




**Sultanate of Oman
Oman Authority for
Academic Accreditation and
Quality Assurance of Education**



Appeals Manual

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FOREWORD

On behalf of the Board of the Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education (OAAAQA), I have pleasure in welcoming you to the latest version of the *OAAAQA Appeals Manual*. The OAAAQA implements a range of External Quality Assurance (EQA) activities that aim to ensure the quality of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), the services they provide and the programmes they deliver, is of an acceptable standard.¹ Closely benchmarked against international standards, notably the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) International Standards and Guidelines, OAAAQA provides HEIs with an avenue for appeal against Final EQA Results (including formal conclusions (CARs) in Quality Audit Reports and Criteria Ratings in Standards Assessment Reports and Accreditation Outcomes arising from its formal EQA activities).

Besides adhering to national legal requirements in terms of timelines and procedures that safeguard the fairness of the appeal system, OAAAQA ensures that it delivers rational, robust and transparent appeal processes. These are continually reviewed and enhanced to ensure that HEIs may continue to place their confidence in OAAAQA to deliver an independent, impartial outcome not only of an appeal but also of any future EQA activities undertaken by the Appellant HEI.

This iteration of the *Appeals Manual* is a genuine reflection of OAAAQA's ongoing endeavours to improve its systems in general and the appeal process in particular. It contains significant amendments, notably the inclusion of illustrative examples intended to guide prospective HEIs considering making an appeal while also providing important information to Appeals Committee Members. All parties involved in the appeal process are highly encouraged to study this manual carefully prior to engaging into any activities relating to an appeal.

Board Chairperson
Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education (OAAAQA)

1 References to source materials in this manual are given in Appendix A. Acronyms and terms are defined in Appendix B.

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PART A: THE QUALITY MANAGEMENT SYSTEM FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

1. OVERVIEW OF THE NATIONAL QUALITY MANAGEMENT SYSTEM FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

The initial version of the national quality management system for higher education was known as 'Requirements for Oman's System of Quality Assurance' (ROSQA). This system contained a number of key elements: namely, the Oman Qualifications Framework; the Oman Classification of Institutions; Institutional and Programme Standards; and processes for Institutional and Programme Accreditation. Royal Decree 9/2021 established the OAAAQA in order to further develop the national system for assuring the quality of Oman's education sector at both school and higher education levels. The Decree stipulates that the OAAAQA is responsible for regulating the quality of education in Oman to ensure the maintenance of a level that meets international standards and to foster a culture of continuous quality assurance within educational institutions. To fulfill this mandate, OAAAQA implements a range of External Quality Assurance (EQA) activities aimed at ensuring that the quality of HEIs and their provisions are of an acceptable standard. The OAAAQA's EQA activities include the following:

- Institutional Standards Assessment (ISA)
- Programme Standards Assessment (PSA)
- General Foundation Programme Quality Audit (GFPQA)
- Reassessment Activities, such as Institutional Standards Reassessment (ISR) and Programme Standards Reassessment (PSR)

Institutional and Programme Reaccreditation

- Appeal Process
- International EQA (IEQA) review of applications and publication of outcomes

1.1 Institutional Accreditation

In response to its mandate, the OAAAQA approaches institutional accreditation through the Institutional Standards Assessment (ISA), a summative process that focuses on evaluating whether an HEI has met or has not met the applicable institutional standards set by the OAAAQA. HEIs which meet all applicable standards are accredited and are required to undergo Institutional Reaccreditation on a five-year cyclical basis in order to maintain their accreditation status. An HEI which does not meet applicable standards as outlined in the Institutional Standards Assessment Manual is either conditionally accredited or placed under probation for up to one year prior to undergoing the Institutional Standards Reassessment (ISRI). Only those Standards which have been rated as Not Met and the Criteria within those Standards which have been rated Not Met or Partially Met are reassessed in ISR. If an HEI is Conditionally Accredited or placed On Probation after the ISRI, it may be given a second and final opportunity to undergo an ISRII. If the accreditation outcome remains unchanged after the second ISR attempt, the ISA process is terminated, the HEI is given Not Accredited status and the OAAAQA advises the Cabinet and the HEI's supervising Ministry or entity (if applicable) accordingly. More information on the Institutional Standards Assessment, the processes for assessing HEIs against these standards and the outcomes of assessment is outlined in the Institutional Standards Assessment Manual².

² <https://www.oaaaqa.gov.om/About-the-OAAA/OAAA-Manuals/?lang=en-GB>

1.2 Programme Accreditation

The OAAAQA is responsible for accrediting all higher education programmes offered in Oman. This is achieved through the Programme Standards Assessment (PSA), a summative process designed to evaluate whether a programme has met the two applicable programme standards and associated criteria. All applicable criteria must be addressed by HEIs undergoing PSA. Programmes which meet the two applicable standards are Accredited. Programmes which do not meet either one or two applicable standards are put on probation for up to one year. After this period, they undergo one attempt of Programme Standards Reassessment (PSR). If after PSR the programme still does not meet the standards, it is Not Accredited, and the OAAAQA advises the Cabinet and the HEI's supervising Ministry (if applicable) accordingly. Further information on all aspects of PSA and PSR is outlined in the Programme Standards Assessment manual³.

1.3 General Foundation Programme Quality Audit

General Foundation Programme Quality Audit (GFPQA) is a formative review process by which HEIs offering GFPs are held accountable to society for their role in preparing students for higher education. This process is instrumental in facilitating continuous quality improvement of the HEIs GFP. The process generates the impetus for a self-study, and then produces an independent evaluative final GFPQA report containing formal conclusions in the form of Commendations, Affirmations and Recommendations (CARS). These CARS can be used for improvement purposes.

³ <https://www.oaaaqa.gov.om/About-the-OAAA/OAAA-Manuals/?lang=en-GB>

PART B: THE APPEAL PROCESS

2 OVERVIEW

The OAAAQA seeks to abide by international best practices in its policies and guidelines whenever possible, particularly the most recent edition (2022) of the International Standards and Guidelines (ISGs) for Quality Assurance in Tertiary Education issued by INQAAHE. These ISGs cover the following regarding appeals and complaints:

- The EQA agency has procedures in place to deal in a consistent way with complaints about its procedures or operations.
- The EQA agency has clear, published procedures for handling appeals related to its external review and decision-making processes.
- Appeals are conducted by an independent panel/commission not responsible for the original decision and has no conflicts of interest. Appeals need not necessarily be conducted outside the EQA Provider (INQAAHE, 2022, p. 21).

The OAAAQA's methods for appeal are also designed to be consistent with national laws. This comprehensive Manual sets out the criteria and process regarding formal appeals against Final EQA Results and Accreditation Outcomes arising from OAAAQA's formal EQA activities. The outcome of an Appeal is final, and, by government decision, there is no recourse to legal judgement after Appeal.

2.1 Overview of the Appeal Process

An overview of the main steps which are included in the appeal process is shown in Figure 3. As indicated in the diagram, there are two key HEI submissions: the Appeal Application and the Appeal Submission. By submitting an Appeal Application Form (see 0Appendix C: Appeal Application Form²⁷), an HEI indicates an intention to submit an appeal.⁴ This is followed by the Appeal Submission in which the HEI concisely explains the exact nature of all the claims that comprise the appeal. Further details are provided throughout this *Appeals Manual*.

⁴ The Appeal Application is available as a stand-alone downloadable template available through OAAAQA.

