GUIDELINES FOR MARITIME UNIVERSITIES' QUALITY ASSURANCE FRAMEWORKS (2016)

1. PURPOSE OF THE GUIDELINES

These *guidelines* aim to assist institutions in establishing or improving their quality assurance frameworks (and related policies and processes) and to support the Commission when assessing the frameworks in place.

2. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

A successful university quality assurance framework[1] is guided by:
- 2.1 The pursuit of continuous improvement;
- 2.2 A focus on learning;
- 2.3 The necessity of encompassing all functions and units of an institution;
- 2.4 Accountability and transparency; and
- 2.5 The documentation and implementation of policies, guidelines and procedures.

3. SCOPE OF A UNIVERSITY'S QUALITY ASSURANCE FRAMEWORK

A university's quality assurance framework:
- 3.1 Reflects its mission and values;
- 3.2 Is comprehensive and accounting for the full range of its offerings and activities;
- 3.3 Is linked to the institution's strategic and other plans;
- 3.4 Includes provisions to cover all of the functions and units of the institution (research, administration, community service, etc.) and applies to the full spectrum of a student's university experience; and
- 3.5 Is forwarded to the MPHEC.

4. OBJECTIVES OF THE UNIVERSITY'S QUALITY ASSURANCE FRAMEWORK

The objectives of a university quality assurance framework are, at a minimum, to assure the quality of programs and to ensure that stated student outcomes can be realized.

The purpose of each institution-led assessment is to answer the following two questions: first, "How well is the unit or the program achieving what it set out to accomplish?" and second, "Is it doing what it should be doing?"

In answering the above questions, the university examines:
- 4.1 Inputs; and
- 4.2 Outputs.

5. STANDARD[2] FOR THE ASSESSMENT OF ACADEMIC PROGRAMS/UNITS

5.1 Central Components

To assess academic programs/units[3], an institutional quality assurance framework would, at a minimum:
- 5.1.1 Identify the coordinating or administrative unit responsible for the overall management of the quality assurance process. This unit is located at a higher echelon (e.g. vice-president) of the institution's administrative structure, and is accountable to the institution's decision-making bodies.
- 5.1.2 Assign and distribute responsibility for the various components of the quality assurance framework (deans, department heads, program managers, committees, etc.).
- 5.1.3 Define the assessment criteria (see section 5.2).
- 5.1.4 Require a self-study, involving faculty and students participating in the program or unit. The self-study is student-centred as it would aim, in most cases, to assess the student experience and, in the case of academic programs, to assess the quality of learning and teaching. The self-study is structured according to the defined assessment criteria, and is both descriptive and analytical. When and where appropriate, the results of accreditation processes may be included, and/or substituted for this component, or a portion thereof.[4]
- 5.1.5 Require an external review component, with a sufficiently comprehensive site visit and written report, carried out by at least two experts external to the institution, with at least one coming from outside Atlantic Canada. The external reviewers' team should also include a senior faculty member from the institution to assist the external

---

1. This document refers to an institutional quality assurance framework, which may encompass multiple policies and procedures covering an institution's work in this area (e.g., faculty specific policies that reflect various realities, or separate policies for academic units and other types of units).

2. The Commission uses the term Standard as 'A document established by consensus and approved by a recognized body that provides for common and repeated use, rules, guidelines or characteristics for activities or their results, aimed at the achievement of the optimum degree of order in a given context'. ISO/IEC Guide 2:1996, definition 3.2

3. For the purpose of this section of the Guidelines, an academic unit is understood as a department or a unit whose mission is preponderantly teaching and whose nature reflects the existence of a demonstrably coherent field of knowledge, normally defined by close cognate disciplines. An academic unit may offer more than one program, but in the context of quality assurance, each program is to be assessed, including curriculum, outcomes, resources, etc.

4. However, the quality assurance framework addresses gaps in accreditation processes (if any) to ensure the same standards are applied across all programs (e.g., reporting back to higher echelons of the institution).

reviewers in the process and provide clarifications on the institution's context. As appropriate, the results of accreditation may be included, and/or substituted for this component, or a portion thereof.[4]

5.1.6   Ensure the participation of students through: membership on committees dealing with program review and quality assurance; participation in surveys designed to collect data on a number of student and graduate outcomes; and mandatory student course evaluations.

5.1.7   Incorporate the participation of faculty not directly involved in the reviewed program (or discipline or unit).

5.1.8   Enable the participation of the wider network of stakeholders, such as employers, graduates, professional associations, the local community, etc.

5.1.9   Define the follow-up mechanisms, which include the procedures, areas of responsibility and expected timelines, along with provisions for follow-up monitoring of progress (usually involving the Senate).

5.1.10   Establish the assessment cycle and related schedule which normally does not exceed seven years (with no programs exceeding, in practice, 10 years between reviews).[5]

5.1.11   Assess newly established programs or units after the first cohort has graduated.

5.1.12   Document the standard timeline for individual reviews, from the preparation of the self-study through to Senate approval of recommendations, normally 12 to 18 months.

