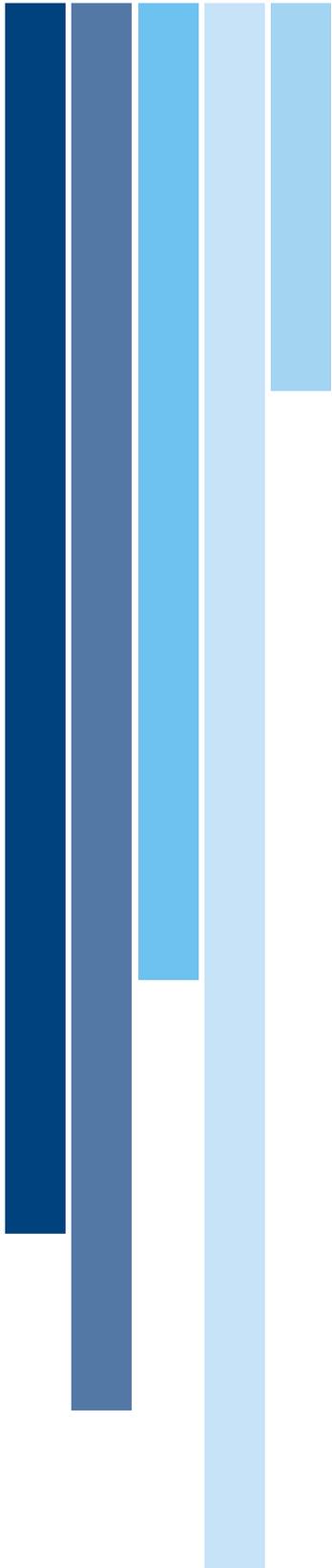


GUIDELINES FOR PROGRAMME ACCREDITATION

2017



Maldives Qualifications Authority
Ministry of Education
Republic of Maldives

Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	3
2. Objective of Programme Accreditation.....	3
3. Roadmap and timeframe.....	4
3.1 Application with Self-Evaluation	4
3.2 Self-evaluation process.....	5
3.3 Self-evaluation Report.....	7
3.4 External Review and Appointment of Review Panel Members.....	8
3.5 Site-visit.....	9
3.6 Review Panel Report.....	10
3.7 Accreditation Decision and Publication.....	11
3.8 Appeals procedure.....	12
3.9 Follow-up Procedure	13
4. Development of a Manual for Implementation of the Guidelines for Institutional Audit.....	13
5. Standards for Assessment.....	14
5.1 Compliance with criteria	14
a) Full compliance	14
b) Substantial compliance	14
c) Partial compliance.....	14
d) No compliance.....	14
5.2 Overall compliance	14
5.3 Denial of accreditation	15
6. Criteria for Programme Accreditation	16
6.1 Criterion 1 – Programme Objectives, Content and Learning Outcome....	16
6.2 Criterion 2 – Design and Management of the programme	17
6.3 Criterion 3 – Staffing and Quality of Staff.....	19
6.4 Criterion 4 – Internal Quality Assurance	20
6.5 Criterion 5 – Teaching, Learning and Research	22
6.6 Criterion 6 – Facilities and Resources	23
Annex 1: Template for the Review Panel Report for MQA Programme Accreditation	25
Annex 2: Template for Site-Visit.....	28

1. Introduction

The purpose of this document is to provide information to higher education institutions (HEIs) about the process of programme accreditation carried out by the Maldives Qualifications Authority (MQA) and to assist review panels in their assessment work.

The guidelines are an explanatory document to the MQA Criteria for Programme Accreditation and have formal status. Therefore, they are to be followed by the HEIs and External Review Panels during the self-evaluation and external review process, to ensure consistency and coherence of MQA's decisions on programme accreditation.

It is highly recommended that higher education institutions study these guidelines carefully to simplify the review process, thus facilitating the work of MQA and its review panels. Furthermore, it should be noted that adherence to these guidelines will also ensure that the review process will be most useful for the higher education institution and generally be of highest quality. The criteria and guidelines are supposed to enable higher education institutions to analyse and evaluate their quality performance in relation to a programme and guide them through the process of self-evaluation.

The criteria for programme accreditation have been developed in consultation with the major stakeholders in higher education to both ensure their acceptance in the academic community and their relevance on the labour market.

2. Objective of Programme Accreditation

The objective of programme accreditation is to assess the quality of programmes in terms of their subject-specific and professional nature as well as their compliance with the formal regulations and requirements. The assessment is based on the concept of a peer-review process, in which members of the academic/professional community provide their opinion about the programme. The review panel bases its opinion on evidence gathered in relation to the fulfilment of the MQA Criteria for Programme Accreditation.

Quality assurance is a continuous process, for which the higher education institution carries the main responsibility. Cyclical programme accreditation is one feature of the external component of quality assurance in Maldives. The external review only takes place every five years, which is the duration of the validity of an accreditation, thus it does not interfere with the autonomy of higher education institutions and is rather to be understood as a support process for higher education institutions, whilst ensuring that the minimum requirements for programmes offered in the Republic of Maldives are being met. The criteria apply to all programmes offered in the Republic of Maldives. Programme accreditation is obligatory both for national and foreign institutions regardless of the mode of delivery.

Whilst MQA encourages innovative forms of delivery, it pays special attention that criteria are met. This also necessitates that providers clearly outline specifically in non-traditional modes of delivery how they ensure that the minimum criteria are met, and that both academic standards as well as the student experience are comparable to that of traditional full-time provision.