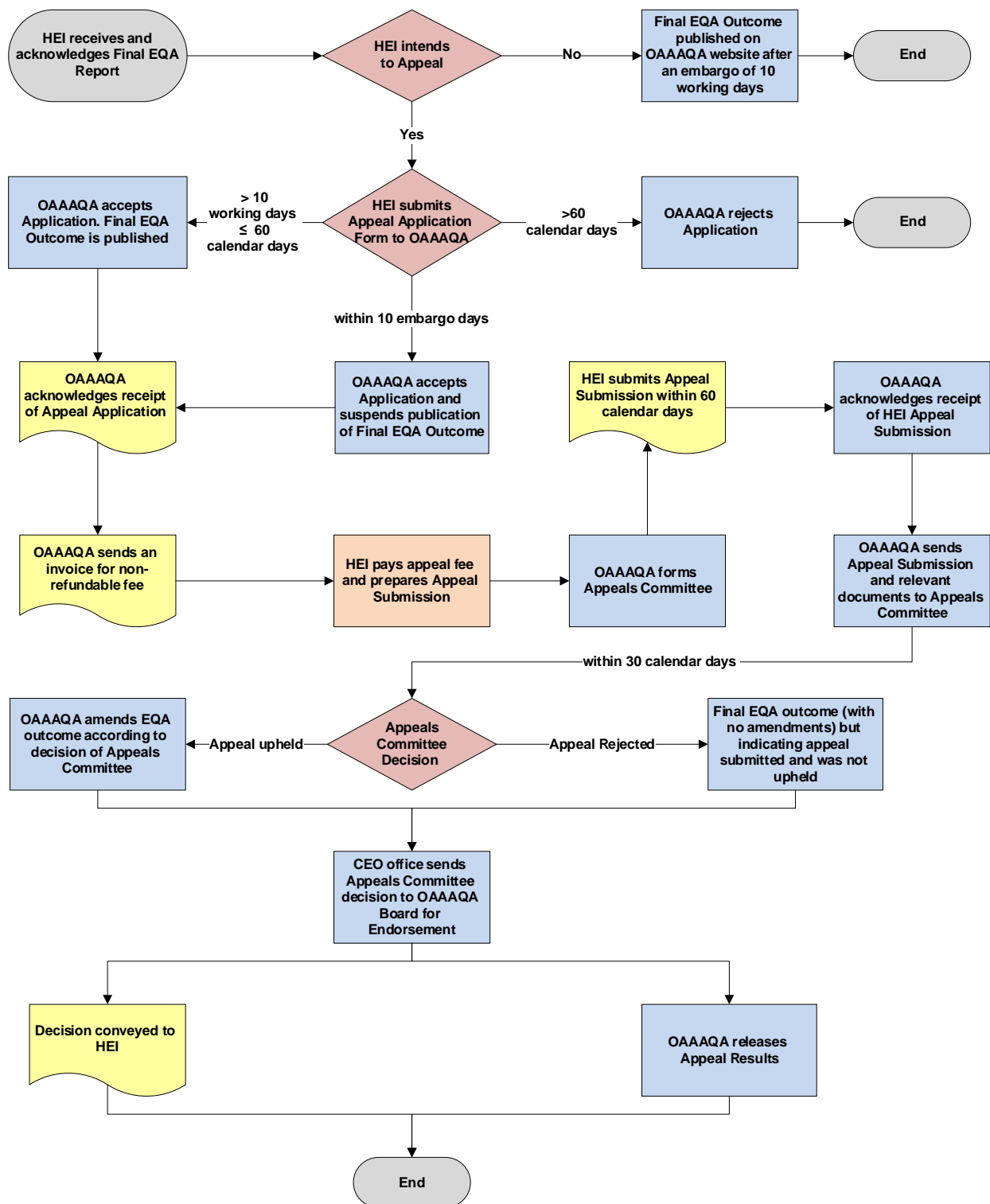


Figure 3: Appeal Process

2.2 Stages of the Appeal Process

Table 1 below sets out in sequential order the main tasks associated with the appeal process.

Table 1: Appeal Process			
Timeframe	#	Activity	Responsibility
After Board endorsement of EQA Report v6	1	OAAAQA sends the Final EQA Report to the HEI under an embargo of 10 working days ⁵ (see Section 6.1 below).	DG CHEQA
Within 10 working days of receipt of Final Report	2	An HEI, deciding to appeal, submits an Appeal Application Form (Appendix C) to DG CHEQA .	Appellant
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If OAAAQA receives the application within the ten-day embargo period, it temporarily suspends the publication of either the Final EQA Report and/or Results and updates the HEI status on the OAAAQA website as 'Under Appeal'; The Director General of the Centre of Higher Education Quality Assurance (DG CHEQA) notifies the OAAAQA CEO and the EQA Review Director (RD) who informs the Panel that an appeal has been lodged. If OAAAQA receives the application after the ten working days of the embargo period and within 60 calendar days of the Final EQA Report, it accepts the application but the Final EQA Report and/or Results remain in the public domain on the OAAAQA website; DG CHEQA notifies the OAAAQA CEO and the EQA Review Director (RD) who informs the Panel that an appeal has been lodged. If OAAAQA receives the application after 60 calendar days, it rejects the application. 	DG CHEQA + RD
As soon as possible after receipt of Appeal Application Form	3	DG CHEQA acknowledges receipt of the Appeal Application Form and, if the appeal application is accepted, sends an invoice for the non-refundable appeal fee (see Section 12 below); an Appeals Committee Coordinator (ACC) is appointed by DG CHEQA in coordination with the concerned Director of department.	DG CHEQA + concerned Director of department
	4	CHEQA prepares the Appeals Committee longlist from the approved External Reviewers (ERs) on the national register; the DG CHEQA approves the longlist.	DG CHEQA + CHEQA
	5	The Appellant prepares the HEI's Appeal Submission (see Section 6.3 below).	Appellant
	6	CHEQA sends the Appeals Committee longlist to the Appellant.	CHEQA
	7	The Appellant reviews whether any External Reviewers on the Appeals Committee longlist may have a conflict of interest (see Section 3.5.1 below) and returns any comments to DG CHEQA.	Appellant
		The Appellant pays the appeal fee.	
8	CHEQA sends an invitation to the shortlisted Appeals Committee Members from the longlist together with a draft EQA contract that includes a conflict of interest declaration.	ACC + PSO	

⁵ The ten-day embargo period is subsumed in the 60 calendar days from the date upon receiving the Final EQA Report

Table 1: Appeal Process					
Timeframe	#	Activity	Responsibility		
		Each Appeals Committee Member completes and signs the EQA Contract and returns it to OAAAQA.	Appeals Committee Members		
	9	CHEQA forms the Appeals Committee.	CHEQA		
		CHEQA informs the Appellant of the confirmed membership of the Appeals Committee.	ACC		
		The ACC confirms the key dates with the Appeals Committee and notifies the Appellant of the first Appeals Committee meeting date.			
Within 60 calendar days of receipt of Final Report	10	The Appellant sends the Appeal Submission to OAAAQA within 60 calendar days of receipt of the Final EQA Report.	Appellant		
	11	ACC acknowledges receipt of the HEI's submission.	ACC		
Within 30 calendar days of Appeal Submission	12	The ACC sends the Appeals Submission to the Review Director (RD) of the original EQA Panel who, in turn, requests the original Panel members for a response.	ACC + RD of EQA under appeal		
	13	The RD collates the EQA Panel's response to the Appeal Submission, includes his or her own comments and submits the report to the ACC (see Section 7 below).	RD of EQA under appeal		
	14	ACC sends the following documentation to the Appeals Committee:	ACC		
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appellant Appeal Submission • Original HEI EQA submission • EQA Report v5 • The HEI's comments on Report v5 • The Panel's response to the HEI comments on Report v5 and actions taken as a result • Final EQA Report (indicating any changes made to Report v6 by the OAAAQA Board) • The EQA Panel's response to claims in the Appellant's submission • The EQA RD's response to claims in the Appellant's submission 			
		15		Each Appeals Committee Member prepares a preliminary analysis of the Appeal Submission and sends it to ACC.	Appeals Committee Members
		16		The ACC collates the preliminary analysis from the Appeals Committee and circulates it to the Appeals Committee.	ACC
		17		The ACC prepares the agenda for the Appeals Committee Meeting.	ACC
	18	The Chair steers the Appeals Committee Meeting (see Section 8 below).	ACC + Chair + Appeals Committee		
	19	The Chair convenes further Appeals Committee meetings as required.	ACC + Chair + Appeals Committee		

Table 1: Appeal Process			
Timeframe	#	Activity	Responsibility
	20	The ACC prepares the Appeals Committee minutes and circulates them to the Appeals Committee Members for feedback; the Appeals Committee Chair approves the final minutes.	ACC + Appeals Committee + Chair
	21	The Appeals Committee Chair issues a decision on behalf of the Appeals Committee and prepares a covering letter for the OAAAQA CEO and the Appellant.	Appeals Committee Chair
		The Appeals Committee Chair completes the confidential Appeals Committee Report Template (Appendix G); this serves only to inform the OAAAQA CEO and Board of the final outcome of the appeal process and is not shared with the Appellant.	Appeals Committee Chair
		The ACC conveys the Appeals Committee decision and covering letters to the DG CHEQA who then forwards it to the OAAAQA CEO Office.	ACC + DG CHEQA
	22	The OAAAQA CEO's Office sends the Appeals Committee decision to the OAAAQA Board for endorsement; on receipt of endorsement, the DG CHEQA forwards the decision to the Appellant.	OAAAQA CEO's Office + OAAAQA Board + DG CHEQA
As soon as possible after the Appellant is notified of the Appeal decision	23	The ACC amends the post-appeal EQA Report according to the Appeals Committee decision and includes a section on the Appeal process, key dates and outcomes; the OAAAQA CEO submits Report v6 to the OAAAQA Board for endorsement.	ACC + DG CHEQA OAAAQA CEO + OAAAQA Board
	24	CHEQA releases the post-appeal results in accordance with normal procedures (see step -2 above) and updates the OAAAQA website; the DG CHEQA sends the Final Report to the HEI and CHEQA arranges for report printing.	DG CHEQA + CHEQA
	25	The ACC prepares a feedback report about the conduct of the appeal process; the Appeals Committee Members complete a confidential evaluation of the Appeal process, as per contract, and submits this to the ACC.	ACC + Appeals Committee

2.3 Language of the Appeal Process

The appeal must be addressed in the language in which the original EQA process was conducted by the OAAAQA. It is the responsibility of the Appellant to translate where necessary any documents required for the Appeal Submission into the language of the appeal process.

3 THE APPEALS COMMITTEE

3.1 Purpose

- The purpose of forming the Appeals Committee is to provide external scrutiny of EQA processes to ensure that they were conducted as per established practice stipulated in the relevant EQA manual (see Appendix F: Guidance Note for Appeals Committee Members).
- It should be noted that the appeal represents tertiary analysis (of an institution or programme, including GFP). Primary analysis is undertaken by an HEI through self-study or self-assessment. Secondary analysis, designed to check the validity of the primary

analysis, is carried out through OAAAQA's EQA processes. Tertiary analysis is undertaken by the Appeals Committee focusing on whether the secondary analysis was conducted as per established practice (for example, where the text does not support the outcome, or the appropriate evidence was overlooked or triangulation was not carried out). There is no remit given to the Appeals Committee to conduct a new secondary analysis. With this in mind, the Appeals Committee does not visit the Appellant's premises, nor does it interview staff or students.

- Appeals Committees are authorised to make decisions and direct the OAAAQA to make any changes to Final Reports consistent with the scope of their authority as an Appeals Committee.

