



Zimbabwe Council for Higher Education
Quality Assurance in Higher Education



**GUIDELINES ON ESTABLISHING AND MANAGING UNIVERSITY
INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE UNITS**



1.0 Introduction

Higher education institutions bear the primary responsibility of ensuring quality assurance. To fulfil this role, these institutions establish an Internal Quality Assurance system, which they design to coordinate multiple processes. The goal of this system is to guarantee the provision of high-quality education and demonstrate the institution's commitment to continuous improvement. To achieve this, the institution must design a suitable Internal Quality Assurance system that supports the development of a quality culture and ensures the attainment of strategic goals. The Internal Quality Assurance system aims to establish and systematically ensure a cycle that includes defining, implementing, assessing, evaluating, and improving Quality Assurance processes in various areas such as academic activities, research, governance, administration, and resources. Moreover, this systematic approach, which is based on a process and outcome-based methodology, enables the decision-making body within the institution to respond effectively to changing needs and priorities in all institutional functions. This approach operates from both a "bottom-up" and "top-down" perspective, fostering continuous improvement.

To effectively implement a robust internal quality assurance system, an institution should establish an internal quality assurance unit. Creating an internal quality assurance unit in a university involves careful planning, coordination, and implementation. To harmonise the establishment of internal quality assurance systems in universities in Zimbabwe, the ZIMCHE has crafted comprehensive guidelines to help universities in Zimbabwe to establish effective Internal Quality Assurance Units (IQAU). Given the diverse governance and administrative structures of universities in Zimbabwe, each institution must customise its Internal Quality Assurance Unit (IQAU) in accordance with ZIMCHE guidelines. These guidelines should be viewed as a flexible reference point rather than a rigid framework, allowing universities to adapt them to their specific contexts. The critical focus should be on developing a robust quality assurance system that not only meets the unique needs of each institution but also aligns with international best practices, ensuring effectiveness and relevance in the higher education landscape.

2.0 Define Purpose and Scope:

- a. Determine the purpose and objectives of the IQAU. This may include enhancing the quality of teaching, learning, research, and support services within the university. The following objectives are often stated in most IQAU guidelines:

The main objectives of the IQAU are:

- i. To develop a system for conscious, consistent and catalytic action to improve the academic and administrative performance of the institution.
 - ii. To promote measures for institutional functioning towards quality enhancement through internalisation of quality culture and institutionalisation of best practices.
- b. Clearly define the scope of the IQAU" s responsibilities, ensuring alignment with national and international quality assurance standards. Sample functions of an IQAU are shown in Section 16 of these guidelines.

- c. Outline benefits of setting the IQAU. Sample benefits of setting the IQAU are shown in Appendix 1.
- d. Outline major principles of internal quality assurance. A sample of IQA principles are listed in Appendix 2.

3.0 Establish Governance and Leadership

Every university should:

- a. Appoint a dedicated head to oversee the IQAU's activities and ensure its effectiveness. The appointed head should be a senior academic with a track record in academia and should hold a PhD. The head is often at the Director level. Sample job description of the head of the IQAU is shown in Appendix 3.
- b. Set up a University Quality Assurance Committee comprising representatives from various university departments, academic staff, and administrative staff to provide guidance and support to the IQAU. A sample composition of the IQAU is shown in Appendix 4.

4.0 Develop a Quality Assurance Policy

- a. Develop a comprehensive quality assurance policy that outlines the university's commitment to quality and sets the framework for the IQAU's activities.
- b. Ensure the policy reflects the institution's vision, mission, and strategic goals, as well as compliance with relevant external quality assurance requirements. The policy should be benchmarked against reputable universities.
- c. The policy should ensure that all university departments/units (teaching and non-teaching) have quality assurance sub-committees that report to the main university Quality Assurance Committee.

5.0 Organisational Structure and Resources

- a. Design an organisational structure for the IQAU, specifying roles, responsibilities, and reporting lines.
- b. Allocate adequate resources, including personnel, budget, and infrastructure, to enable the IQAU to fulfill its functions effectively. The IQAU should have at least 5 members of staff including the Head/Director. However, the size of the institution and the availability of resources will determine the staff complement of an institution.

6.0 Framework and Processes

- a. Develop quality assurance processes, methodologies, and tools to be used by the IQAU.

- b. Establish processes for programme evaluation, curriculum development, staff development, student feedback, and support services assessment.
- c. Define protocols for collecting, analysing, and utilising data for evidence-based decision-making.

7.0 Capacity Building and Training

- a. Identify training and development needs for IQAU members and provide them with appropriate training on quality assurance principles, methodologies, and best practices.
- b. Encourage IQAU members to participate in relevant workshops, conferences, and professional development programmes to stay up-to-date with emerging trends in quality assurance.
- c. The IQAU should also build quality assurance capacity of all university staff, councillors/body members, students and key stakeholders.