The mode of delivery, which is indicated in the application for programme accreditation, whether it is distance, online, virtual, part-time or full-time cannot be changed or modified after approval for the programme has been given. It also has to be in accordance with the mode of delivery for which Programme Approval was granted. In case of a change of delivery, it is required to submit a new application for Programme Approval of the programme.

MQA firmly believes in the enhancement of quality of higher education provision. Therefore, the process of programme accreditation places a great emphasis on suggestions and recommendations as well as their implementation. Whilst the accreditation process ensures that minimum standards are being met, it is not simply a process of checking the compliance with the Criteria for Programme Accreditation. The process of programme accreditation is aimed at fostering a quality culture within higher education institutions.

The process of programme accreditation has been designed based on the mandate assigned to MQA by the Government and follows the values that MQA stands for and abides by in all its work. These values are transparency, objectivity, neutrality and excellence. It is part of the objectives of MQA to support the building of an effective national quality assurance system. Therefore, the process of programme accreditation follows internationally accepted good practices in the area of quality assurance and provides for state-of-the-art adaptation of these practices in the context of the higher education system in the Republic of Maldives.

3. Roadmap and timeframe

The following section outlines the roadmap towards achieving programme accreditation and provides for an indicative time frame. Higher education institutions are asked to start the procedure well in advance in order to allow for sufficient time for the accreditation process to be completed.

3.1 Application with Self-Evaluation

Once the Guidelines become effective, MQA Governing Board will select a manageable number of existing programmes for accreditation on an annual basis. The Board may select programmes for accreditation based on a number of criteria including level of qualification, sectoral priority, number of approved programmes currently being offered, etc.

For existing programmes, MQA will initiate the programme accreditation by sending a letter of request to the respective institutions to begin the institutional self-evaluation as part of the programme accreditation process. This letter would also request the HEI to designate a staff to liaise with MQA on matters related to the programme accreditation. This letter would further indicate the deadline for submission of the self-evaluation report and inform about the external review process that will follow once the self-evaluation report is accepted by MQA. A document that outlines the roles and responsibilities of MQA and the institution during the programme accreditation process will be sent as well.

In case of the new programmes approved from the beginning of 2017, a higher education institution must formally apply for the accreditation. It is the responsibility of the higher education institution to initiate the application on time. It is suggested that the application is received by MQA not later than six months prior to the end of the validity of the initial approval or previous accreditation. No applications for programme accreditation can be made for a programme that has not received initial programme approval before.

In case of first accreditation of programmes, the application needs to be made in the last year of the validity of the initial programme approval and at least six months prior to the end of it. The application needs to bear the signature of the programme coordinator and the legal representative of the higher education institution. MQA will send the higher education institution a correspondence, outlining the responsibilities of both the higher education institution and MQA.

The application form needs to be accompanied by the self-evaluation report (SER), the details of which are specified in section 3.

The fees for a programme accreditation are set by MQA. The fees comprise all costs related to the accreditation process, including the follow-up procedures. The fees are used to cover expenses and honorariums of the review panel as well as overhead costs of the MQA. Fifty percent (50%) of the fee is due 14 days after MQA accepts the self-evaluation report submitted by the higher education and shall be transferred to the account of MQA or paid in cash or cheque at counter, the details of which can be found in the official correspondence. The remaining 50% of the fee is due upon the completion of the external review. In addition, the applying higher education institution is in charge of covering transportation costs and, if necessary, of organising local transportation arrangements for the review panel.

3.2 Self-evaluation process

It is the responsibility of the higher education institution to start the internal procedures for the preparation of the accreditation, in order to ensure timely

submission of the self-evaluation report and all other relevant documentation. The self-evaluation process can be a time-consuming activity, given consideration to the fact that it needs to be undertaken by staff who also have to fulfil their everyday obligations.

It is recommended that a working group is in charge of the self-evaluation process. This group should comprise of people in charge of the programme, academic and administrative staff as well as students. Ensuring a broad base of people involved in the process will provide a more holistic view about the strengths and weaknesses of the programme. At the same time, the size of the group should allow for effective and efficient meetings.

It may be useful to designate individual responsibilities for certain parts of the self-evaluation report. However, the panel should allow for discussions and comments on the whole report, as the self-evaluation process is a collective reflection. It is also recommended that one person carries the overall responsibility for compiling the report in order to ensure that the report is drawn up in a consistent manner and style. The self-assessment group should regularly meet in order to discuss progress and exchange views.

Ideally, a self-evaluation exercise is not only carried out in preparation of an external review. It should take place on a periodic basis, e.g. every two years. It should be understood by the higher education institution that quality assurance is a continuous process that primarily serves the institution and the study programme itself and is not just undertaken for the sake of satisfying the responsibility in view of an external review.

The higher education institution should ensure that all necessary data are being collected and analysed. It might be useful to develop specific benchmarks against which the performance in the course would be measured. These could either be internal benchmarks, such as other courses within the higher education institution, external benchmarks or a combination thereof.

It is good practice that key performance indicators are used in order to measure progress. These indicators should be established on the basis of the overall strategy of the higher education institution and the specific goals and objectives of the study programme.

The goal of the self-evaluation process is to identify strengths and weaknesses in order to improve the capacity for improvement through a self-reflective process. It is therefore of great importance that the self-evaluation is undertaken in a manner that allows for and encourages critical reflection and analysis.

Therefore, it is important that the group does not work in isolation, but gathers feedback throughout the academic community that comprises the programme. This may be done in formal ways, such as questionnaires, or in more informal discussions. In any case, it is important to ensure that everybody concerned is well aware of the

task and remit of the self-evaluation group in order to provide adequate input. In addition, feedback from external stakeholders, such as graduates or employers should be gathered and taken into account in the self-evaluation process.