3.2 Membership

- The Appeals Committee is formed by a decision of the CEO of OAAAQA and comprises a Chairperson and up to two other Members for each appeal. In the event of an appeal against a '*Not Accredited*' Accreditation Outcome, the number of Committee members may increase depending on the gravity of the case. Each Appeals Committee normally includes at least one locally-based External Reviewer.
- The composition of a longlist of potential Appeals Committee Members is carefully considered for each specific appeal in order to ensure that appropriate expertise is assigned to each case. Longlisted members are drawn from the OAAAQA Register of External Reviewers, excluding those who have had involvement in the original EQA process.
- The HEI is requested to identify any potential conflict of interest with the proposed nominees.
- OAAAQA sends invitation to the shortlisted Appeals Committee Members from the longlist that has been vetted by the HEI for conflict of interest and approved by the CEO of OAAAQA.
- Shortlisted Appeals Committee Members are required, furthermore, to sign a declaration form, embedded within the External Reviewer Contract that includes a statement regarding conflict of interest, in line with OAAAQA's Values of 'Integrity' and 'Transparency'.

3.3 Appeals Committee Coordinator

The Appeals Committee Coordinator (ACC) is a member either of OAAAQA technical staff or a member of the OAAAQA Register of External Reviewers nominated by the DG CHEQA to support the smooth running of the appeal process. The selection process avoids, however, any personnel who were actively involved in the EQA under appeal. The ACC has access to all Appeal Submission documents, provides support to the Appeals Committee and ensures that the appeal is carried out in line with the process set out in this manual. The ACC is not, however, a member of the Appeals Committee and has no right to express opinion on any part of the submission nor on the Appeals Committee's response.

3.4 Responsibilities

3.4.1 Responsibilities of the Appeal Committee

Members of the Appeal Committee have the following responsibilities:

- To deliberate upon the appeal submitted to the Appeals Committee and to make a decision.

- To consider the Appeal Submission and supporting documentation; to prepare a preliminary analysis and actively contribute to the Appeals Committee meetings, and to provide feedback on minutes of the Appeals Committee meetings.
- To clearly establish the grounds for the Appeals Committee decisions (see Section 9 below).
- To limit the scope of their deliberations to appeals against EQA results (including formal conclusions (CARs) in Quality Audit Reports and Criteria ratings in Standards Assessment Reports). The Appeals Committee has no authority to deal with general complaints.
- Ensure that the provided evidence existed before the evidence deadline for the EQA (i.e. the last day of the EQA Visit).

3.4.2 Responsibilities of the Appeals Committee Chairperson

In addition to sharing the responsibilities set out in Section 3.4.1 above, the Appeals Committee Chairperson has the following responsibilities:

- To convene all deliberations of the Appeals Committee.
- To facilitate consensus-based decision-making processes of the Appeals Committee and to ensure that the appeal process is carried out in accordance with this *Appeals Manual* and OAAAQA values.
- To document the responses of the EQA Panels and Appeals Committee Members to the HEI's claims and the Appeal Committee's decisions in the Appeals Committee Report Template (Appendix G).
- Issue a decision letter on behalf of the Appeals Committee and prepares two covering letters addressed to the OAAAQA CEO and the Appellant.

3.4.3 Responsibilities of the Appeals Committee Coordinator

- To draft with DG CHEQA the Appeal process timeline and milestones.
- To coordinate with the Appeals Committee Chairperson regarding the appeal process and act as the focal point for all communication between Appeals Committee Members and the Appellant.
- To send invitations to shortlisted Appeals Committee Members.
- To communicate the names of the appointed Appeals Committee Members to the Appellant.
- To circulate the Appeal Submission and related documentation to the Appeals Committee Members.
- To liaise, as necessary, with the Appellant on administrative matters pertaining to the appeal.
- To send the Appeal Submission to the RD of the original EQA with a request for each of the original EQA Panel Members to respond to the claims therein, in line with the process for handling responses set out in Section 8 of this *Appeals Manual*.
- To collate the preliminary analyses submitted by each Appeals Committee Member and circulate them to the Appeals Committee prior to the first Appeals Committee meeting.
- To prepare agendas, letters and other working documents.
- To attend all the Appeals Committee meetings and to provide guidance to the Appeals Committee on the appeal process as set out in this *Appeals Manual* and in alignment with OAAAQA values.
- To record the Appeals Committee decisions in minutes of meetings, circulate those minutes to the Appeals Committee Members for feedback, and submit the minutes for final approval by the Appeals Committee Chairperson.
- To commission the drafting of the two decision letters addressed to the HEI and the OAAAQA CEO to be signed by the Appeals Committee Chairperson.
- To amend the post-appeal EQA Report to include the dates and outcome of the Appeals process, together with the names of Appeals Committee Members, and a summary of the

subject of the Appeal (for example, criteria ratings in standards assessment). Any amendments are indicated as footnote(s) in the post-appeal Report. These footnotes should be attributed to the Appeals Committee.

3.4.4 Responsibilities of the OAAAQA Board

- To endorse and release, where an appeal is upheld, an amended Accreditation Outcome (including ratings) and post-appeal EQA Report in line with the decision of the Appeals Committee.
- To endorse and release, where an appeal is not upheld, the original Accreditation Outcome (including ratings) and post-appeal EQA Report in line with the decision of the Appeals Committee.
- To receive and consider the Annual Appeals Report prepared by CHEQA.
- To approve the *Appeals Manual*.

3.4.5 Responsibilities of the Director General of the Center for Higher Education Quality Assurance (DG CHEQA)

In addition to sharing the responsibilities of the ACC (see Section 3.4.3 above), the DG CHEQA has the following responsibilities:

- To receive the Appeal Application Form from the Appellant.
- To appoint the ACC in consultation with the Director of concerned Department.
- To approve the longlist of External Reviewers proposed by the concerned Director of Department for the membership of the Appeals Committee.
- To request the issuance of an invoice for the Appeal fee.
- To ensure the provision of effective and efficient administrative support to the Appeals Committee.
- To communicate the decision of the Appeals Committee to the Appellant.
- To oversee the review of the *Appeals Manual* as necessary and to submit it to the OAAAQA Board for approval.

3.4.6 Communication

The Appeal Application Form (Appendix C) and completed Appeal Submission Template (Appendix D)⁶ should be sent to the DG CHEQA and signed by the Appellant's most senior representative. Other communication in relation to the appeal should be made through the OAAAQA ACC and the Appellant's nominated Contact Person (see Appendix C: Appeal Application Form). Under no circumstances should the Appeals Committee Chairperson or Appeals Committee Members be contacted directly by the Appellant. In cases where the Appellant attempts to communicate directly with any Appeals Committee Member, the appeal is subsequently rejected and the pre-appeal outcomes of the EQA is confirmed (see Section 3.6 below).

3.5 Conflicts of Interest

All Appeals Committee Members must declare any potential conflict of interest prior to their participation. An established conflict of interest results in the withdrawal of an External Reviewer from an appeal process (see Section 3.5.3 below).

3.5.1 Types of Conflict of Interest

A conflict of interest may be personal or professional. A personal conflict of interest arises if one or more of the following conditions apply to the Appeals Committee Member:

⁶ The Appeal Submission Template is available as a stand-alone downloadable document from OAAAQA.

An immediate family member or very close friend is on the governing body or staff of the Appellant or is a student of the Appellant.

Animosity exists with a person on the governing body or staff of the Appellant.

A financial interest exists in the Appellant, or financial interest is a going concern in association with any member of the governance and/or management or staff of the Appellant.

Bias is borne towards or against the Appellant due to previous circumstances (including being a graduate or having been a staff member of the Appellant).

A professional conflict of interest arises if the appeal Committee Member:

- Has held a key position in the Appellant HEI in the past ten years.
- Is currently an applicant or candidate for a position with the Appellant.
- Is currently engaged in, or has been engaged, within the past five years, with the delivery or receipt of professional services to/from the Appellant which may affect the EQA appeal process (such as being an external examiner; participating in internal review processes, providing consulting services).
- Has been a member of an EQA Panel involved in the assessment of the HEI in the past five years.
- Belongs to, or has an interest in, an organisation currently involved in an explicit competitive process against the Appellant (as distinct from general competition within the sector).
- Holds a managerial position in an organisation currently involved in a major form of cooperation with the HEI concerned in the EQA (such as benchmarking, external examination and research collaboration).

3.5.2 Appeals Committee Member Longlist and Declaration

To commence the formation of an Appeals Committee, the Director of ERASD and Director of concerned CHEQA Department draw up a longlist of approved names from the national Register of External Reviewers for approval by DG CHEQA. Selected External Reviewers must complete, sign and return an Appeals Committee Member Declaration Form as part of their contract with the OAAAQA before they may be confirmed as a Member of a particular Appeals Committee. This form has a number of requirements, including confirmation from panel members that they have no conflict of interest with the concerned HEI or programme under review. If the selected External Reviewers have concerns about a possible conflict of interest, they should contact the Director of ERASD to discuss the matter further.

3.5.3 Consultation with Appellant

The longlist is submitted in strict confidence to the Appellant's most senior representative who is invited to identify from the HEI's perspective whether any External Reviewer included on the longlist has or may have a conflict of interest (the only grounds for objection). The DG CHEQA is not obliged to agree with any objection from the Appellant (other than those listed in 3.5.1 above), but must consider all objections carefully. Once the Appeals Committee has been confirmed, the names of the Appeals Committee Members are sent to the Appellant.