8.0 Documentation and Recordkeeping

- a. Establish a systematic documentation process to maintain records of quality assurance activities, including evaluation reports, programme reviews, meeting minutes, and improvement plans.
- b. Ensure the confidentiality, accuracy, and accessibility of records for future reference and external reviews.
- c. Ensure that all the data are easily accessible.

9.0 Stakeholder Engagement

- a. Develop mechanisms to engage stakeholders, including staff, students, alumni, employers, and external partners, in quality assurance processes.
- b. Seek regular feedback from stakeholders through surveys, focus groups, and other feedback mechanisms to inform quality enhancement initiatives.
- c. All stakeholder engagement activities should be documented, filed and easily accessible.

10.0 Continuous Improvement

- a. Foster a culture of continuous improvement within the university by encouraging ongoing self-assessment, reflection, and learning.
- b. Use evaluation findings and stakeholder feedback to identify areas for improvement and develop action plans with measurable goals and timelines.

11.0 External Collaboration

- a. Foster collaboration with external quality assurance agencies, professional bodies, and other universities to share best practices, and seek external reviews or accreditation.
- b. Participate in external quality assurance processes to gain external validation and enhance the credibility of the IQAU.

12.0 Reporting and Communication

- a. Develop a reporting mechanism for the IQAU to regularly communicate its activities, findings, and recommendations to relevant university stakeholders, including senior management, academic departments, and governing bodies.
- b. Utilise various communication channels, such as annual reports, newsletters, websites, and presentations, to disseminate information on quality assurance initiatives of the institution.
- c. All IQAU guidelines are disseminated to all internal and external stakeholders and there is evidence of their dissemination.

13.0 Implementation of Standard 8 in the ZIMCHE Manual

The IQAU ensures effective implementation of Standard 8 (Internal Quality Assurance Standard) in the ZIMCHE Manual on Academic and Institutional Audits.

14.0 Implementation of Standard 17 in the ZIMCHE Manual

The IQAU ensures effective implementation of Standard 17 (Management of Information and Data) in the ZIMCHE Manual on Academic and Institutional Audits. In this regard, the IQAU should ensure that data expected in Standard 17 are collected, analysed and reported.

15.0 Benchmark IQAU Guidelines of other Universities

Universities are expected to benchmark their guidelines against quality assurance guidelines for established IQAUs such as those set by The National Assessment and Accreditation Council of India

16.0 Review and Evaluation

- a. Conduct periodic reviews and evaluations of the IQAU's performance and effectiveness, involving internal and external stakeholders.
- b. Use the evaluation results to identify strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement, and incorporate these findings into the IQAU's action plans.

17.0 Overall Expected Functions of the IQAU

Below is a summary of functions and responsibilities of the IQAU:

1. Develop quality assurance frameworks that meet national and international quality standards in higher education.
2. Review quality standards and guidelines in the University.
3. Develop quality improvement evaluation instruments for continuous quality improvement.
4. Coordinate the implementation of quality procedures, guidelines, and policies.
5. Coordinate provision of data to the ZIMCHE.
6. Ensure that QA issues and successes have been incorporated in the Annual University Report.
7. Carry out research related to QA in higher education.
8. Establish an effective system of self-evaluation of University Faculties, Departments, programmes and services, aimed at quality enhancement.
9. Facilitate accreditation of academic programmes by the ZIMCHE
10. Build QA capacity of both teaching and non-teaching staff.
11. Promote quality enhancement in Higher Education at national and international levels through research and participating in conferences.
12. Cascade to the university community and stakeholders all ZIMCHE QA standards and guidelines including the ZIMCHE Manual related to QA.
13. Provide QA university data to the ZIMCHE.
14. Provide guidance on the development and implementation of quality assurance guidelines and procedures in the institution.
15. Provide advice on QA to all Faculties and Departments including non-teaching units in the University.
16. Monitor all QA activities in units of the University as well as providing the required guidance, organisation, where necessary, of awareness programmes on QA for the staff members.
17. Promote the integration of QA standards in the institution's strategic plan.
18. Facilitate the identification and sharing of good practices in all units in the University.
19. Prepare QA-related guidelines and manuals for use within the institution (e.g. academic regulations, equipment manuals, laboratory manuals etc.)
20. Ensure that the necessary Academic Regulations are in place, and if not, make recommendations for remedial action.
21. Establish QA sub-committees for teaching and non-teaching departments as well as defining their duties and responsibilities.
22. Initiate and support preparation of self-assessment reports for programme and institutional accreditation and academic audits.
23. Motivate university departments/units to prepare self-evaluation reports for internal use (without necessarily involving the ZIMCHE).
24. Familiarise university leadership and staff with regional and international university ranking systems.