As further guidance, MQA will develop step-by-step suggested procedure for conducting self-evaluations to assist the higher education institutions. This procedure would provide a flow chart of tasks, detail the criteria for self-evaluation, and list specific questions to ask under each criterion, and indicate related data/evidence to collect with respect to these questions.

3.3 Self-evaluation Report

The self-evaluation report is a crucial element in the review process. It constitutes the finalisation of the whole self-evaluation process, which is equally important as the report itself. The self-evaluation report is the major document that the review panel is using in its work.

It should therefore comprise all essential information that would be necessary for an outsider to understand properly the status of the programme. The self-evaluation report should adequately describe all features related to the study programme. However, it is essential that the self-evaluation is not merely descriptive, but to a large extent also analytical in its findings. Equally, it is important to provide evidence for the findings in order to allow an outside reader to understand how the self-evaluation group arrived at its conclusions.

It would be expected that the self-evaluation report does not just list strengths and weaknesses, but also proposes solutions for the further development and how shortcomings would be remedied. This should be done in the form of specific actions to be taken, indicating a clear timeframe. It is good practice that the actions proposed conclude individual chapters in the self-evaluation report. The self-evaluation report in this manner would not only be a document in the context of the external review, but it would allow for it being used as an internal working document and guide.

It is expected that the self-evaluation consists of an introductory part that provides general information about the programme in the context of the higher education institution. It should furthermore address each MQA criterion separately. The self-evaluation report should conclude with a summary of the findings and proposed actions.

The self-evaluation report should be as concise as possible whilst containing all essential information. Important documents that outline specific issues in more detail and/or provide documentary evidence should be annexed to the report and referred to in the main body of the text.

The individual sections addressing the criteria should address all relevant points outlined in this guideline. It would be good practice that a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis is carried out for each criterion separately in order to evaluate to adequacy of the programme. It would also be good practice to also carry out a PEST (political, economic, social, technological) analysis for the programme as a whole.

As the overall self-evaluation exercise is supposed to be of holistic nature, it is also important that the findings of the self-assessment report are distributed widely to the academic and administrative staff involved in the programme. This is not just essential for information purposes, but will also allow individuals to take action in their areas of responsibilities. It is part of a quality culture that every person contributing to the programme takes into account how to enhance quality as part of their everyday work.

It is expected that a first self-evaluation report may take up to ~~six~~ four months to be finalised. Subsequent versions, either for internal quality assurance purposes or for the next rounds of accreditation, may take less time, as the processes might be better institutionalised, but it will still be an ambitious task. The final report that is being submitted should be assessed in terms of its readability, clarity and comprehensiveness. In most cases the report should be submitted in English language in order to allow easy access to information for international reviewers. However, Dhivehi and other languages could be used based on justifiable reasons

The self-evaluation report must be submitted to MQA at least four weeks in advance of the site-visit. It must be submitted in electronic form and in one hard copy. MQA will forward the report to the review panel members. The programme coordinator and the Department/Faculty Head should sign the report.

3.4 External Review and Appointment of Review Panel Members

The External Review by an Expert Panel is an integral part of Programme Accreditation undertaken by MQA. External review takes place after the submission of the self-evaluation report by the HEI to MQA. It is the responsibility of MQA to appoint a Review Panel and guide the panel to conduct the process in a transparent and credible manner.

The purpose of external review is twofold: (i) undertake a verification of the self-evaluation report, and (ii) to provide an independent assessment on the programme. External Reviewers will be provided with the self-evaluation report submitted by the HEI.

After the formalities are complete with the higher education institution for the accreditation of a programme, MQA appoints a panel of reviewers through written invitation. This panel comprises of normally 3 members, who are academics. At least two out of the three academics are specialists in the field of the programme under scrutiny. The other member may be from another professional area, but would be an

expert in higher education, including learning outcomes, qualifications frameworks or quality assurance.

The reviewers are appointed from a pool of reviewers that MQA maintains. MQA organises a regular selection process for new reviewers to become members of the pool. The pool consists of both national and international reviewers. For some programmes, MQA will plan to recruit international experts from overseas as well.

It is of utmost importance for MQA to ensure the objectivity of the reviewers. Therefore, specific measures are taken to prevent possible conflicts of interest. Reviewers must have sufficient distance from the HEI to enable them to make an objective and unbiased assessment of the programme at a given HEI. Hence, reviewers cannot have an affiliation with the programme under review. Reviewers have to sign a declaration of non-conflict-of-interest. MQA appoints the reviewers, using several criteria, including gender balance and a mix between more experienced and new reviewers. One of the External Review Panel members will be invited by MQA to serve as the Chair of the Panel.

The review panel members also have to agree to and sign a non-disclosure statement. In this statement the reviewers declare that all information obtained during the process of accreditation remains confidential and is only used for the work of the review panel internally as well as to inform the writing of the review panel report.

MQA ensures that the reviewers are specifically trained for the work they undertake. For this reason, MQA organises regular trainings on review and accreditation methodology generally and for specific areas of relevance.

The review panel members will be confirmed in consultation with the respective HEI. After potential review panel members are identified to conduct the review of a programme, MQA will consult with the relevant institution regarding the suitability of the members before appointing them formally.

3.5 Site-visit

An essential element of the external review and accreditation process is the site-visit. The main purpose of the site-visit is to validate institutional claims of the intended programme to be accredited and advise on informed decision with respect to final accreditation of that programme.

The duration of the site-visit is decided depending on the specifics of the programme. During the site-visit, the review panel conducts a series of interviews with different groups and scrutinises relevant documents.