3.5.4 Identifying Conflict of Interest

If an Appellant deliberately or inadvertently fails to declare a conflict of interest during the longlisting process (see Section 3.5.3 above), it may not raise any such concerns about conflict of interest among the confirmed Appeals Committee Members at a later stage in order to discredit the decisions of the Appeals Committee. If such a situation arises,

OAAAQA reserves the right to suspend the appeal process and confirm the original EQA outcomes.

3.6 Undue Influence

It is not permissible for the Appellant to exert undue influence on the Appeals Committee or the OAAAQA, including the OAAAQA Board. Undue influence by the Appellant (or stakeholders of the Appellant) may take a number of forms, including (but not limited to) the following:

- Communication about the appeal with the Chairperson or individual Appeals Committee Members or the OAAAQA CEO, Board Chairperson or members during the course of the appeal (except as a formal part of the appeal process).
- Explicit or implied threats against the Appeals Committee Members, OAAAQA staff or OAAAQA Board Members.
- Explicit or implied promises of benefits to the Appeals Committee Members, OAAAQA staff or OAAAQA Board Members.
- Gifts (material or monetary) to Appeals Committee Members, OAAAQA staff, the OAAAQA CEO, the OAAAQA Board Chairperson or Board Members.

In the event of undue influence occurring, the appeal process is automatically cancelled and the EQA results remain unchanged and the occurrence/incident is reflected in the post-appeal Final Report. Additionally, OAAAQA shall resort to legal recourse based on the nature of such influences.

4 GROUNDS FOR APPEAL

An HEI is entitled, subject to the terms and conditions set out in this *Appeals Manual*, to appeal against EQA results (including formal conclusions (CARs) in Quality Audit Reports and Criteria ratings in Standards Assessment Reports) endorsed by the OAAAQA Board relating to OAAAQA's EQA activities.

Appeals may only relate to matters raised by an Appellant in its comments on Draft Report Version 5 (v5), and/or any subsequent changes made by OAAAQA after the HEI submits its comments on Draft v5 that have not been requested by the Appellant.

4.1 Admissible Grounds for Appeal⁷

4.1.1 Formal Conclusions of Quality Audit Reports

All OAAAQA's Quality Audit activities result in a Final Report. These reports contain formal conclusions in the form of CARs.

The grounds for appealing against formal conclusions (CARs) of a Quality Audit Report are:

- Significant factual inaccuracies that the HEI has already tried to correct by providing the appropriate evidence to the EQA Panel.
- Emphases or perspectives taken by the EQA Panel that are unfairly prejudicial against the HEI and lead to unfair results, including formal conclusions (CARs).
- The omission of an issue so significant that its omission is unfairly prejudicial against the HEI and results in unfair results, including formal conclusions (CARs).

⁷ The acceptance of the grounds for appeal does not necessarily mean or guarantee the acceptance of the appeal itself.

- The EQA process was conducted in a manner that was manifestly unfair and deviated from the relevant EQA manual in a manner that had not been agreed by both parties.
- The formal results, including formal conclusions (CARs) are manifestly at odds with the respective commentary in the Report.

4.1.2 Accreditation Outcomes

All Standards Assessments result in a formal Accreditation Outcome endorsed by the OAAAQA Board. This outcome determines the accredited status of an institution or programme. For more information on potential Accreditation Outcomes, please consult the Institutional Standards Assessment Manual(s) and the Programme Standards Assessment Manual.

The grounds for appealing against an Accreditation Outcome are:

- Significant factual inaccuracies that the HEI has already tried to correct by providing the appropriate evidence to the EQA Panel.
- Emphases or perspectives taken by the EQA Panel that are unfairly prejudicial against the HEI and result in unfair assessment of a standard or related criteria.
- The omission of an issue so significant that its omission is unfairly prejudicial against the HEI and results in unfair assessment of a standard or related criteria.
- The EQA process was conducted in a manner that was manifestly unfair and deviated from the relevant EQA manual in a manner that had not been agreed by both parties.
- The Accreditation Outcome and/or ratings are manifestly at odds with the Final Report.

4.2 Non-admissible Grounds for Appeal

A non-admissible appeal is one where the Appeals Committee considers the submission but does not uphold it. The following shall not constitute grounds for an appeal:

- Any matters not raised by the Appellant in its comments on Draft Report Version 5 (v5).
- Important information which the Appellant had failed to submit in a timely fashion during the EQA process.
- Undue influence on Appeals Committee (see Section 3.6 above).
- Providing evidence of any nature that did not exist up until the last day of EQA Panel visit.

4.3 Grounds for Non-acceptance of Appeal

An appeal application may not be accepted before reaching the Appeals Committee in the following circumstances:

- An Appeal Submission is received by OAAAQA after 60 calendar days from the date upon which the Final EQA Report was received (see Section 6.3 below).
- The non-receipt of the appeal fee before the appeal submission (see Section 6.3 below).
- The failure to declare a conflict of interest regarding one or more External Reviewers on the Appeals Committee Member longlist that was submitted to the Appellant for vetting.

5 SUBJECT OF APPEAL

This *Appeals Manual* applies to appeals against the results of OAAAQA's higher education EQA activities as indicated in the following sections.

5.1 Institutional Accreditation

5.1.1 Institutional Standards Assessment Results

There are three results from ISA: (i) ratings of standards and criteria; (ii) Accreditation Outcome based on these ratings, and (iii) a confidential Final ISA Report. An institution has the right to appeal against any of the ratings of standards and criteria. It also has the right to appeal against the Accreditation Outcome. It does not have the right to appeal against the text of the Final ISA Report.

5.1.2 Institutional Standards Reassessment Results

There are three results from ISR (which takes place after a conditional accreditation or probation period): (i) ratings of the reassessed standards and criteria; (ii) Accreditation Outcome and (iii) a confidential Final ISR Report. An institution has the right to appeal against any of the ratings of the reassessed standards and criteria. It also has the right to appeal against the Accreditation Outcome following ISR. It does not have the right to appeal against the text of the Final ISR Report.

5.2 Programme Accreditation

5.2.1 Programme Standards Assessment Results

There are three results from PSA: (i) ratings of standards and criteria; (ii) Accreditation Outcome; and (iii) a confidential Final PSA Report. An institution has the right to appeal against any of the ratings of standards and criteria. It also has the right to appeal against the Accreditation Outcome. It does not have the right to appeal against the text of the Final PSA Report.

5.2.2 Programme Standards Reassessment Results

There are three results from Programme Standards Reassessment (PSR): (i) ratings of the reassessed standards and criteria; (ii) Accreditation Outcome based on these ratings, and (iii) a confidential Final PSR Report. An institution has the right to appeal against any of the ratings of the reassessed standards and criteria. It also has the right to appeal against the Accreditation Outcome following PSR. It does not have the right to appeal against the text of the Final PSR Report.

5.3 General Foundation Programme Quality Audit

There is no Accreditation Outcome resulting solely from a GFPQA. The result of a GFPQA is a Final GFPQA Report endorsed by the OAAAQA Board and includes formal conclusions in the form of CARs. These conclusions may be subject to appeal. The Appellant does not, however, have the right to appeal against the text of the Final GFPQA Report.

6 THE APPEAL APPLICATION AND SUBMISSION

In line with national legal requirements, an HEI has the right to appeal the result of the EQA activity up to 60 calendar days from the time it received the Final EQA Report even after the publication of the Final EQA Report or Accreditation Outcome on the OAAAQA website. Any application received after this will be rejected (see Section 4.3 above). The embargo period in which an HEI may apply for appeal, however, is ten working days⁸ from the date that it received

⁸ The ten working days are subsumed in the 60 calendar days from the date upon receiving the Final EQA Report

the Final EQA Report (as opposed to the draft Report) to ensure suspension of the results. This date is confirmed in the covering letter from the OAAAQA that accompanies the Final EQA Report. See Figure 3 and Table 1 above for identification of key milestones in the appeal process and Appendix F for a guidance note on preparing an appeal submission.

6.1 The Appeal Application

- The HEI completes the Appeal Application Form (see Appendix C: Appeal Application Form) and ensures it is received by the DG CHEQA within ten working days, counted from the HEI's acknowledged receipt of the Final EQA Report, to qualify for temporary suspension of the results (see Section 6.2 below). These ten working days are referred to as an 'embargo' period (see Section 11 below).
- In the event that an appeal is made after the ten working days, the HEI must complete the Appeal Application Form (see below) and ensure it is received by the DG CHEQA within 60 calendar days, bearing in mind that any delay counts as part of the sixty-day period. If, for example, an Appellant submits an Appeal Application forty days after receiving the final EQA report, it has only twenty days to prepare and submit the Appeal Submission.
- The HEI needs to indicate the date of the Appeal Submission (see Section 6.3 below) to enable the OAAAQA to make the arrangements for the appeal process.
- The only person authorised to submit an Appeal Application Form on behalf of the HEI is the Appellant's most senior representative (see Appendix B: Acronyms and Terms for a definition).

6.2 Temporary Suspension of the Report and Accreditation Outcome

- If the Appeal Application Form is submitted within ten working days from the date the HEI received the Final EQA Report, the OAAAQA suspends the publication of the Final EQA Report or the Accreditation Outcome (as appropriate). In this circumstance, the Final EQA Report or Accreditation Outcome remains suspended until the Appeals Committee has come to a final decision.
- Final EQA Reports or Accreditation Outcomes are not made public by the OAAAQA during the suspension period and the OAAAQA updates the status of the HEI as 'Under Appeal' on the OAAAQA website.
- If the Appeal Application Form is submitted after ten working days (but within 60 calendar days) from the date the HEI received the Final EQA Report, the OAAAQA will keep the EQA Report/ results that have already been published in the public domain, subject to any amendments that may arise from the Appeal process.

