



Guidelines for Preparing Program Self Study Report



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1. Program Self-Study

Self-study reviews of a program can be undertaken by the institution, college or department at any time, but to coincide with requirements for program re-accreditation by the NCAAA, one should be undertaken in the sixth year after its initial accreditation, and after that on a seven year cycle

The self-study examines the program in greater depth, re-evaluating the need for it, checking on how effectively it is achieving its mission and objectives, and planning for any changes that are needed. The course and program portfolios are important resources for this self-study since they should contain details of development, the reasons for development, course and program evaluations, and the ideas of those who have had responsibility for teaching and learning.

The program SSR provides the basic resource for the external review for accreditation and re-accreditation of a program. Internal processes for carrying out a self-study and preparing a SSR are described below.

Self-studies involve stepping back from day to day operations and thoroughly reviewing all aspects of a program and the extent to which it is achieving its objectives. The audience for program SSRs is primarily the Review Panel and the institution.

A self-study is a major undertaking, however if it builds on the outcomes of continuing monitoring and planning, and if subject and program portfolios have been properly maintained, most of the necessary information will already be available (See, Self-Study Report for Programs).

Programmatic self-study will consider inputs, processes and outcomes, and these are all incorporated in the six accreditation standards. The most important of these considerations, and the ultimate test of the value of a program, is what students have learned and can do as a result of participating in it. Consequently special attention should be given to student learning out-





comes, including standards of student achievement and how these standards are directly measured and verified.

Each program must have its own particular learning outcomes relating to the field of study and/or profession for which students are being prepared. It must also deal with the range of domains of learning set out in the National Qualifications Framework for Saudi Arabia (NQF-KSA) at the level of performance expected for the qualification that is being obtained, as well as the Key Learning Outcomes specified for the discipline. Consequently, particular attention in a program self-study should be given to student learning across the range and levels of learning outcomes, the appropriateness of teaching and assessment strategies for those outcomes, and the effectiveness of coordination of students learning experiences across courses in the program. These components should all be in alignment.

2. Managing the Program Self-Study Process

A senior member of faculty should take responsibility for leading the self-study with a small group of colleagues to plan and coordinate the process. The person might be the manager/coordinator of the program. However, it is generally considered preferable that a different person take on this role to ensure greater independence in the evaluations and recommendations that are involved.

Assistance and advice in developing the structure and processes of the review should be obtained from the institution's quality center or unit, and if one has been appointed, from a quality coordinator in the college or department. A comprehensive plan for carrying out the program self-study should be developed before it begins.

In planning the self-study a number of issues should be considered:

- **Scope and Special Emphasis**

There may be a number of factors influencing the scope and extent of the review. For example, there may be parallel reviews in similar pro-





grams that require coordination of evaluations of core and elective subjects, there may have been significant developments in the profession or academic field of study that require investigation to assess implications for the program, and there may have been information from evaluations or changes within the institution that could mean additional collections of evidence, or affect other aspects of planning. Any matters of this sort will affect the way the review process is planned and coordinated, and the time required to carry it out.

- **Time Scale**

Adequate time should be allowed for the planning and analysis involved in the self-study. Although time required may vary according to the nature of the program, the issues to be addressed, and the availability of surveys used for program evaluation, it is usually expected that a periodic program self-study could take up to nine months or more to complete. A plan for carrying out a self-study should include time lines for carrying out stages of the process, and allow at least some time for unanticipated developments.

- **Administrative Arrangements**

A small steering committee should be established to help with planning and monitoring the process, and to advise on developments. If a program is offered in male and female sections, representatives of both sections should be included. As for the person leading the process, it is important that these people be respected colleagues who are familiar with quality assurance processes, have at least a reasonable understanding of the program and what it is trying to achieve, but have sufficient independence to reliably evaluate evidence and draw potentially critical conclusions. If resources are available the appointment of an independent facilitator can be extremely beneficial.