Interviews would usually be conducted with the management of the programme, full-time as well as part-time academic staff, administrative support staff, students, graduates and employers. The interview groups should not comprise of more than 8 members in order to ensure efficiency of the meetings.

All meetings will be conducted in a confidential manner and no information provided will be associated with any individual. Hence, during the individual meetings only the respective groups of interviewees can be present so that the meetings will be conducted in a private atmosphere.

As the review panel works on a tight schedule, the meeting will, after brief introductions, focus on the questions that the review panel has prepared. The interviewees shall not prepare any formal presentations and are asked to respond to the questions in a concise manner.

The review team would let the higher education institution know in advance what types of documents should be provided on the spot. It may, however, also ask for additional documentation during the site-visit.

A template for the schedule of a site-visit is attached as Annex 2. However, this schedule might be altered depending on the specific circumstances regarding the programme. Between each interview session, the review panel will have some time for debriefing in order to discuss the main findings. For this reason, the higher education institution should provide the review panel with a private meeting room.

The higher education institution is supposed to designate a liaison person who will be in communication with the team for all practical matters. This might also involve that additional documents, which the review team requests, will be made available. The liaison person should ensure that for each interview a list of the attendees is prepared and given to the attention of the review panel. It should be avoided that the review panel meets the same person more than once in different interviews.

The interviewees should be open and frank in their responses. A self-critical perspective is much more fruitful in order to identify areas for improvement from which the course would benefit than a public relations approach.

3.6 Review Panel Report

On the basis of the self-evaluation report and the site-visit, the review panel will write its report using MQA's template for site-visit report, which is to be found as Annex 1. The panel report shall be written in a manner that it is easy for an outside person to understand. The report needs to be evidence-based and include appropriate information about all the MQA criteria for programme accreditation.

It is expected that within each section of the report, the review panel describes the situation, undertakes an analysis in terms of the compliance with each criterion, and concludes with a final statement. In addition, the review panel should provide

recommendations for improvement where necessary. These recommendations should clearly refer to the analysis and are to be linked to the fulfilment of the criteria. At the end of the report, the review panel will provide a recommendation about whether full or conditional accreditation should be granted or whether accreditation should be denied.

At the end of the site-visit, the review panel makes a brief presentation about its main findings to the higher education institution. The review panel will, however, not make any statements in terms of compliance with individual criteria or overall compliance and its final recommendations regarding accreditation. The review panel will also summarise the next steps towards the MQA decision about accreditation. The presentation is not meant to be a discussion. Hence, no questions or comments are allowed. The representatives of the higher education institution are welcome to formally thank the review panel though.

At the end of the site-visit, the review panel will compile its draft report. This draft report will be shared with the higher education institution excluding the section about the review panel's recommendation about accreditation. The higher education institution has 10 days to check the accuracy of the report and to bring any factual mistakes to the attention of the review panel. However, apart from factual mistakes, the higher education institution cannot comment on the substance of the report or its findings. The review panel will correct potential mistakes within 10 days and send the final report to MQA.

3.7 Accreditation Decision and Publication

After receiving the final report from the review panel, staff of MQA Liaison Officer will examine the report. MQA may, in case of any ambiguities, refer the report back to the review panel for further explanations. In this case, the review panel will respond to the specific questions of MQA. The Programme Accreditation Committee chaired by the Chief Executive Officer of MQA or nominee will take the decision about accreditation of the programme. This decision will be based on the panel report and taking into account the accreditation criteria whilst ensuring consistency and coherence of accreditation decisions. This procedure is used in order to ensure that timely decisions are made about the accreditation of study programmes.

After the decision of MQA, the higher education institution will be notified in writing about the accreditation decision alongside a copy of the final review panel report. MQA will publish the decision and the report on its website. It is up to the respective higher education institution to publish the report on its website.

The accreditation decision can be to:

- fully accredit the programme,
- conditionally accredit the programme,
- deny accreditation of the programme.

Full accreditation requires that a programme fully or substantially complies with all the accreditation criteria. However, the panel report may still contain recommendations or suggestions about possible improvements to be made to the programme. These recommendations or suggestions should be taken into account by the higher education institutions in order to further improve the quality of the programme.

Conditional accreditation indicates that a programme by and large complies with the accreditation criteria. Whilst some criteria might be fully or substantially complied with, at least one criterion is only in partial compliance. It would be necessary that the higher education institution remedies the identified shortcomings as quickly as possible. Normally, the higher education institution is given between one and two years to fulfil the condition, which is determined in the accreditation decision. Hence, it has to be possible to address the criteria, which are only in partial compliance in a period of up to two years. If the conditions are not fulfilled in the specified time-frame, the conditional accreditation will be withdrawn. A programme that is conditionally accredited remains on MQA's list of programmes that are provisionally accredited. Should the conditions be fulfilled, it will be entered into the list of accredited programmes. If the conditions are not fulfilled in the specified time-frame, the programme will be deleted from the list of provisionally accredited programmes.

Denial of accreditation indicates that the programme does not comply with several of the accreditation criteria in a way that the shortcomings cannot be overcome in a reasonable timeframe and/or that the shortcomings are of such a severe nature that the programme cannot be reasonably offered until these shortcomings are mitigated.

3.8 Appeals procedure

The higher education institution has the right to appeal against the decision of MQA. Such an appeal can be made on procedural grounds or in cases of perversity of judgement. The appeal must be made in written form by the legal representative of the higher education institution offering the course within 14 days of the receipt of the accreditation decision. The appeal needs to be addressed to MQA. MQA will notify the higher education institution about the receipt of the appeal.