6.3 The Appeal Submission

- The Appellant completes and submits the substantive Appeal Submission document, using the Appeal Submission Template (Appendix D), within 60 calendar days from the date the Final EQA Report was received. Failure to abide by the latter stipulation leads to the rejection of the appeal.
- The Appeal Submission document should detail, as concisely as possible, the exact nature of the claims that comprise the appeal and clarify the grounds of the appeal.
- The Appellant should ensure that the submission contains *all* and *only* the argumentation and evidence in support of the appeal.
- Searchable electronic copy in pdf format, and an electronic copy in Microsoft Word format of the Appeal Submission should be sent to OAAAQA .
- An Appeal submission will only be accepted if the non-refundable Appeal fee is paid in advance (see Section 12 below).
- The only person authorised to submit an Appeal Submission Template on behalf of the HEI is the Appellant's most senior representative (see Appendix B: Acronyms and Terms for a definition).

7 RESPONSE TO THE APPEAL SUBMISSION

The ACC liaises with the RD of the original EQA Panel for a response to the claims made in the Appeal Submission. The focus of this communication is on (i) claims that were included in the HEI's earlier comments on EQA Report v5, and (ii) any additions made after v5. The RD liaises with the original EQA Panel Chairperson and Members, and coordinates preparation of the EQA Panel's response and includes his or her own comments. The collated response is submitted to the ACC to assist in the Appeal Committee deliberations.

8 APPEALS COMMITTEE PROCESS AND DELIBERATIONS

- The Appeal Submission and supporting documentation are circulated to the Appeals Committee Members.
- Each Appeals Committee Member considers the Appeal Submission and supporting documentation. This documentation includes the response from the EQA Panel (and the OAAAQA Board, where relevant) to the Appeal Submission, if available; if this is not available, it can be circulated to the Appeals Committee prior to or during the Appeals Committee Meeting (see Section 7 above).
- Each Appeals Committee Member prepares a preliminary analysis to be sent to the ACC prior to the first Appeals Committee Meeting. The Appeals Committee meets once or more (face-to-face at the OAAAQA office, or via virtual conferencing or a combination of both), and must respond within 30 calendar days from the date of receiving the Appeal Submission. The Appellant is informed of the date and time of the Appeals Committee meetings.
- The meetings provide an opportunity for the Appeals Committee to consider the Appeal Submission, the preliminary analysis submitted by the Appeals Committee Members, and the response to the Appeals Submission from the EQA Panel (and OAAAQA Board, where relevant) (see Section 7 above). The Appeals Committee Chairperson guides Appeals Committee Members to reach consensus-based decisions informed by a thorough analysis and discussion of the documentation.
- In the event of the Appeals Committee Members not reaching a consensus-based decision during the meeting and/or needing further information, the Appeals Committee may request clarification from the Appellant and/or OAAAQA, providing that these clarifications are communicated through the ACC and relate to documents and/or activities already existing at the time of the EQA under appeal.
- Evidence in support of the appeal cannot be accepted by the Appeals Committee unless the Appellant can demonstrate that the evidence existed before the evidence deadline for the EQA (i.e. the last day of the EQA Visit).
- The Appeals Committee meets in private. The Appellant is not entitled to have representation at Appeals Committee meetings.
- The minutes of Appeals Committee meetings are prepared by the ACC and circulated to the Appeals Committee Members for feedback. Meeting minutes and decisions are approved by the Appeals Committee Chairperson.
- The Appeals Committee Chairperson signs two documents commissioned by the ACC; one document is addressed to the HEI and the other document is addressed to the OAAAQA CEO.
- The two documents, together with the minutes of the Appeals Committee meetings and the Appeals Committee Report (Appendix G), are sent to the DG CHEQA who then forwards it to the OAAAQA CEO Office.
- The OAAAQA CEO's Office sends the Appeals Committee decision to the OAAAQA Board for endorsement;
- On receipt of endorsement, the DG CHEQA communicates the decision to the Appellant. The outcome of the appeal process is posted on the OAAAQA website.

- The post-appeal EQA Report is prepared, by the ACC based on the Appeals Committee decision and is submitted to DG CHEQA, who forwards it to OAAAQA CEO in preparation for the OAAAQA Board for endorsement.

9 APPEALS COMMITTEE DECISIONS

The Appeals Committee makes the final appeal decision and EQA results are amended by the OAAAQA only on the Committee's directions. The Appeals Committee's decisions are limited to the options set out in the following sections.

9.1 Appeal Result Options for Institutional Accreditation

9.1.1 Institutional Standards Assessment

- a. The Accreditation Outcome stands and the Final Report indicates that an appeal was submitted and was not upheld.
- b. The Accreditation Outcome stands but the ratings of individual standards or criteria are changed and amended in the Final Report by the OAAAQA.
- c. The criteria ratings (and, by extension, individual standards) are amended and the Accreditation Outcome is amended accordingly (such as from 'On Probation' to 'Conditionally Accredited').
- d. The length of any conditional accreditation or probation period is amended by the OAAAQA. The amended length of any conditional accreditation or probation period is reflected in the Final Report.

9.1.2 Institutional Standards Reassessment

- a. The Accreditation Outcome stands and the Final Report indicates that an appeal was submitted and was not upheld.
- b. The Accreditation Outcome stands but the ratings of individual standards or criteria are changed and the Final Report is amended accordingly.
- c. The criteria ratings (and, by extension, individual standards) are amended and the Accreditation Outcome is amended accordingly (such as from 'On Probation' to 'Conditionally Accredited'). This may result in a second conditional accreditation or probation period, the length of which may be determined by the Appeals Committee. The Final Report is amended accordingly.
- d. The length of the second conditional accreditation or probation period is amended by the OAAAQA. The amended length of the conditional accreditation or probation period is reflected in the Final Report.

9.2 Appeal Result Options for Programme Accreditation

9.2.1 Programme Standards Assessment

- a. The Accreditation Outcome stands and the Final Report indicates that an appeal was submitted and was not upheld.
- b. The Accreditation Outcome stands but the ratings of individual standards or criteria are changed and the Final Report is amended accordingly.
- c. The criteria ratings (and, by extension, individual standards) are amended and the Accreditation Outcome is amended accordingly (such as from 'On Probation' to 'Accredited').
- d. The length of the probation period is amended and reflected in the Final Report.

9.2.2 Programme Standards Reassessment

- a. The Accreditation Outcome stands and the Final Report indicates that an appeal was submitted and was not upheld.
- b. The Accreditation Outcome stands but the ratings of individual standards or criteria are changed and the Final Report is amended accordingly.
- c. The criteria ratings (and, by extension, individual standards) are amended and the Accreditation Outcome is amended accordingly (such as from 'On Probation' to 'Accredited'). The Final Report is amended accordingly.

9.3 Appeal Result Options for General Foundation Programme Quality Audit

- a. The Final Report is released without amendments (apart from indicating that an appeal was submitted and was not upheld).
- b. The Final Report is released with amendments made by the OAAAQA to its formal conclusions (CARs).

10 THE APPEAL DECISION

- The Appeals Committee makes the final decision in accordance with the provisions of this *Appeals Manual* (see Section 9 above).⁹
- The Appeals Committee decision is issued no later than 30 calendar days from the date of receiving the Appeal Submission from the HEI (see Section 6.3 above).

11 CONFIDENTIALITY

If the Appeal Application Form (see Appendix C: Appeal Application Form) is received by the DG CHEQA within ten working days from the date that the HEI receives its Final EQA Report, the Accreditation Outcomes and the publication of the EQA Final report are withheld. This period is referred to as the 'embargo' period. The OAAAQA website records the current status of that institution or programme as being 'Under Appeal'.¹⁰ Details of the appeal proceedings, however, are confidential to the OAAAQA and the Appellant. The result of an appeal is reflected in the revised EQA Report (including formal conclusions (CARs) in Quality Audit Reports and Criteria ratings in Standards Assessment Reports).

12 COST OF APPEAL

The cost of lodging an appeal is structured to ensure that this action is undertaken with appropriate gravity.

- The fee for lodging an appeal against EQA results (including formal conclusions (CARs) in Quality Audit Reports and Criteria ratings in Standards Assessment Reports) is fixed regardless of an HEI's classification. This fee is non-refundable irrespective of the nature or the outcome of the appeal.¹¹
- An invoice is sent to the Appellant on receipt of an Appeal Application by the OAAAQA.
- The payment of the non-refundable appeal fee must be made prior to submission.

⁹ In case of a conflict in the provisions due to different versions of the manual used by OAAAQA and the appellant, the copy published on the OAAAQA website shall be considered. The OAAAQA periodically updates its manuals, and HEIs are encouraged to check the website for the latest version.

¹⁰ <http://www.oaaaqa.gov.om>

¹¹ For current information regarding the cost of an appeal, refer to OAAAQA Policy on Appeals Against EQA Activities, Reports and Decisions: <https://oaaaqa.gov.om/getattachment/05de07e5-2e58-4cf5-a974-1aa0a6d9688c/Fees%20Charged%20for%20OAAA%20External%20Quality%20Assurance%20Activities%20and%20Appeals.aspx?b=0>

13 FURTHER INFORMATION

For further information, an HEI may communicate with the OAAAQA by email (cheqa@oaaqa.gov.om) or by telephone (+968) 2412 1629. Alternatively, refer to the commonly asked questions given in this manual (see **Error! Reference source not found.**).