Small working groups should be established and asked to investigate and report on particular issues (for example, quality of teaching, devel-





opments in the professional or academic field, adequacy of learning resources). Students can often provide important contributions as members of these groups, but whether they are included as members or not, mechanisms to obtain their views should be built into the process. The use of working groups helps in providing for the participation of faculty as well as contributing to completion of the task. Membership of a group of this sort should also be regarded as a useful professional development exercise providing experience in quality assurance processes and insight into the effectiveness of their own activities as providers of elements of the program. The terms of reference for their activities should be clearly defined as part of the planning process and members should be fully briefed on their role. Members of the steering committee may take on the task of chairing one or more of these working groups. It is important to retain notes of meetings and of any special investigations or interviews conducted by these groups. These should be retained in a central file for the program and be available for subsequent reference if required.

- **Use of Evidence**

It is extremely important that analyses and conclusions are based on valid evidence rather than subjective impressions. Much of the evidence required should be available from annual subject and program reports and these should be made freely available to those in need of that data. Performance indicators selected in advance are important and should be carefully considered. However, the self-study should look beyond these to other sources, and may lead to a view that the selected indicators should be changed. An important part of the study will be to assess the responsiveness of the program to changing circumstances and to evaluations of quality in successive years. Consequently, particular attention should be given to such things as surveys and questionnaire reports, the appropriateness of indicators and benchmarks of performance, the va-





lidity of conclusions drawn from analyses of them, the appropriateness of action plans and the extent to which they have been implemented.

It is also likely that after reviewing the available evidence some additional evidence on particular matters may be required. This may require additional data collection and analysis and interpretations of that data in drawing conclusions. It is important to obtain independent verification of such evidence wherever possible, and to cite clearly the evidence on which conclusions are based.

- **Resources**

The amount of effort required to complete a program self-study will vary according to the scope of the review and any special circumstances that may exist. However, it will necessarily involve some faculty time, and it is likely that at least some special efforts will be required to investigate and find evidence relating to issues that may emerge. In planning, it is desirable that some time allowance be given for key members of faculty who will have a major role in the analysis and preparation of reports, and that some secretarial assistance is made available. Provision should be made for assistance with any special surveys or statistical analysis that is required.

- **Communication**

The self-study process should be open and transparent, with opportunities for faculty, students and other stakeholders to participate and offer suggestions. To achieve this result, information should be provided at an early stage to all stakeholders that the self-study is being undertaken and inviting input. Any inputs should be acknowledged and considered by the relevant groups involved in the task, and there should be regular communications about stages of development. On completion of the self-study, information should be made available about its main conclusions.





2.1 Independent Evaluation

It is important to arrange for independent analysis and comment on what has been done and the conclusions that have been drawn.

If an institution chooses to use an independent quality agency or specialized accreditor for this purpose, valuable advice can be obtained as a result. If such a body is not used, it is still important to obtain independent verification of the analysis and conclusions. This can provide advice on possible gaps in the analysis, other problems that might be noticed by an independent observer, and possible alternative solutions to problems that have been identified. A person or group selected for this role should have substantial experience in quality assurance processes and knowledge of the requirements of the field of study involved, and the confidence of those involved in the review.

The role of an independent evaluator is that of a critical partner. It is important for those responsible for the program and those conducting the self-study not to be defensive, but to share issues and problems. The exercise is designed to find ways to improve the program, not to defend the status quo. It is also important for those providing comment and advice to do so in a constructive and cooperative manner. A summary of the report from an independent evaluator used in a self-study should be included in the report, and the full document made available.

Concluding Statement and Action Plan

A summary of major conclusions should be included in the SSR, indicating both successful achievements, and areas where deficiencies have been identified and need to be addressed. This summary should then be used as a basis for developing an action plan to address the most urgent and important priorities for development.

All significant problems should be clearly identified and recommendations for remedial action made, even if it may take some time for everything to be completed. On the other hand, proposed changes should be





realistic, recognizing that there are limits to available resources, and that it would be unusual to find a situation where every desirable change could be made at once. Recommendations should be strategic, focusing initially on the most urgent priorities with a sequence of anticipated further actions in a continuing program of change and improvement.

2.2 Matters for Inclusion in a Program Self-Study Report (SSRP)

General information and Profile data are included as part of the overall SSRP and are updated annually. Copies of the most recent version of the program specifications and two of the most recent annual program reports must be complete and submitted through the NCAAA accreditation management system, together with the program description in the form used for the bulletin or handbook. During the NCAAA Eligibility Visit these documents are reviewed.