MQA will forward the appeal to its Board. The MQA Board will scrutinise the appeal within two months and decide about whether the appeal is justified or not, including a written statement of the reasons. In case the appeal is justified, the Board of MQA will take a new decision about the study programme accreditation. This decision is final. In case the appeal is not deemed justified, MQA will inform the higher education institution in written form, including the statement of the MQA Board.

3.9 Follow-up Procedure

The external component of quality assurance in relation to programme accreditation does not end with the decision and report publication. MQA has a rigorous follow-up system in place for programmes that are only conditionally accredited. If a programme is fully accredited, the institutions should work on the continuous improvement of the programme, but there is no formal follow-up mechanism involving MQA.

In case of conditional accreditation, the higher education institution is required to establish an action plan and submit this plan to MQA within six weeks of the receipt of the accreditation decision. The action plan shall both address the conditions for accreditation as well as any other recommendations and suggestions contained in the panel report. MQA must approve the action plan and may ask for alterations of it, should the action plan be deemed unsuitable for meeting the conditions for accreditation. The higher education institution needs to report progress to MQA in relation to the implementation of the action plan every six months.

At the end of the period that the higher education institution was given to meet the conditions for accreditation of the course, the higher education institution must submit a final report that will be examined by MQA. Based on this report, MQA assesses whether the conditions for accreditation have been fulfilled. If the conditions are fulfilled, the course will be given accreditation for the remainder of the period of five years since the first decision of MQA to grant conditional accreditation. If the conditions are not fulfilled, the course will be considered as not accredited.

4. Development of a Manual for Implementation of the Guidelines for Institutional Audit

MQA would develop a Manual/Handbook to facilitate the implementation of this Guidelines for Programme Accreditation. This Manual/Handbook would provide the following: (1) standard operating procedures for MQA staff to implement the programme accreditation guidelines, (2) a step-by-step procedure for higher education institution to undertake self-evaluation and (3) a step-by-step procedure for external review panel members to undertake the review.

5. Standards for Assessment

The review panel assesses the compliance of the programme in relation to each individual criterion. In addition, the review panel gives an overall assessment of compliance.

5.1 Compliance with criteria

a) Full compliance

Full compliance indicates that the programme satisfies all aspects of the requirements of a criterion to a large extent.

b) Substantial compliance

Substantial compliance indicates that the programme meets the majority of requirements relating to a criterion to a significant extent. However, there are minor issues that need to be improved. Substantial compliance may also indicate that although currently the requirements of a criterion are met, it is likely that the situation changes so that the requirement will not be met until the time of the next review.

c) Partial compliance

Partial compliance indicates that important requirements of a criterion are not met and that the quality of the programme is compromised as a result of this. Immediate attention needs to be paid to mitigate the shortcomings.

d) No compliance

No compliance indicates that the majority of the requirements of a criterion are not met and that the programme quality is not ensured.

5.2 Overall compliance

The overall judgement about compliance with the criteria provides for the indication whether a programme should be accredited, conditionally accredited or denied accreditation.

The overall compliance looks at the performance in relation to each individual criterion. Full accreditation can be recommended if the criteria are fully or substantially complied with. Hence, even if the overall assessment is that a programme only substantially complies with the criteria, full accreditation may be recommended.

However, partial compliance with criteria can only lead to conditional accreditation, as immediate action is required so that the quality of the programme is no longer compromised. Conditional accreditation may also be recommended if the programme is non-compliant with regard to one criterion. Conditional accreditation may only be recommended if it appears reasonable that the shortcomings can be sufficiently addressed within a maximum time period of two years.

5.3 Denial of accreditation

Denial of accreditation will be recommended if the course does not comply with more than one criterion. Accreditation will also be denied if partial compliance was established, but it would not be possible to sufficiently improve the identified shortcomings within a period of maximum two years.

6. Criteria for Programme Accreditation

In this section information is provided about the criteria that are used in the process of programme accreditation. The intention of the information provided is three-fold.

- (i) Firstly, it should give higher education institutions a clear guideline for their understanding of the criteria so that they are also in a position to better evaluate the study programme to be accredited.
- (ii) Secondly, review teams use the information so that they better assess the individual criteria in the course of the site-visit and writing of the review report.
- (iii) Thirdly, the information is used by MQA in order to ensure consistency and coherence of decision regarding the accreditation of study programmes.

Whilst due care is given to the preparation and training of reviewers, it is still essential that MQA retains the possibility to ensure that similar conditions are evaluated similarly and that differences between study programmes are also taken into account.

The criteria for programme accreditation address six areas:

- Criterion 1: Programme Objectives, Content and Learning Outcomes
- Criterion 2: Design and Management of the Programme
- Criterion 3: Staffing and Quality of Staff
- Criterion 4: Internal Quality Assurance
- Criterion 5: Teaching, Learning and Research
- Criterion 6: Facilities and Resources

6.1 Criterion 1 – Programme Objectives, Content and Learning Outcome

- a) *The goals and objectives of the programme are clearly defined.*
- b) *The programme is designed in a structured and coherent way in order to reach the goals and objectives of the programme.*
- c) *The goals and objectives of the programme conform to the requirements of the Maldives National Qualifications Framework.*
- d) *The content, structure, volume and didactical design of the curriculum and the modules correspond to scientific requirements in the discipline and labour market needs. They also are suitable to attain the intended learning outcomes.*
- e) *The intended learning outcomes are clearly defined and correspond adequately to the requirements of the Maldives National Qualifications Framework.*

The overall goals and objectives of a study programme should be defined in a clear manner. This is crucial for information purposes for both prospective students as well as the interested public, including employers. Therefore, the goals and objectives should also be publicly available. In addition, the clear definition of the goals and objectives is essential for the management of the programme and for the teaching staff contributing to it. The goals and objectives provide a frame for any activities related to the programme, including its review and improvement.