PART C: APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: REFERENCES

International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE).2022 'International Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Tertiary Education.

<https://2023.inqaahe.org/international-standards-and-guidelines-quality-assurance-higher-education-isgs>

Oman Academic Council (OAC). (2008). Institutional Quality Audit Manual: Institutional Accreditation Stage 1. : <https://oaaqa.gov.om/getattachment/aff32aa8-8a64-40a6-842e-295a17e7821e/Quality%20Audit%20Manual.aspx?b=0>

Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (OAAA). (2016). Institutional Standards Assessment Manual: Institutional Accreditation Stage 2. <https://oaaqa.gov.om/getattachment/12585ee0-ff26-421f-9ef6-bab44004149c/Institutional%20Standards%20Assessment%20Manual.aspx?b=0>

Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education (OAAAQA). (2023). Programme Standards Assessment Manual (Programme Accreditation-version 1).

<https://www.oaaqa.gov.om/About-the-OAAA/OAAA-Manuals>

Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (OAAA). (2024). Institutional Standards Assessment Manual: (Institutional Accreditation- version 2). <https://www.oaaqa.gov.om/About-the-OAAA/OAAA-Manuals>

Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education . (2023). OAAA Policy On Fees Charged for Oaaa External Quality Assurance Activities and Appeals.

<https://www.oaaqa.gov.om/Media/Document-Centre>

APPENDIX B: ACRONYMS AND TERMS

The following acronyms and terms are used in this *Appeals Manual*. See the OAAAQA Glossary for definitions of specific terms.¹²

ACC.....	Appeals Committee Coordinator
Accreditation Outcome.....	The OAAAQA Board-approved result of an HEI's Standards Assessment
Appellant.....	The HEI lodging an appeal
Appeal Application	A form completed by the HEI indicating the name of the appealing institution, the EQA process under appeal and the Appellant's contact details
Appeal Submission	A document that concisely explains the exact nature and details of all the claims that comprise the appeal
CARs	Commendations, Affirmations and Recommendations (in Quality Audit Reports)
CEO.....	Chief Executive Officer
CHEQA.....	Centre for Higher Education Quality Assurance at OAAAQA
DG CHEQA.....	Director General - Centre for Higher Education Quality Assurance
EQA.....	External Quality Assurance
ERASD.....	External Reivew Activities Support Department
GFP.....	General Foundation Programme
GFPQA.....	General Foundation Programme Quality Audit
HEI	Higher Education Institution
INQAAHE	International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education ¹³
ISA.....	Institutional Standards Assessment
ISR	Institutional Standards Reassessment
Most senior representative.....	Generally the Vice-Chancellor of a university or Dean of a college (or those authorised on their behalf if unavailable)
OAAAQA	Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education
OAC.....	Oman Accreditation Council
PSA	Programme Standards Assessment
PSR.....	Programme Standards Reassessment
RD	Review Director
Report.....	Any report resulting from an OAAAQA EQA activity
ROSQA	Requirements for Oman's System of Quality Assurance
TSS	Techncal Support Services

¹² <https://oaaqa.gov.om/About-the-OAAA/Glossary>

¹³ www.inqahe.org

APPENDIX C: APPEAL APPLICATION FORM



Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education

Appeal Application Form

Please read the *Appeals Manual* before submitting an appeal.

This form is used to give notice to OAAAQA that a Higher Education Institution (HEI) is intending to submit an appeal. It should only be used by an HEI after receiving the Final Report of an External Quality Assurance (EQA) activity from OAAAQA. The completed form, the Appeal Fee and the Appeal Submission Template, must be received within 60 calendar days from the date the HEI receives the Final EQA Report. **If an HEI wishes OAAAQA to suspend a Final EQA Report or the Accreditation Outcome (as appropriate) before it is made public, OAAAQA must receive this notification of appeal *within 10 working days* of the HEI receiving the Final EQA Report.** Please send the form (typed and scanned) by email to the CHEQA at OAAAQA:cheqa@oaaaqa.gov.om

Part A: Key Details	
HEI Name	
Date (day, month and year) of Receipt of Final EQA Report	[dd/mm/yyyy]
Date of Submission of this Appeal Application Form	[dd/mm/yyyy]
Type of EQA being Appealed Against (eg, ISA, ISR, PSA, PSR, GFPQA)	
If appealing against PSA, please name the programme ¹⁴	
Intended Date of Appeal Submission	

Part B: Subject of Appeal		
Please tick (in the second column) only one of the following rows:		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Row 1	We are appealing the formal conclusions of Standards Assessment (ie, criteria ratings) ¹⁵	<input type="checkbox"/>
Row 2	We are appealing the formal conclusions of Quality Audit (ie, CARs)	<input type="checkbox"/>

Part C: Communication			
List here the details of your HEI's contact person who may be approached by the OAAAQA in relation to this application:			
Contact Person's Name		Email	
Designation		Telephone	

Part D: Authority
This Appeal Application Form is submitted for and on behalf of the HEI by the HEI's most senior representative:

¹⁴ If the appeal pertains to a programme, please provide the name of the programme (a separate Appeal Application Form must be lodged for each programme).

¹⁵ Note that the standard ratings and the accreditation outcome is calculated automatically from the criteria ratings.

Representative's Name		Signature	
Designation		Date	

APPENDIX D: APPEAL SUBMISSION TEMPLATE



Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education

Appeal Submission Template

Please read the current *Appeals Manual* before submitting an appeal.

This Appeal Submission Template is used to submit an appeal to OAAAQA. It should be used by a Higher Education Institution (HEI) only after having given notice to OAAAQA of the intention to appeal (by submitting an Appeal Application Form) and only after paying a non-refundable Appeal fee. The submission must be received by the OAAAQA within 60 calendar days from the date the HEI receives the Final EQA Report. Please send this submission, together with supporting evidence, to the Appeals Committee Coordinator (appeals@oaaaqa.gov.om).

Part A: Key Details	
HEI Name	
Date (dd/mm/yyyy) of Receipt of Final EQA Report	[dd/mm/yyyy]
Date of Submitting this Appeal Submission Template	[dd/mm/yyyy]
Type of EQA being Appealed Against (eg, ISA, ISR, PSA)	
If appealing against PSA, please name the programme ¹⁶	

Part B: Subject of Appeal		
Please tick (in the second column) only one of the following rows:		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Row 1	We are appealing the formal conclusions of Standards Assessment (ie, criteria ratings) ¹⁷	<input type="checkbox"/>
Row 2	We are appealing the formal conclusions of Quality Audit (ie, CARs)	<input type="checkbox"/>

Part C: Authority			
This Appeal Submission Template is submitted for and on behalf of the HEI by the HEI's most senior representative:			
Representative's Name		Signature	
Designation		Date	

Appeal Submission Template: Appealing an EQA Result (add rows as required)		
Subject of Appeal	Grounds for Appeal	

16 If the appeal pertains to a programme, please provide the name of the programme (a separate Appeal Submission must be lodged for each programme).

17 Note that the standard ratings and the accreditation outcome is calculated automatically from the criteria ratings.

No	Criterion or Scope Area	Current Ratings or CARs	Rationale (with supporting evidence) ¹⁸	Suggested Criteria Ratings or CARs
1				
2				
3				

APPENDIX E: GUIDANCE NOTE FOR APPELLANT (HEI)

Aim of this Guidance Note

The aim of this Guidance Note is to assist Higher Education Institutions (HEIs or Appellants) prepare a submission for an appeal against the results of an EQA Activity.

Preparation of the Appeal Submission

In the event an HEI decides to proceed with lodging an appeal, a submission needs to be prepared within the timelines set out in the *Appeals Manual*. The submission needs to be submitted in soft copy using the Template available from OAAAQA (Appendix D); this submission must be brief and to the point (for example, from about 50 words to no more than 500 words per criterion, including the text of the EQA Report) and should include evidence.

Before proceeding to compile a submission, HEIs should carefully review the *Appeals Manual* (particularly Sections 5 and 6 outlining the scope of the Appeals Committee and the grounds for Appeal). This is to ensure that the HEI understands the grounds and subject of appeal and the range of potential decisions open to the Appeals Committee.¹⁹

For each aspect or point being disputed by the HEI the submission needs to include:

- Identification of the 'Subject' of the appeal (See Section 6 above, *Appeals Manual*)
- An indication of the 'Grounds' on which the Appeal is being made, such as significant factual misinterpretation of evidence which the HEI already attempted to correct (See Section 6 above, *Appeals Manual*)
- Evidence to support the appeal

The Subject of the Appeal needs to relate to EQA results (including formal conclusions (CARs) in Quality Audit Reports and Criteria ratings in Standards Assessment Reports) as the Appeals Committee remit is limited to these areas. The HEI needs to carefully define the points on which they wish to appeal to ensure these are within the authority of the Appeals Committee.

The next step is to identify the Grounds on which the appeal will be based as outlined in the *Appeals Manual*. It is essential to nominate one or more of these Grounds for each point disputed. The following step to be considered in framing the appeal is the selection of evidence that will be provided to support the Appeal. In each case this should directly relate to the Subject and Grounds and, as with all HEI evidence, must have been in existence before the final day of the EQA Visit. The Appellant cannot submit new evidence (that is, evidence that has not been already submitted to the EQA Panel) irrespective of whether it was in existence before the last day of the EQA visit or not.

There is no benefit to be gained by the HEI from including matters that are not directly related to the Subject and Grounds. Also there is nothing to be gained in resubmitting information that has already been provided to the EQA Panel before the completion of the Final Report unless there is firm evidence that the EQA Panel Members misinterpreted or ignored that evidence or the evidence forms part of a new compilation or argument.

