



**Internal Quality
Assurance Manual
for
Sri Lankan Universities**

February, 2013



CONTENTS

1. Introduction	1
2. Need of Quality Assurance in Higher Education	1
3. Integration between Internal and External Quality Assurance	2
4. Suggested composition of the Internal Quality Assurance Unit	3
5. Functions and Responsibilities of the Internal Quality Assurance Unit	3
6. By-laws	4
7. Developing a 'quality culture' through internal quality assurance	5

INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE MANUAL FOR SRI LANKAN UNIVERSITIES

1. Introduction

All over the world, as higher education grows rapidly and its cost continues to rise in both public and private sectors, there is increasing interest in quality and standards. Any country that aspires to become a knowledge-based economy must demonstrate that it takes the quality of its higher education programmes and awards seriously, and is willing to put into place the means of assuring and demonstrating that quality.

The concept of quality assurance was introduced to Sri Lankan universities in 2001 as an initiative of the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Directors (CVCD). Using a participatory approach, the CVCD involved a large group of academics with representation from all universities in developing a framework for institution and subject reviews. This was soon followed by an academic procedures handbook which described several codes of good practice and the development of benchmark statements in several subjects.

Internal quality assurance units were set up in the universities on the recommendation of the University Grants Commission (UGC) and the CVCD during 2004 – 2006, to carry out the university's quality assurance activities and co-ordinate these with the Quality Assurance and Accreditation Council (QAAC).

The purpose of this manual is to enable universities and other higher education institutes in Sri Lanka to set up their own internal quality assurance systems at a high level of functionality.

2. Need of Quality Assurance in Higher Education

Providers of higher education have a primary responsibility for the quality of their provision and its assurance, and as such, quality assurance must be a continuous and an on-going process. Though the top management may set policy and priorities, quality assurance is the responsibility of everyone in an educational institution. Assuring quality should not be considered as a one-off activity that takes place only in preparation for external quality assurance procedures.

Quality assurance systems in higher education established in many countries comprise of two basic components: an internal component and an external component. Internal quality assurance refers to internal processes that an institution has developed in order to monitor and improve the quality of their students' learning experience and ensure achievement of established goals, objectives and standards, whereas external quality assurance brings in a third party, to review the learning experience offered by an institution or a study

programme and achievement of established goals, objectives and standards. Moreover, internal quality assurance must be a continuous, on-going process whereas external quality assurance can usually be conducted only at intervals, perhaps several years apart, and at supra-institutional levels. Hence, external QA alone cannot bring about sustained improvements in the quality of the learning experiences offered by any institution, but can help in assessing the credibility of the results of internal evaluation.

Why is Internal Quality Assurance Important?

Quality assurance (planned and systematic review process of an institution or educational program to ensure that acceptable standards of education, scholarship, and infrastructure are being maintained and enhanced) needs to be a continuous, on-going process. Everyone working in an institution must take responsibility for building it into their day-to-day, routine activities. This can be brought about only through internal QA. Hence, internal QA is considered as the corner stone of QA in higher education.

The set of internal processes that help institutions to improve their performance is sometimes referred to as 'quality enhancement'. Most of the emphasis in developed countries has shifted to making quality enhancement more effective, as external quality assurance activities occur at long intervals (perhaps once in five years), and at very high level. The European *Standards* recommend that external quality assurance procedures should take into account the effectiveness of such internal quality assurance processes. In some countries the external quality assurance agency has a defined role of promoting internal quality assurance within institutions.

Areas that are considered of particular importance in internal quality assurance include:

- policy and procedures for higher education;
- approval, monitoring and periodic review of programmes and awards;
- assessment of students;
- quality assurance of teaching staff;
- learning resources and student support;
- information systems; and
- public information.

3. Integration between Internal and External Quality Assurance

Internal and external quality assurance procedures complement each other in many ways. An internal quality assurance process with preparation of a self-assessment report is a critical core element of the external quality assurance process. A set of standards and criteria, pre-determined by the national quality assurance system, usually forms the basis for the self-evaluation report. Such standards and criteria are usually developed through nation-wide consultations to ensure wide participation of the stakeholders. A thorough

quality assurance exercise needs a good set of information on the pre-determined criteria and standards to sustain quality judgments.

External quality assurance can play a very important role in strengthening internal quality assurance. Identification of the criteria used for external quality assurance can inform institutions of what they need to focus on in developing and strengthening their internal quality assurance processes. Explicit acknowledgement by the external quality assurance agency that the effectiveness of internal quality assurance practices in an institution will be taken into account during the external review process will help to further strengthen internal processes. External quality assurance can also help an institution to identify which internal processes are working well and those that need to be strengthened further, as well as those that may need to be introduced because they may be currently non-existent in the institution.