The study programme should be organised in a manner that best ensures that the overall goals and objectives are met. The structure should be clear, internally consistent and ensure that the individual components logically build upon each other.

The goals and objectives need to be in line with the requirements of the MNQF generally and specifically with all requirements for a programme at the respective level.

The overall design of the programme in terms of the curriculum as well as the specific modules should correspond to disciplinary requirements as well as labour market needs in terms of its scientific content, its structure and volume in terms of credits and workload as well as its didactical design. Therefore, the programme needs to be organised in a manner that ensures that the intended learning outcomes for the programme as well as for the modules can be attained.

The learning outcomes of a study programme have to be in line with the requirements of the MNQF. It is expected that a mapping grid outlines how the learning outcomes of individual modules all contribute to the programme learning outcomes. There should be a procedure to ensure that the programme learning outcomes address all aspects contained in the MNQF in terms of the level descriptors. The learning outcomes need to be written in a manner that clearly allows for students and staff to understand them.

6.2 Criterion 2 – Design and Management of the programme

- a) The programme is managed effectively on the basis of clearly defined responsibilities and tasks, including accountability measures.*
- b) The programme is designed, approved, monitored and reviewed according to clear policies and regulations.*
- c) Information about the programme is publicly provided, including essential information about learning outcomes, credits, admission, progression and completion.*
- d) Student admission is undertaken according to transparent and clear criteria that are publicly available and consistently applied. The admission criteria*

also specify the possibilities for the recognition of prior learning, including guidelines for advanced standing.

- e) *The credit system is appropriately used and applied. The programme establishes the student workload in a manner that ensures that students can complete the programme within the established timeframe.*

A study programme needs to be properly managed. This requires a well-structured management system. In addition, it requires adequate management capacity. Everybody who has a role in the management of a study programme needs to be fully aware of the tasks and responsibilities. Therefore, these tasks and responsibilities should be available in written form to the people involved. It should also be clearly articulated where in the management system accountability for the various aspects of the programme management are situated.

The development and review of a study programme is crucial to ensure its quality. Therefore, clear policies and regulations about the different steps in the programme development and review should be established. These policies and regulations should be in written form and publicly available. It would be expected that the policies and regulations are approved by the highest academic decision-making body of the higher education institution. The formal internal approval of a study programme should be undertaken by a different body than the one who designed the programme. The on-going monitoring and the periodic review of the study programme should be outlined in a manner that everybody concerned clearly understands the processes. The policy should also set out in which intervals the reviews, including comprehensive reviews, of a study programme should take place.

It is essential for prospective students as well as labour market representatives and other interested parties to be able to obtain clear information about the study programme. Therefore, information should be publicly provided on the website of the higher education institution about the major features of the study programme, including the learning outcomes, credits, admission, progression and graduation requirements.

It is also essential for any prospective student to clearly understand how the admission process, and especially the admission criteria, for a study programme is organised. For this reason and for the sake of equal treatment it is crucial that the admissions process is organised in a consistent manner, following criteria that are publicly available, thus enhancing the transparency of the process. There should be a policy and mechanisms to ensure that the criteria are consistently applied.

Furthermore, also all possibilities for recognition of prior learning should be outlined in the criteria. This would include a guideline on advanced standing. Such a guideline has to regulate that advanced standing can only be granted for learning, which took place at a higher or equal to the one for which a student is applying. Furthermore, it should regulate that advanced standing can only be granted for up to 1/3 of the credits of a programme.

The credit system used for the programme needs to correspond to the requirements of the MNQF. This in particular requires that evidence is provided that one credit is awarded for 10 hours of learning time of an average student. The calculation needs to clearly take into account contact hours, as well as self-study, assignments, workshop or laboratory time, research activities or practical placements. It would be expected that for qualifications at Levels 1-3, the contact hours would amount to half of the workload, whilst for qualifications at level 4 and above, the contact hours would comprise of one third of the total workload. There should be a mechanism to systematically ensure that the calculation of the workload and hence the credit numbers are realistic. The total number of credits for one year of full-time study would normally amount to 120.

Especially, if programmes are (partially) offered in non-traditional forms of part-time delivery through arrangements such as block-mode, it needs to be clearly outlined how the overall workload of students is taken into account and calculated.

6.3 Criterion 3 – Staffing and Quality of Staff

- a) The number of academic staff involved in the programme is adequate.*
- b) Academic staff involved in the programme are appropriately qualified as outlined in the provisional programme accreditation guidelines and sufficiently experienced.*
- c) Academic staff are regularly appraised using transparent and published criteria that also take account of the student evaluations.*
- d) The management of the programme is assisted by sufficient support through qualified administrative staff.*
- e) Staffs have the possibility to take advantage of professional development offerings.*
- f) There are strategies to overcome difficulties in attracting and/or retaining qualified academic and support staff.*

The quality of a study programme also depends on the staff who are involved in running it. It needs to be ensured that the number of academic staff is adequate in terms of the staff-student-ratio. The staff-student-ratio depends on the orientation of the study programme, the teaching and learning methods incorporated into the programme as well as the level of the study programme.