¹⁸ The submission must be brief and to the point (from about 50 words to no more than 500 words per criterion or scope area, including the text of the EQA Report).

¹⁹ See Appendix F for a Guidance Note for Appeals Committee Members.

If the evidence being submitted to support the HEI appeal argument is part of aggregated set of evidence there should be clear directions for the Appeals Committee to locate the specific data or evidence. It is crucial that the HEI's case is not based on assertions that are unsupported by evidence. Nor are any of the following types of argument helpful within an appeal framework:

- Critique of the OAAAQA framework or standards (as this is not up for debate in the context of an appeal).
- Viewpoints that show the HEI does not accept that EQA processes (as these are based on the considered judgement of a panel of experts, using international benchmarks, rather than the institution's sense of its own position in the sector).
- Suggestions that the collective judgements made by the panel are not legitimate, or suggestions that the panel as a whole is insufficiently qualified to make those judgements (as Panels are comprised of QA experts who apply individual judgement based on evidence).
- Questioning, without evidence, the capacity or impartiality of one or more members of the panel or suggesting that the panel is not properly constituted.
- Arguments that the existence of a plan, with or without an allocation of resources (for example to purchase new equipment) is sufficient basis for saying that aspect of the HEI operations is satisfactory or even exemplary.
- Suggestions that the report fails to adequately recognise recent improvements or plans for improvement since this demonstrates a lack of understanding of EQA processes which are about judgements of demonstrable achievements against the OAAAQA scope areas or standards at a point in time; in other words, a full ADRI cycle needs to be demonstrated, wherein results and improvements are shown to be deliberately attained rather than arrived at by chance.
- Seeking to change the text, including the tone of the report text, for example, by adding more discussion on areas of strong achievement or de-emphasising weaker areas.
- Arguments that a change to standard processes, as set out in the EQA Manual, *previously negotiated and agreed in writing* between the HEI and OAAAQA have disadvantaged the HEI.
- Claims that it is not legitimate for an aspect of the HEI operations to be considered in different contexts in the report (for example, claiming that it is not applicable to apply judgements about academic integrity to other areas of the HEI's operations, outside Standard 2).

Features of an Effective Appeal Submission

The Appeal Submission needs to be structured so that the Appeals Committee Members can see the line of argument from the HEI's Subject of appeal, the Grounds on which the appeal is being advanced and the evidence to support the argument. The Committee meets in private so the Appellant (the HEI) is not entitled to representation. In this situation clarity and careful presentation of relevant evidence in the Appeals Submission is essential.

The two examples below (Figures 4 and 5) show in brief the sequence of events in two appeals to demonstrate the logic underlying the appeals process and guide the preparation of an Appeal Submission. Figure 4 shows a hypothetical example leading to a successful appeal while Figure 5 shows an example leading to an unsuccessful appeal.

Example of Sequence of Events Leading to Successful Appeal by an HEI

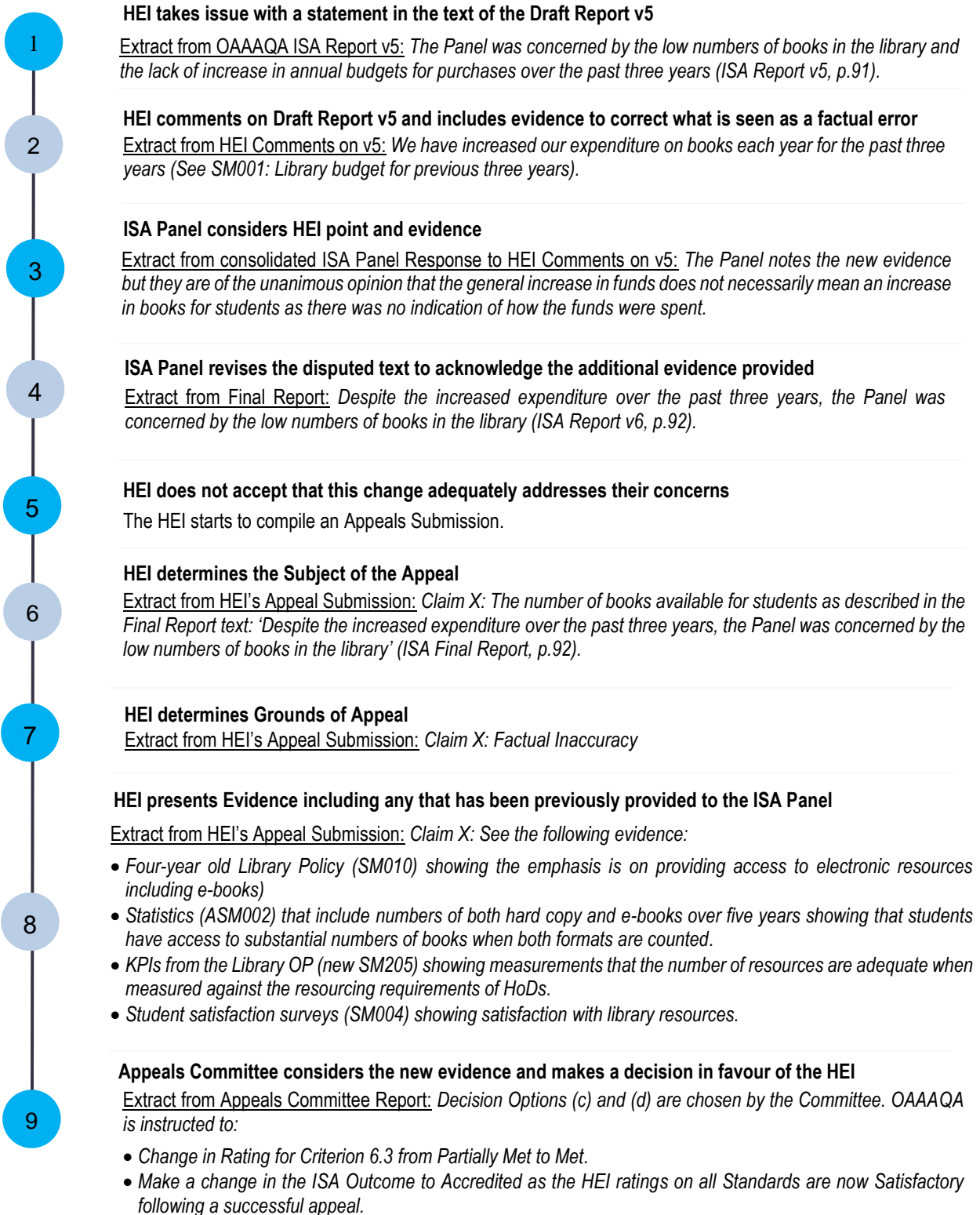


Figure 4: An Example of a Successful Appeal Process

Example of Sequence of Events Leading to Unsuccessful Appeal by an HEI

1

HEI takes issue with a statement in the text of the Draft Report v5

Extract from OAAAQA ISA Report v5: *The College has not yet implemented a comprehensive Academic Integrity policy (ISA Report v5, p.49).*

2

HEI comments on Draft Report v5 and includes evidence to correct what is seen as an omission of important information

Extract from HEI Comments on v5: *Faculty are encouraged to include a statement on teaching materials about the need to avoid breaches of academic integrity and also have access to Turnitin to check individual student assignments if they have a suspicion that a student has plagiarised (See SM020: Details of Turnitin license).*

3

ISA Panel considers HEI argument and evidence

Extract from consolidated ISA Panel Response to HEI Comments on v5: *The Panel notes the new evidence but they are of the unanimous opinion that there was still no evidence of the implementation of a College-wide policy establishing the principles and procedures of academic integrity.*

4

ISA Panel revises the disputed text in ISA Report v5 to acknowledge the additional evidence provided.

Extract from Final Report: *The College has installed Turnitin which faculty may use for checking individual assignments if they suspect plagiarism but there was no evidence of the implementation of a College-wide policy establishing the principles and procedures of academic integrity required to be observed by students and faculty in academic activities.*

5

HEI does not accept this change adequately addresses their concerns

The HEI starts to compile an Appeals Submission.

6

HEI determines the Subject of the Appeal

Extract from HEI's Appeal Submission: *Claim X: The report has overlooked our use of Turnitin as part of our Academic Integrity policy.*

7

HEI determines Grounds of Appeal

Extract from HEI's Appeal Submission: *Claim X: Omission of an issue so significant that its omission is unfairly prejudicial against the HEI.*

8

HEI presents Evidence including any that has not been previously provided to the ISA Panel

Extract from HEI's Appeal Submission: *Claim X: See the following evidence:*

- *Draft 2 of a College Academic Integrity Policy (new SM054) under consideration by the senior management.*
- *Examples of subject materials from the Department of Management Studies indicating to students that they must avoid plagiarism (SM290).*
- *The terms of reference of the Academic Integrity Sub-Committee (ASM12).*

9

Appeals Committee considers the new evidence and makes a decision to reject the HEI appeal

Extract from Appeals Committee Report: *The Committee did not uphold the appeal. The Appeals Committee determined that the ISA Panel had appropriately assessed all evidence presented and, furthermore, that the additional new evidence provided to the Appeals Committee did not confirm that an Academic Integrity policy had been implemented at the College. The Appeals Committee also noted that there was evidence the HEI had begun to address the requirements of Criterion 2.6 Academic Integrity but it had failed to provide evidence that, at the time of the ISA Visit, they had implemented policies and procedures across the entire institution as required under this Criterion. OAAAQA is instructed to notify the College that decision option (a) applies: The Accreditation Outcome stands and the Final Report indicates that an appeal was submitted and not upheld.*

Figure 5: An Example of an Unsuccessful Appeal Process

APPENDIX F: GUIDANCE NOTE FOR APPEALS COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Aim of this Guidance Note

The aim of this Guidance Note is to assist Appeals Committee Members carry out their responsibilities in considering appeals submitted by Higher Education Institutions (HEIs or Appellants) against EQA Results.²⁰

Grounds for Appeal

This OAAAQA *Appeals Manual* describes the circumstances in which it is possible for an HEI to appeal:

- An Appeals Committee may only accept an Appeal subject to the terms and conditions set out in this *Appeals Manual*.
- Only an appeal against EQA results (including formal conclusions (CARs) in Quality Audit Reports and Criteria ratings in Standards Assessment Reports) approved by the OAAAQA Board relating to OAAAQA's EQA activities is admissible.
- Appeals may only relate to matters raised by an Appellant in its comments on Draft Report Version 5 (v5), and/or any subsequent changes made by OAAAQA after the HEI submits its comments on Draft v5 that have not been requested by the Appellant.