5.1.13   Include a communication strategy to inform the university community (students, faculty, staff, etc.) and the general public about a university's quality assurance framework as well as significant changes brought about by quality assurance activities. The communication strategy should include activities to inform faculty, staff and heads of units about the framework, its objectives, assessment criteria, and follow-up processes.

5.1.14   Define the provisions to assess the framework periodically, normally at the end of each assessment cycle, and table the resulting report with decision-making bodies within the institution (e.g., Senate, Board of Governors).

5.2   Assessment Criteria

Each university establishes assessment criteria for reviewing the quality of its programs/units. The assessment criteria are comprehensive in their range and in their use across programs and units; they have a strong focus on students and reflect the institutional mission and values. They are published and include at a minimum the following:

5.2.1   The continuing appropriateness of the program's structure, method of delivery and curriculum for the program's learning outcomes and the degree level expectations;

5.2.2   The achievement by students and graduates of the learning outcomes in light of the program's stated goals, the degree level expectations, and, where relevant, the standards of any relevant regulatory, accrediting or professional body;

5.2.3   The continuing appropriateness and effectiveness of the methods used for the evaluation of student progress and achievement in light of the degree level expectations;

5.2.4   The capacity of the faculty and staff to deliver the program and the quality of education necessary for the students to achieve the stated learning outcomes, and to meet the needs of the existing and anticipated student enrolments;

5.2.5   The continuing performance of the faculty, including the quality of teaching and supervision, and their continuing progress and achievement in research, scholarship or creative activity, and professional activity in light of the program under review;

5.2.6   The appropriateness of the support provided to the learning environment, including but not limited to library and learning resources (e.g., human, physical and financial resources; academic advising; student services; graduate studies office; registrar services; technological services; centres for teaching and learning, etc.), unless such supports are assessed through other means;

5.2.7   The effectiveness and appropriateness of the use made of the existing human, physical, technological and financial resources;

5.2.8   The continuing appropriateness of the academic policies (including admission, promotion and graduation requirements; requests for transfer credit and advanced standing; and appeals) and of the governing and decision-making structures of the academic unit; and

5.2.9   The definition of indicators that provide evidence of quality, including enrolments, graduation rates, time-to-completion rates, student satisfaction level and, as appropriate, relevant measures of graduate outcomes (e.g., graduate employment rates, employment in field of study, employer satisfaction level, further study, etc.).

6.   STANDARD FOR THE ASSESSMENT OF OTHER UNITS

A university's quality assurance framework ought to assess all functions and units of the institution. This includes the university's units whose missions are not driven by teaching, and in particular academic support units. The diversity of these units makes the development of general guidelines universally applicable across units and across universities challenging. It is up to the institution to determine whether each unit is assessed more effectively on its own or in conjunction with academic units (see 5.2.6, above).

---

4. However, the quality assurance framework addresses gaps in accreditation processes (if any) to ensure the same standards are applied across all programs (e.g., reporting back to higher echelons of the institution).

5. In exceptional circumstances, review cycles may be interrupted to accommodate other institutional priorities; in these cases, the MPHEC should be contacted and informed of the length/extent of the anticipated interruption (no program should exceed 10 years between reviews).

The Commission will gather information from, and generate discussion with, universities on best practices in the assessment of other units. In the interim, universities are still expected to review these units and, at this stage, the Commission proposes the following four assessment criteria:

6.1 The continuing appropriateness and effectiveness of the service or support provided to the academic programs, students and faculty;

6.2 The capacity of the unit or program to deliver the service or support which its mandate defines;

6.3 The appropriateness and efficiency of the use made of the existing human, physical, technological and financial resources; and

6.4 The contribution of the unit or program to other aspects of the institution's mission and to the student experience.

7. KEY DOCUMENTS ASSOCIATED WITH A UNIVERSITY'S QUALITY ASSURANCE FRAMEWORK

Standardization and documentation of processes and procedures support two goals: a common and transparent process and shorter timelines. To this end, institutions should establish the following policy(ies), templates and standards:

FORMAL, APPROVED QUALITY ASSURANCE RELATED POLICY(IES)

GUIDELINES FOR THE PREPARATION OF THE SELF-STUDY, to include templates/data /source(s) for indicators/measures of quality (e.g., enrolments, graduation rates, time-to-completion rates, student/employer satisfaction level, graduate employment rates, employment in field of study, further study, etc.).

GENERIC TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR EXTERNAL REVIEWERS

COMMON STUDENT COURSE EVALUATION FORM

TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR RELEVANT COMMITTEE(S)

GUIDELINES FOR THE REVIEW OF PROGRAMS THAT ARE ALSO SUBJECT TO ACCREDITATION