APPENDIX 1: BENEFITS OF AN INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE UNIT (IQAU) IN A UNIVERSITY

An internal quality assurance unit (IQAU) in a university offers several benefits, contributing to the overall quality and effectiveness of the institution. Here are some key benefits of having an IQAU:

1.Enhancing Academic Quality: The primary function of an IQAU is to ensure and enhance the academic quality of programmes and services within the university. By implementing quality assurance processes, the IQAU helps maintain high standards in teaching, learning, research, and support services.

2.Continuous Improvement: The IQAU promotes a culture of continuous improvement by conducting regular evaluations, collecting feedback, and analysing data. This enables the University to identify areas for enhancement and implement appropriate measures to drive positive change.

3.Compliance with Standards: An IQAU ensures that the University adheres to relevant internal and external quality standards, guidelines, and accreditation requirements. This helps the institution to demonstrate its commitment to quality and meet the expectations of regulatory bodies and stakeholders.

4.Stakeholder Confidence: The presence of an IQAU enhances stakeholder confidence, including students, staff, parents, and external partners. It provides assurance that the University is committed to maintaining and improving the quality of its programmes and services, leading to increased trust and satisfaction.

5.Accreditation and Recognition: An IQAU plays a crucial role in preparing the University for external accreditation processes. By conducting internal reviews and assessments, the IQAU assists in identifying areas that require improvement to meet accreditation criteria. Successful accreditation enhances the reputation and credibility of the University.

6.Data-Informed Decision Making: The IQAU collects and analyses data related to various quality indicators, including student performance, staff qualifications, programme outcomes, and student satisfaction. This data-driven approach enables evidence-based decision making, leading to more effective resource allocation and strategic planning.

7.Staff Development: The IQAU supports staff development initiatives by providing feedback, guidance, and resources to enhance teaching and learning practices. It offers opportunities for professional development, training, and mentorship, contributing to the growth and effectiveness of the University staff.

8.Student Support: Through quality assurance processes, the IQAU identifies areas where students may require additional support or resources. This helps in designing and

implementing student support services to ensure student success, retention, and overall satisfaction.

9. Benchmarking and Best Practices: The IQAU facilitates benchmarking exercises and the sharing of best practices within the university and with external institutions. This enables the institution to learn from successful practices, adapt innovative approaches, and continuously improve its operations.

10. Strategic Planning: The IQAU contributes to the university's strategic planning process by providing valuable insights into the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges of the institution. This information helps in setting strategic goals, priorities, and action plans for quality enhancement and institutional development.

APPENDIX 2: SAMPLE GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF IQA IN A UNIVERSITY

1. Applying best practices in QA management and implementation.
2. Devolution of QA to faculties, departments and all University units.
3. Continuous quality improvement embedded in organisational learning and total quality management.
4. Regular review of QA policies, guidelines, procedures and standards.
5. Rigorous internal and external peer review.
6. Actively involving stakeholders in developing QA policies and quality standards.
7. Collegiality and *esprit de corps* are paramount.
8. QA is a proactive process which focuses on detecting and addressing quality issues early before they become institutional problems.
9. QA is a collective responsibility.
10. Central documentation of QA standards, guidelines, policies and instruments.

APPENDIX 3: SAMPLE JOB DESCRIPTION OF THE HEAD OF INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE UNIT (IQAU)

Job Title: Director/Head of Internal Quality Assurance Unit (IQAU)

Job Summary:

The Head of the Internal Quality Assurance Unit (IQAU) is responsible for leading and overseeing all aspects of quality assurance within the university. This leadership role involves developing and implementing quality assurance policies, conducting evaluations and assessments, ensuring compliance with accreditation requirements, and driving continuous improvement initiatives. The Head of IQAU collaborates with key stakeholders, including principal university officers, deans, chairpersons and programme coordinators, staff, students, and external accrediting bodies, to promote a culture of quality and enhance the overall effectiveness of the institution.

Responsibilities:

Develop and Implement Quality Assurance Policies:

- Develop and revise quality assurance policies, procedures, and guidelines aligned with institutional goals, accreditation requirements, and regulatory standards.
- Ensure the effective implementation and communication of quality assurance policies throughout the university.

Conduct Evaluations and Assessments:

- Plan and coordinate evaluations and assessments of academic programmes, support services, and administrative units to assess their effectiveness and compliance with quality standards.
- Collect and analyse data to evaluate programme outcomes, student performance, staff qualifications, and institutional effectiveness.
- Identify areas for improvement and develop strategies to enhance the quality of programmes and services.