The EQA Panel finalizes the formal conclusions after the HEI has provided OAAAQA with any additional information requested during the EQA Visit and its comments on v5 of the draft EQA report. Therefore, appeals are limited to processes that occur from the day after the EQA Visit to the date on which OAAAQA provides the Final Report to the HEI. Other mechanisms are in place to allow HEIs to provide input to processes as the EQA proceeds from the establishment of the EQA Panel through the planning and conduct of the EQA Visit. These mechanisms are outlined in OAAAQA EQA manuals.

Guiding Principles in Assessing Grounds for Appeal

In dealing with the HEI comments on v5 of the draft EQA report, OAAAQA expectations are that the following two principles will be observed:

- The EQA Panel will follow agreed OAAAQA procedures for considering additional requested evidence and the HEI comments in determining EQA results (including formal conclusions (CARs) in Quality Audit Reports and Criteria ratings in Standards Assessment Reports).
- Results from the EQA will be demonstrably based on a fair and thorough consideration of the additional evidence and commentary provided in the HEI comments on v5 of the draft EQA report.

Consideration of the Appeal Submission

The Appeals Coordinator forwards a range of documents to each Appeals Committee Member:

- Appellant Appeal Submission.
- Original HEI EQA submission.
- EQA Report v5.
- HEI's comments on v5.
- Panel response to HEI comments on Report v5 and actions taken as a result.
- Final EQA Report (indicating any changes made to EQA Report v6 by the OAAAQA Board).
- EQA Panel response to the Appellant's submission.
- EQA RD's response to the Appellant's submission.

²⁰ See Appendix E for a Guidance Note for Appellants (HEIs).

The initial guiding questions for the Appeals Committee Members in their analysis of the appeal documents are based on the OAAAQA principles for EQA Panels mentioned earlier:

- Has the Appellant only raised issues mentioned in their comments on Draft v5 of the Report, and/or any changes made by OAAAQA after the HEI submitted its comments on Draft v5 that have not been requested by the Appellant? Were the processes followed by the EQA Panel (from the day after the end of the EQA Visit to the day the Final Report was sent) consistent with EQA processes as described in the EQA Manual?
- Were the EQA Panel Members manifestly fair, reasonable and thorough in their consideration of the evidence and commentary provided in the HEI comments on Draft v5 of the Report?

Examples of more specific questions to be considered by each Appeals Committee Member in their initial analysis of the documentation are:

- Has the EQA Panel been diligent in addressing each of the points raised by the HEI in commenting on the Draft v5 report?
- Do the comments by Panel members in their responses to points raised by the HEI reflect a thoughtful and respectful approach to the concerns of the HEI?
- Do the documents indicate that new evidence provided on request after the EQA Visit was analysed and used and that previously supplied evidence was re-checked where facts were disputed by the HEI?
- Is there evidence that the EQA Panel carefully considered the HEI comments on Draft v5 of the Report that they had been unfair to the HEI in one or more formal conclusions?
- Does the outcome arise logically from the text (for example, does positive text lead to a negative outcome, or *vice versa*)?
- Did the Panel record adequate justification in rejecting any of the HEI's comments on Draft v5 of the Report?

In summary, the role of individual Appeals Committee Members in examining the Appeals submission and other documentation is limited to checking that EQA processes for dealing with the HEI comments on Draft v5 of the Report have been followed and a spirit of fairness has prevailed throughout. Appeals Committee Members do not re-analyse the breadth of evidence presented and analysed by the Panel during the entire EQA exercise; their focus is on ensuring that the EQA **processes** that take the report from Draft v5 to a Final Report have been properly implemented according to the EQA Manual.

At the end of their individual work analysing the full set of appeal documents, each Appeals Committee Member compiles a preliminary response. This includes any views on potential changes to EQA results (including formal conclusions (CARs) in Quality Audit Reports and Criteria ratings in Standards Assessment Reports) to be discussed by the Appeals Committee as a whole. These individual responses are forwarded to the ACC.

APPENDIX G: APPEALS COMMITTEE REPORT TEMPLATE



Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education Appeals Committee Report Template

This template should be used by an Appeals Committee to record decisions regarding each of the claims made by a Higher Education Institution (HEI) in any appeal against one of OAAAQA's External Quality Assurance (EQA) processes. Information in square brackets is given to guide the Appeals Committee in the use of this template and further information is provided in footnotes. The template should be returned, through the Appeals Committee Coordinator, when communicating the appeal decision to OAAAQA.

Part A: Appeal Details			
Name of Appellant	<i>[ie, the name of the HEI lodging the appeal]</i>		
EQA Activity	<i>[eg, ISA, ISR, PSA, PSR]</i>		
Date of Appeal Submission	<i>[ie, date the HEI submitted the appeal documentation]</i>		
Date of Appeal Decision	<i>[ie, date the Appeals Committee communicated their decision]</i>		

Part B: Overall Appeal Decision				
Appeal Outcomes for Standards Assessment and Reassessment ²¹			✓	✗
The Accreditation Outcome stands and the Final Report indicates that an appeal was submitted and was not upheld.				
The Accreditation Outcome stands but the ratings of individual standards or criteria are amended and the Final Report is amended accordingly. <i>[Please list rating amendments below.]</i>				
Standard/Criterion	Original Rating	Amended Rating		
The criteria ratings (and, by extension, individual standards) are amended and the Accreditation Outcome is amended accordingly. <i>[Please list outcome amendment below.]</i>				
Original Accreditation Outcome				
Amended Accreditation Outcome				
The length of the probation period (where applicable) is amended and reflected in the Final Report.				
Original Probation Period				
Amended Probation Period				

Part C: Appeals Committee Report Signatories		
Full Name	Designation	Signature
	Chair	
	Member	
	Member	
	Member	

²¹ This is an example of an ISA/ISR appeal report form for illustrative purposes only. Please amend as required to fit the possible outcomes of other EQAs such as GFPQA (with reference to the current OAAAQA Appeals Manual: <https://oaaaqa.gov.om/External-Quality-Assurance/Appeals>).

Part D: Record of Appeals Committee Decisions and Rationale – Sample for Guidance Only ²²				
Claim # ²³	Criterion ²⁴	Ref ²⁵	In v5? ²⁶	Appeal Claim
1	Standard 2 Criterion 2.3	AS p6	Yes	<i>'The EQA Panel overlooked a key piece of evidence (SM XYZ) in coming to the conclusion that no review of this system is taking place.'</i>
EQA Panel Response & Decision				<i>'The EQA Panel rejects this claim - v5 and v6 includes reference to the content of SM XYZ; besides, multiple other factors contributed to the rating of '1', as elaborated upon in the v5 and v6 commentary.'</i>
Appeals Committee Response and Rationale				<i>The Appeals Committee finds that the Panel does refer to feedback from students in the review of this system although not explicitly to the SM in question. While the Appeals Committee recognises that an explicit reference to SM XYZ would have been helpful in v6, it is satisfied that the content of the evidence has been addressed. Appeals Committee finds that the HEI has overlooked the EQA Panel's further comments supporting the rating of '1', namely that there is no evidence of use of student feedback in any review or improvement activity (v6, p85).</i>
Appeals Committee Decision				<i>No amendment to the criterion rating.</i>

Part D: Record of Appeals Committee Decisions and Rationale				
Claim #	Criterion	Ref	In v5?	Appeal Claim
1				<i>[The first of the HEI's appeal claims should be copied here.]</i>
EQA Panel Response				
Appeal Committee Response and Rationale				
Appeals Committee Decision				

Part D: Record of Appeals Committee Decisions and Rationale				
Claim #	Criterion	Ref	In v5?	Appeal Claim
2				<i>[The second of the HEI's appeal claims should be copied here.]</i>
EQA Panel Response				
Appeals Committee Response and Rationale				
Appeals Committee Decision				

22 The details of the Appeals Committee's response to each claim in the Appeal is given in Part D. All responses must be supported by a rationale and in reference to specific evidence.
 23 Please follow the same sequence of claims as listed by the HEI in their Appeal.
 24 For appeals against outcomes, the standard and criterion reference should be given here.
 25 Reference should be made here to the Appeal Submission (AS) where possible, and particularly for lengthy appeals.
 26 Only claims made on points already raised in the HEI's Comments on EQA Report v5 may be considered in an appeal: all other claims must be rejected and this should be noted in the AC Rationale for Response.