Arrangements for the Self-Study

A description of organizational arrangements for the conduct of the self-study, including establishment of a steering committee and any sub-committees that may be needed, dates and timelines, persons appointed, and processes followed. Terms of reference for working groups or committees or sub-committees should be inserted with a quality assurance flowchart.

Mission and Objectives

Mission, goals and objectives for development of the program, and indicators and benchmarks selected to provide evidence of performance are included in a SSRP table.

Program Context

Summary of any significant changes in the environment affecting the program since the program was introduced or since the last SSRP, must be provided. This should consider any important developments in research or professional practice, scientific or technological develop-





ments affecting the demand for graduates, the skills they need, and any other matters affecting the need for and the operations of the program. Implications for the program arising from this analysis should be indicated with a brief statement of any changes or new requirements from within the institution that have affected the program during the review period or that will affect it in the next planning period

Comment on any changes that have been made or that could be required as a result of the review of the context.

Program Developments

A description of how the program has developed over the period since the last self- study, or if this is the first self-study, since the program was introduced. This description should include any courses added or deleted, significant changes in objectives, approaches to teaching or student assessment, and an explanation of reasons for those changes. The role played by stakeholders, including students, graduates, and relevant professional groups in identifying need for change and responding to changes made or proposed should be indicated.

A summary of statistical information should be included on numbers of students enrolled and trends in progression, completion, and employment rates.

Program Evaluation

Description of results and actions taken to achieve goals and objectives for the development and improvement of the program are included.

Descriptive reports should be prepared on performance in relation to each of the eleven specified standards and each of the sub-standards. The template is designed for each of these sections to be complete.

Please note that it is extremely important to provide statistical data and hard evidence to support conclusions. Opinion statements and judgments about quality based on the starring system in the self-evaluation





scales are useful, but of relatively little value in an accreditation assessment unless backed up by solid evidence.

Special attention must be given to the Key Performance Indicator (KPI) tables that are embedded throughout the Self Study Report (see, NCAAA KPIs for programs). KPI tables provide direct scientific evidence to support and validate that a given standard or sub-standard is met. Additional KPI table templates may be used whenever they may be of help.

The introductory section of the SSRP on each standard includes background information that should be drawn to the attention of an external review team. This might include recent changes in arrangements or new strategies being introduced within the program, or changes elsewhere in the institution that have a significant effect on the program.

The SSRP on the standards should be considered as a scientific research report on the quality of the program and presented in a way that is comparable to other research reports. Particular strengths and recommendations for improvement should be inserted with evidence cited in tables or other appropriate fields provided for presentation. Key performance indicators and benchmarks should be referred to wherever appropriate and reference should be made to other documents where more detailed information could be obtained. Then too, trends in quality of performance should be noted and improvements in response to remedial action acknowledged.

Review of Courses

A program is made up of a number of courses, and in many cases, field experience activities. An important element in a program self-study is a review of courses within it. The program SSRP should include summary information about what is done to review what happens in courses and consider any changes that might be necessary. This would normally involve consideration of course and field experience reports, data from student evaluations and consultations with graduates and employers,





and developments in the field of study that might require changes in details of what is taught.

Suggestions for changes in courses based on this analysis including the addition or deletion of courses, changes in optional or required courses, and changes in course content.

3. Independent Evaluation

A summary of views of independent external evaluator(s), who might be colleagues from other departments or colleges familiar with this kind of program, or from other institutions, should be inserted in the SSRP. They offer important contributors to program self-study. Since a number of different aspects of program development and delivery are involved, several different evaluators may be used for different issues considered.

There are sections for independent evaluation in both the Self-Evaluation Scales for Higher Education Programs and the Self- Study Report. Accordingly, it is expected that early in the self-study an independent evaluation will take place and the finding are included in the Self Evaluation Scales. A second independent evaluation will normally take place toward of the completion of the SSRP. This process and time frame enables programs to document improvements made over the duration of self-study process and to have them verified.

A full copy of the SSRPs should be available.

Conclusion and Action Plan

An overall summary of the results of the self-study, noting areas of high achievement and areas of concern that require attention are located at the end of the SSRP.

Recommended action plan for achieving further improvements and overcoming problems that have been identified should be outlined. The action plan details are specified in the Self- Study Report.





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