faculty, lecturers, and teaching assistants)

#### **Evidence and Performance Indicators**

Evidence about quality of employment processes can be obtained from documents setting out employment and promotion processes and criteria, descriptions of orientation programs for new faculty and staff, and procedures for performance evaluation and support for improvement. Records of assessments of quality of teaching, and staff participation in professional development activities relevant to their employment can provide valuable evidence, particularly when they include ratios of participation and assessments of the value of those activities by the participants. Data on staff turnover in parts of the institution can be used to indicate stability or instability in staffing. Regulations on dispute resolution combined with records of the incidence and outcomes of disputes can provide evidence about the effectiveness of those processes.

Performance indicators almost always include student/teaching staff ratios and proportions of teaching staff with levels of qualifications. However a number of others that can also be readily quantified are important such as participation ratios in professional development and scholarly activities. Some others such as rates of turnover of teaching staff, and incidence of disputes might be selected if there are problems in the institution that need to be monitored.

## **Standard 10: Research**

The institution should develop a research strategy consistent with its nature (eg. as a university with research obligations or as an undergraduate college) and its mission. All staff teaching higher education programs must be involved in sufficient appropriate scholarly activities to ensure they remain up to date with developments in their field, and those developments should be reflected in their teaching. Staff teaching in post graduate programs or supervising higher degree research students must be actively involved in research in their field. Adequate facilities and equipment must be available to support the research activities of teaching staff and post graduate students to meet these requirements. In universities and other institutions with research responsibility, teaching staff must be encouraged to pursue research interests and to publish the results of that research. Their research contributions must be recognized and reflected in evaluation and promotion criteria. The research output of the institution must be monitored and reported, and benchmarked against that of other similar institutions. Clear and equitable policies must be established for ownership and commercialization of intellectual property.

### **Evidence and Performance Indicators**

Evaluations of the quality of research should include a review of the research strategy and other supporting documents including details of the extent and quality of research output in all colleges and departments and research centers. Documentary evidence about the institution's research strategies can be obtained from documents such as a research development plan, evaluation and promotion criteria, policies on commercialisation of research and ownership of intellectual property and the extent of cooperation with industry and other institutions. Further evidence can be obtained by consideration of agreements for cooperative research and for shared use of major equipment items. Staff and student surveys can provide evidence about the adequacy of provisions for research facilities and equipment.

Performance indicators for research are commonly based on statistics on the number of research publications per faculty member in reputable journals, the proportions of research-active faculty (a term that needs to be defined) and numbers of research citations. These figures should be compared with those at other comparable institutions. Institutions with a commitment to research may include indicators of the extent to which research and scholarly activities are translated into applications within the academic or professional field concerned.

## **Standard 11: Institutional Relationships with the Community**

Contributing to the community must be recognized as an important institutional responsibility. Facilities and services must be made available to assist with community developments, teaching and other staff must be encouraged to be involved in the community and information about the institution and its activities made known. Community perceptions of the institution must be monitored and appropriate strategies adopted to improve understanding and enhance its reputation.

For the purposes of this standard contributions to the community should include services and activities to assist individuals, organizations or communities outside the institution (i.e. they would not include such things as financial assistance or extra curricular activities for enrolled students or the provision of academic programs leading to qualifications) but could include participation in research or development projects, and community education programs provided without cost, or for which charges are made.

### **Evidence and Performance Indicators**

Evidence about quality of community relationships can be obtained from documents describing policies on service to the community, criteria for staff evaluation and promotion that include community contributions, and guidelines and processes for community media releases and other public comments on behalf of the institution. Reports on community relationships that include such matters as community use of institutional facilities, participation of staff on community committees or development projects, and interactions with schools and other agencies can provide relevant information. The extent of community service activity, including formal courses and other services provided by departments or individuals throughout the institution should be documented and retained in a central data system. Community views about the quality of the institution and its standing as a respected member of the community can be obtained from surveys.

A number of these forms of evidence include ratings that can be used directly as performance indicators. However in this area in particular the mission of the institution and the community within which it operates is important in deciding what aspects of performance should be closely monitored.