Ensure Accreditation and Compliance:

- Stay updated on accreditation requirements and regulatory standards applicable to the university.
- Prepare the institution for accreditation and academic audit visits, coordinate accreditation and academic audit processes, and assist in the preparation of accreditation reports.
- Ensure compliance with accreditation standards and regulatory guidelines.

Lead Quality Enhancement Initiatives:

- Identify opportunities for enhancing the quality of teaching, learning, research, and support services.
- Lead and support quality enhancement initiatives by providing guidance, resources, and training staff.
- Foster a culture of continuous improvement and innovation throughout the institution.

Collaborate with Stakeholders:

- Collaborate with staff, students, and external stakeholders to promote a culture of quality and facilitate effective quality assurance practices.
- Engage with accrediting bodies, regulatory agencies, and external quality assurance networks to stay informed about best practices and higher education trends.
- Foster productive relationships and partnerships with internal and external stakeholders to support quality assurance efforts.

Reporting and Documentation:

- Prepare reports on quality assurance activities, evaluation outcomes, improvement plans, and compliance status.
- Maintain accurate and comprehensive documentation related to quality assurance processes, including evaluation reports, policies, and procedures.
- Communicate quality assurance results and recommendations to university leadership, faculty, staff, and other relevant stakeholders.

Training and Professional Development:

- Provide training and professional development opportunities for staff, and students to enhance their understanding and implementation of quality assurance practices.
- Stay updated on emerging trends and developments in the field of quality assurance through continuous professional development.

Qualifications, experience and skills:

- A doctoral degree in a relevant field (e.g., education).
- At least 10 years university teaching and administrative experience
- Extensive research experience
- Experience in developing qualitative and quantitative data collection instruments
- Experience in analysing qualitative and quantitative data
- Experience in academic report writing.
- Extensive experience in quality assurance, accreditation processes, and higher education.
- Strong knowledge of quality assurance frameworks, policies, and best practices.
- Familiarity with accreditation standards and regulatory guidelines.
- Excellent analytical and problem-solving skills.
- Strong leadership and management abilities in higher education.
- Effective communication and interpersonal skills.
- Ability to collaborate and build relationships with diverse stakeholders.
- Attention to detail and commitment to accuracy.
- Knowledge of data analysis and assessment methodologies.
- Familiarity with national, regional and international higher education trends
- Familiarity with continuous improvement processes and methodologies.

APPENDIX 4: COMPOSITION OF THE COMMITTEE TO OVERSEE INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE IN A UNIVERSITY

The composition of a committee to oversee internal quality assurance in a university can vary depending on the size, structure, and specific needs of the institution. However, the following are some key roles and stakeholders that should be included in such a committee:

1. **The Chair of the Committee:** The Chair of the Committee is usually the Pro-Vice Chancellor, Academic.
2. **Academic Leaders:** Representatives from academic leadership positions, such as Deans and Chairpersons should be included in the committee. Their involvement ensures alignment of quality assurance efforts with academic goals and priorities of the institution.
3. **Faculty Representatives:** Faculty members from different disciplines and departments should be included to provide input and expertise on teaching, learning, and assessment practices. These representatives can act as advocates for faculty perspectives and contribute to the development and implementation of quality assurance policies and practices.
4. **Student Representatives:** Including student representatives is vital to ensure student input and feedback are considered in quality assurance processes. They can provide insights into the student experience, expectations, and suggestions for improvement.
5. **Administrative Representatives:** Representatives from administrative departments, such as the Registrar's Office, Library, Student Affairs, and Institutional Research, can provide valuable input on support services and administrative processes that impact the overall quality of the institution.
6. **Quality Assurance Professionals:** Depending on the size and complexity of the institution, the committee may include professionals dedicated to quality assurance. This may include individuals responsible for data analysis, assessment, evaluation, and accreditation processes within the university.
7. **IT and Data Management Experts:** Including representatives with expertise in information technology and data management is essential, as data collection, analysis, and reporting are integral to quality assurance processes. These experts can ensure the effective use of technology systems and data-driven decision-making.
8. **Institutional Research Officer:** In universities with an institutional research office, including the Institutional Research Officer in the committee can contribute to the utilisation of institutional data for quality assurance purposes.
9. **Support Staff:** Administrative support staff, such as those responsible for organising meetings, taking minutes, and maintaining documentation, may also be present to ensure the smooth functioning of the committee.

10. The IQAU should be the secretariat of the University Quality Assurance Committee to ensure that all QA issues discussed are captured and acted on.

Approved by Council at its 52nd meeting held on the 25th of March 2026 at the Management Training Bureau at Number 21 Falice Road, Msasa, Harare

Signature:.....  Date:.....

Prof. K. P. Dzimbo (Chief Executive Officer)