The academic staff should be competent in the area of the study programme, in particular in the modules/units, which they are teaching. It would be expected that the academic staff hold a qualification that is intrinsically related to the modules, which they are teaching. The qualifications of the staff as well as of the course coordinator are expected to be a level above the qualification that the programme leads to, e.g. it would be expected that staff at least hold a Master's degree if they are teaching in a Bachelor's level programme. Furthermore, staff should have

sufficient experience in teaching. New staff might therefore require an induction into teaching methodologies.

The performance of the academic staff needs to be monitored. One element of monitoring staff performance is the analysis of student questionnaires of the courses, which are taught by the staff. Staff appraisal should take place regularly, which would normally be expected to take place on an annual basis. The appraisal process, including the elements that are taken into account for it, should be undertaken in a consistent manner. The process should be known to the staff as well as to the people undertaking the appraisal process and therefore need to be published and available to them.

For the support of the management of the study programme, administrative staff is required. The support depends on the peculiarities of the study programme as well as the management processes used. However, support staff should be sufficient so that the management can effectively concentrate on their roles.

The qualifications of both academic and administrative staff are crucial. However, their responsibilities may change in the course of their employment and new methodologies and approaches develop on a constant basis. It is therefore essential that all staff have the possibility of undertaking professional development, both for maintaining and updating their skills and competences in line with their responsibilities. Staff should be supported in attending professional development courses, both within the higher education institution and outside.

6.4 Criterion 4 – Internal Quality Assurance

- a) The quality assurance of the programme is embedded into the institutional quality assurance system.*
- b) The quality assurance processes for the programme are managed with clear responsibilities.*
- c) Management, academic and other staff as well as students are involved in the quality assurance of the programme.*
- d) The quality assurance system for the programme covers all areas of relevance, including teaching and learning, administration, management, facilities, resources and support services.*
- e) The quality assurance activities provide for information and data that are analytically assessed in order to support the management and improvement of the programme.*
- f) The programme is subject to a self-evaluation process on a periodic basis.*
- g) The programme is externally reviewed and accredited by the Maldives Qualifications Authority every five years.*
- h) Students regularly evaluate the programme and their learning environment. The evaluation outcomes are used for the improvement of the programme.*

The quality assurance arrangements for the programme should not be a stand-alone activity. Rather, they need to be integrated into the overall quality assurance system of the higher education institution. This requires also that the quality assurance arrangements for the programme are coherent with the overall policy on quality assurance, including clear aims and objectives.

In order for the quality assurance arrangements of the programme to adequately and effectively function, clear management structures for quality assurance are necessary. These structures have to include precise responsibilities for anybody with a role in the quality assurance process. Furthermore, regulations and procedures for quality assurance of the programme need to have a formal status.

Whilst specific responsibilities are necessary, quality assurance should not be undertaken by an exclusive group of people only. Rather it should be an activity to which all internal stakeholders contribute in order to generate a widely shared understanding of quality assurance. Therefore, it is important that management, academic and administrative staff as well as students have a role in the quality assurance process.

The quality assurance arrangements for the programme need to be all-embracing. Hence, it is essential that all aspects that have an impact on the quality of study are taken into account. Therefore, the quality assurance system needs to cover all relevant areas, which include but are not limited to teaching and learning, management, administration, support services, and the overall and specific resources and facilities.

Quality assurance is most effective if it is underpinned by reliable information and data. The institution therefore needs to ensure that effective processes are in place to gather relevant information and data and to analyse it. Furthermore, it is essential that processes that ensure that the results of the analyses are used for continuous improvement of the quality of the programmes, are in place.

In addition, a regular process of self-evaluation of a programme should be organised. This process may take place annually or biannually. It should take into account all the findings of the regular quality assurance activities including recommendations by MQA through provisional and full accreditation processes and result in a comprehensive self-evaluation report, including an action plan for improvement. The implementation of the action plan needs to be properly monitored.

In addition to the internal quality assurance system, it is necessary to arrange for a regular external assessment. It should therefore be formally included in the policies and regulations that a programme has to undergo external review in the form of accreditation by MQA every five years.

It is of special importance that students are given the opportunity to provide their feedback and evaluate the programme as well as the overall learning environment.

The feedback should be collected in an anonymous manner, and properly analysed. The results of the analysis should lead to concrete suggestions for improvement and should subsequently be implemented. Students should be informed about the outcome of the analysis as well as the concrete actions taken for the improvement of the programme.

6.5 Criterion 5 – Teaching, Learning and Research

- a) The teaching and learning activities are designed so that the intended learning outcomes can best be achieved. The assessment methods are suitable to evaluate whether the learning outcomes have been obtained.*
- b) The progression of students is clearly regulated, including provisions about withdrawal and academic misconduct.*
- c) The programme has procedures in place to ensure that students' completion requirements are fulfilled. Students receive their diplomas in a timely manner after graduation.*
- d) The research components contained in the programme adequately correspond to the type and level of the programme and the character of the higher education institution.*
- e) Mechanisms are in place for ensuring compliance with ethical standards for the research carried out in the programme.*
- f) Adequate and sufficient facilities and equipment for the research components of the programme are available for students and staff.*

The achievement of the learning outcomes needs to be supported through using the best suitable teaching and learning methods. There should be supporting documentation that clearly outlines why certain methods of teaching and learning are used for students to obtain the learning outcomes of a module. Furthermore, the assessment methods used need to adequately correspond to the learning outcomes to be achieved. Some of the assessment methods will also include written examinations.

There should be clear regulations and procedure concerning students' progression in a study programme. These regulations also need to clearly specify items related to academic misconduct, such as plagiarism, including the procedures and consequences to be applied in cases of potential misconduct. Furthermore, the regulations should clearly set out the procedure for student withdrawal.

