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GUIDELINES FOR PROGRAMME AUDIT

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**Maldives
Qualifications
Authority**

GUIDELINES FOR PROGRAMME AUDIT

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1. Introduction

This Guideline for Programme Audit is adopted by the Maldives Qualifications Authority (MQA) pursuant to Sections 7 (d) and 8 (c) of the Act No. 7/2021 (Maldives Higher Education and Training Act) and Section 8 of Regulation No: R-78/2022 (Regulation for Programme Audit), in order to set out rules for auditing higher education and training programmes offered in the Maldives to ensure that the programmes are conducted and delivered as per the accreditation standards.

The purpose of this Guideline is to provide information to Higher Education Institutions in the Maldives about the process of the Programme Audit undertaken by the Maldives Qualifications Authority (MQA).

Programme Audit is based on the key function of the Programme Accreditation in the sense Programme Audit is devised to check and monitor delivery of specific academic programmes accredited by MQA.

It shall be understood that Programme Audit is different from the Institutional Audit. Programme Audit focuses on auditing specific academic programmes, separately or at once.

2. Background

MQA has been carrying out audits of each and every programme accredited since its inception in 2000. Since then, MQA has been checking each and every batch of academic programmes accredited for all the colleges and institutes in the Maldives.

The checks mentioned above included the following processes.

- Before commencing
- Supervision

Initially in the beginning, it was only the Supervision process that ensured conduct of an academic programme met MQA's compliance criteria attached to the programme Accreditation— as evidenced in the programme document. Later on, MQA added a process named as “before Commencing” in 2018.

With the enactment of Act No. 7/2021 (Maldives Higher Education and Training Act), under S. 7 (d) and 8 (c) of the Act, MQA is mandated to form rules that regulate the process of auditing higher education and training programmes conducted in the Maldives. Regulation No: R-78/2022 (Regulation for Programme Audit) and this Guideline are published for the said purpose of defining and regulating the programme audit process.

The programme audit process set out in the cited Regulation and this Guideline comprises the following 3 processes.

- Before commencing
- Random batch audit during the delivery
- Final batch audit

3. Objectives of the Programme Audit

The objective of the Programme Audit is to ensure that academic programmes accredited by MQA are delivered and conducted as per the accreditation standards. Main areas of focus in the programme audit are the following areas.

- Students are admitted as per the “Minimum Entry Criteria of MQA for MNQF Qualifications” and the “Policy for Student Enrollment and Teaching” of MQA.
- Lecturers meet the minimum criteria set by MQA through the “Regulation on Programme Accreditation”.
- Delivery of the programmes are in accordance with the accreditation document of the programme and relevant guidelines and standards published by MQA.
- Delivery modality is as per the accreditation granted by MQA.
- Medium of instruction is as per the accreditation granted by MQA.
- Assessments are conducted as per the MQA standards.

4. Programme Audit Process

MQA's Programme Audit comprises of 3 main processes or stages.

1. Before commencing
2. Random Batch Audit during the Delivery
3. Final Batch Audit

Explanation of each of the processes of the programme Audit are presented below.

4.1 Before Commencing

Before commencing each batch of an academic programme accredited by MQA, the provider must submit required information to MQA. Information shall be provided about the following aspects.

- the provider;
- the academic programme;
- campus;
- coordinator;
- lecturers;
- students – ensuring eligibility; and
- timetable

This information shall be submitted to MQA in the dedicated form named "Required Information before Commencing a Programme" before the stipulated deadline for submission under Section 8 of the Programme Audit Regulation. Though the submission of this information is compulsory, there is no approval process after submission of this form. This information is collected to facilitate the next stage of the Programme Audit, which is "Random Batch Audit during the Delivery".

4.2 Random Batch Audit during the delivery

MQA shall carry out random checks of MQA accredited programmes to monitor the conduct of the programmes. These checks shall be based on the accreditation document and information provided on the “Required Information before Commencing a Programme”.

To carry out these checks, MQA can utilize two types of checks:

- Review information provided about a specific batch during the “Before Commencing” stage and contact the concerned provider to remedy any issue identified.
- Conduct a site visit to the HEI in order to supervise teaching, meet the relevant officials of the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) such as coordinators, lecturers and senior staff as well as students with prior notice - if the need arises based on review of the information provided about a specific batch during the “Before Commencing” stage and reports received.

After carrying out a random check, MQA should send an evaluation report to the HEI within working 7 days. Any issues and recommendations to remedy those issues shall be communicated to the HEI through the evaluation report.

In addition to these random checks, MQA reserves the right to scrutinize the conduct and delivery of the programme at any time.

4.3 Final batch audit

In this stage, the HEI shall submit the required information of a completed batch through submitting the “Final Batch Audit Form”. In this stage, MQA will need to determine if an MQA accredited academic programme has been conducted as per the accreditation standards. The following information should be submitted along with the “Final Batch Audit Form”.

- A list of students who completed an MQA accredited programme.
- Results of the students – to determine if the students passed in the modules and are eligible to graduate. The modules students completed should exactly

be the same modules included in the accredited programme document under the section 10 Programme Summary. For verification, MQA accredited programme documents and related documents shall be available at the premises of the respective HEI's during the site visits.

- Any other critical information such as the eligibility of students – if not submitted during the “Before Commencing” stage.

Certificates and completion letters shall not be issued /awarded to students without MQA's approval in writing as a reply to the “Final Batch Audit Form”.

5. Application procedures

Before commencing a batch, the respective HEI must submit the following form to MQA:-

- “Required Information before Commencing a Programme”.

During the 2nd stage, MQA will initiate the process of Random Batch Audit During the Delivery. During this stage, the HEI has no requirement to submit any form or document unless asked by MQA during the Random Check.

For the Final Batch Audit, the respective HEI has to submit the following form to MQA:-

- “Final Batch Audit Form”

6. Non-compliance with Accreditation Standards

If MQA finds during any stage of the programme audit process that the higher education institution fails to comply or does not comply with this Regulation, “Guidelines for Programme Accreditation” and “Regulation on Programme Accreditation”. set by MQA, or if serious issues in the conduct and delivery of an academic programme are observed during the audit process, a written notice with 01-month duration will be issued to the higher education institution to remedy the issues and follow the accreditation standards stipulated in the referred Guidelines and Regulation. If the higher education institution fails to comply with this written notice by the given deadline, MQA has the discretion to take action against the higher education institution, as stipulated in Section. 9 of the Programme Audit Regulation.

7. Entry into force of this Guidelines

- a) This Guidelines shall come into force from the date it is published in the Gazette of the Government of the Maldives.
 - b) If a HEI is found to be in breach of standards and procedures set in this Guidelines and the Regulation for Programme Audit (Regulation No: R-78/2022), the actions stated in Section 9 of the Regulation for Programme Audit (Regulation No: R-78/2022) shall be taken by MQA.
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