4. Suggested composition of the Internal Quality Assurance Unit

In 2005, it was suggested that Internal Quality Assurance Units (IQAU) in Sri Lankan Universities be appointed by the Senate with the following minimum composition:

- ❖ Chaired by a Senior Academic appointed by the Senate;
- ❖ Deans of all Faculties and / or a nominee from each Faculty, recommended by the Faculty Board;
- ❖ Registrar or his nominee;
- ❖ Bursar or his nominee;
- ❖ Librarian or his nominee;
- ❖ Director, Staff Development Centre.
- ❖ Convener/Secretary to be elected by the Unit from among its members.

The Chairperson should report directly to the Vice-Chancellor.

It was further suggested that the Vice-Chancellor be invited to attend meetings that discuss issues of particular importance.

5. Functions and Responsibilities of the IQAU

It is suggested that the responsibilities of the IQAU should include among others the following activities:

- ❖ Co-ordination of all QA related activities within the institution;
- ❖ Liaising with UGC/QAA Council and other external QA agencies;
- ❖ Implementation of QA Reviews/Audits and follow-up action;
- ❖ Preparation of institutional self-evaluation report;
- ❖ Provision of advice on QA to all Faculties and Departments

- ❖ Monitoring and guidance in Faculty level QA activities;
- ❖ Organization, where necessary, of awareness programmes on QA for the staff members;
- ❖ Quality and QA aspects in the institution's corporate plan;
- ❖ Facilitation of identification and sharing of good practices between academic Departments;
- ❖ Preparation of QA-related guidelines and manuals for use within the institution (e.g. academic regulations, equipment manuals, laboratory manuals etc.)
- ❖ Ensure the necessary Academic Regulations/By-Laws are in place, and if not, make recommendations for remedial action.

Suggested activities include:

- Establishment of a well equipped IQAU in Universities;
- Conduct Faculty level Awareness Programmes among staff members;
- Establishment of Faculty QA Cells, and defining their duties and responsibilities;
- Initiate and support preparation of SER for Institutional Reviews;
- Motivate as many Departments as possible to prepare SERs for Subject/Programme Reviews.

It is expected that IQAU will report to the University Senate on a monthly basis.

6. By-laws

The University Council should appoint a central body, which may be named the Internal Quality Assurance Unit, headed by a Chairperson, to plan, organize, develop, facilitate and monitor all internal quality assurance programmes and activities.

The Chairperson should be appointed for a period of three years. He / she should be a Professor or a senior academic staff member of the university with substantial experience and knowledge in staff development.

The university authorities should provide office space, supportive staff, and logistics for the Chairperson / IQAU to carry out his duties smoothly.

The IQAU should prepare an annual work plan and submit it to the University Senate and the Council for approval before commencing a calendar year.

7. Developing a 'quality culture' through internal quality assurance

In order to develop a 'quality culture', in a higher education institution, its management should first identify the **main functions of the institution**. What sort of educational services does it offer? Is research an important part of its activities? Does it provide any other services to the public or industry?

They would need to understand the organization and management of the institution and the **key processes** in each of its main functions. This sort of information can be gathered from the **top leadership** of the institution, but it would be best if identification of the main functions and key processes were done by a group of **key individuals** from within the institution (namely the IQAU), since different people may see things in different ways. The most important areas for internal quality assurance processes in higher education institutions usually include

- Approval, monitoring and periodic review of programmes and awards
- Assessment of students
- Quality assurance of teaching
- Learning resources and student support
- Information systems
- Public information

Once the key processes within the institution have been identified, together with the persons responsible for each of these, it would be necessary to identify **what practices are already in place** to maintain standards. Discussions should be held with relevant groups to determine if such practices are adequate to ensure high standards, if **existing practices can be improved**, or if **new measures** need to be introduced. The measures should be such that they can be put into effect as part of routine practices within the institution.

These measures should also be viewed from the perspective of the **institution's future plans**. If the institution plans to expand its student population, will the proposed system be able cope with such growth? If it plans to offer different modes of learning, will it be necessary to introduce a different system to quality assure the new mode of learning?

All levels of staff should be encouraged to participate in these discussions, and put forward their own ideas, so that there is a strong feeling of ownership. This process may be facilitated by the QAAC, which can provide information on **internationally accepted practices and standards**, and **examples from other institutions**.

Once agreement is reached on the key processes and measures that are essential for maintenance of standards, the IQAU should document them and obtain feedback from the institution on the documentation. Such **documentation** can provide points of reference, and

the means by which continuity can be ensured when leading figures retire or resign. Examples of such documentation include **codes of practice** on areas such as programme monitoring, approval and review; assessment of students; external assessors; student support and guidance; career guidance; postgraduate research programmes etc.

Attention should be paid to **disseminating information** to all staff members regarding when, where and how these quality assurance measures are to be put into practice, and a mechanism for **educating new recruits** should also be identified, so that no-one can plead ignorance.

Although it would be best if all staff are involved in some way in the development of the internal quality assurance processes, in practice, it will be necessary to identify a key group of academic staff (including the top leadership) who are particularly concerned with issues of quality assurance, so that they will facilitate the process, and be the champions for internal quality assurance. These 'champions for internal quality assurance' must be the members of the IQAU and the Faculty IQA cells.