It is essential that students can only graduate if they have fulfilled all requirements and have successfully obtained the number of credits necessary for the study programme. Therefore, there should be a mechanism in place that allows the higher education institution to carefully check whether all requirements are fulfilled. At the same time, it is important that students receive their certificates without any delay upon their graduation in order to allow them to proceed with their studies or to enter the labour market. Also, when awarding the certificates, the name of the higher education institution, the programme name, the date of award/ completion,

the name and signature of the authorised official(s) as well as the seal of the institution should be included. Any certificate awarded without this crucial information will not be recognised by MQA.

Any programme that contains research elements, which would be expected as from level 6 qualifications, should ensure that these research elements are suitably integrated into the curriculum. They need to reflect the level of the programme in terms of the skills and competencies as set out in the level descriptors of the MNQF.

If research-based graduate programmes are offered, the higher education institution should have adequate and qualified staff to teach research methodology and to supervise graduate students. The institution should also have guidelines for developing and approving research proposals, providing ethical reviews of proposed research, format/guidelines for writing thesis/dissertations, and a policy and procedure for evaluating the originality and quality of thesis/dissertations.

6.6 Criterion 6 – Facilities and Resources

- a) The necessary physical space as well as equipment and other learning resources for the programme are ensured.*
- b) The facilities meet the requirements of the programme.*
- c) The physical facilities, infrastructure and other resources do not hinder the smooth running of the programme.*
- d) There are clear financial management /budgetary and procurement procedures to ensure resources are sufficient for the programme to achieve its aims and objectives and to maintain programme quality.*
- e) The financial sustainability for the delivery of the programme is ensured.*

Teaching and learning within a study programme require a suitable learning environment. Therefore, the facilities need to be in line with the specific requirements and objectives of the study programme. Since facilities are connected to the teaching and learning strategy articulated for the programme, classrooms should be sufficient in size and number to accommodate all students. Classrooms should also be equipped in a way that the teaching and learning methods for the programme can be carried out in an effective manner, e.g. through the use of projectors, smart-boards, intranet, on-line platforms, etc.

The library should be adequately stocked and allow for students to have easy access to important reading and studying materials. Access to electronic resources should not be used to entirely replace a physical library. However, access to important databases and electronic journals would be useful to complement the on-site materials. The library should operate at hours that allow all students to have easy access.

It is important that students who enrol in a programme can rely on this programme to operate until they graduate. Therefore, adequate funding for the programme needs to be ensured and evidence should be provided that the programme is financially supported in a sustainable manner.

Annex 1: Template for the Review Panel Report for MQA Programme Accreditation

Part 1: Introduction

- Provide brief information about the date of visit, names and contact information about the MQA liaison and institution and names of review Panel,

Name of Institution:	
Name of Programme:	
Date of Report:	Date of the Visit:
MQA staff member in charge of the review	Name: Email: Phone:
Liaison person at institution	Name: Email: Phone:
Review panel members	Names: (Chair)

- Provide brief information about the purpose, schedule, and key activities of the review conducted. Provide brief information about the respective higher education institution and the Department and the programme that was reviewed.

Part 2. Performance in relation to the Programme Accreditation Criteria

- Describe the findings in relation to each criterion. Every criterion needs to be thoroughly evaluated. The panel should briefly describe the situation under each criterion and state the degree of compliance, state comments and provide recommendations and conditions (if applicable).
- The tables provided below (next page) could be used for this purpose.

Part 3: Summary of Key Findings

- Briefly state a summary of general observations and conclusions based on the overall quality of programme and proposed actions, if any.
- Also provide the review panel's recommendation to accredit or conditionally accredit or not to accredit the programme reviewed.

Panel findings

Criterion	Compliance (Team writes whether the criterion is Fully/Substantially/Partially/non-compliant)	Comments (The review team should comment on the evidence in an analytical manner)	Recommendations (Any recommendations for the improvement should be outlined in this section)	Conditions (Any conditions need to be highlighted in this section)
1) Programme Objectives, Content and Learning Outcomes				
1) Design and Management of the Programme				
2) Staffing and Quality of Staff				
3) Internal Quality Assurance				
5) Teaching, learning and Research				
6) Facilities and Resources				

Date

Name Reviewer 1

Signature Reviewer 1

Date

Name Reviewer 2

Signature Reviewer 2

Date

Name Reviewer 3

Signature Reviewer 2

Annex 2: Template for Site-Visit

Template for the Site-Visit for MQA Programme Accreditation

Date of the Visit:

Review Panel Visit Schedule

Name of the Institution					
Session	Time	Participants	Names	Activity	Location
0		Review Panel members		Reception and Preparation	Panel working room
1		Review Panel members Programme Co-ordinator		Discussion of objectives, design and managerial aspects of the study programme	Interview room
2		Review Panel members Academic staff		Discussion of teaching and learning (and research, if applicable) aspects of the study programme	Interview room
3		Review Panel members Administrative staff		Discussion of the administrative and support aspects for the study programme	Interview room
		Review Panel members		Lunch break	To be arranged by institution
4		Review Panel members Students		Discussion of all relevant aspects	Interview room
5		Review Panel members Course Co-ordinator		Tour of facilities	Campus
6		Review Panel members Employer representatives		Discussion of aspects related to the experience of employers with graduates and the employers' contribution to the	Interview room

				programme	
7		Review Panel members Graduates		Discussion of aspects relating to the graduates' experience with the study programme	Interview room
8		Review Panel		Discussion of findings and report writing	Panel working room
9		Review Panel Course Co-ordinator Other representatives of the programme		Presentation of findings to the programme representatives	To be arranged by institution