

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



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POLICY ON MAJOR CHANGE NOTIFICATION FOR HIGHER EDUCATION EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE ACTIVITIES

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POLICY ON MAJOR CHANGE NOTIFICATION FOR HIGHER EDUCATION EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE ACTIVITIES

1. Purpose

This policy outlines the principles and procedures by which a Higher Education Institution (HEI) notifies the Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education (OAAAQA) of any major change that may have an impact on its institutional or programme review activities or accreditation status. Reporting these changes is intended to ensure that:

- HEIs have the opportunity to reschedule an External Quality Assurance (EQA) activity, where necessitated by circumstance; and
- the OAAAQA has the opportunity to review whether an HEI's institutional and/or programme accreditation status remains intact or has been compromised by the change.

2. Scope

This policy applies to HEIs that are scheduled to undergo, or currently undergoing, or have already undergone an institutional or programme EQA activity with the OAAAQA. It covers all accreditation outcomes, including an *Accredited* outcome and standards rated as *Satisfactory/Met* in a *Conditionally Accredited* or *On Probation* outcome. This policy also applies to an HEI seeking to reschedule an EQA activity in order to alter the duration of a Conditional Accreditation or Probation period or to reschedule institutional or programme re-accreditation. While this policy covers all EQA activities, including ISA, ISR, PSA, PSR and GFPQA, major changes affecting the Oman Qualifications Framework Listing/Re-

Listing outcomes are covered by a separate policy (see OAAAQA Policy on Major Change Notification for the Oman Qualifications Framework).

3. Policy Statement

To ensure the integrity of EQA activities and their outcomes, HEIs are required to notify the OAAAQA of all major changes, including but not limited to, changes in their operations; organisational, governance or management structures; infrastructure and facilities; and programme planning, delivery and assessment, in a timely manner. This is to enable the OAAAQA to determine if the notified change has an impact on:

- a. an HEI's ability to submit an EQA self-assessment document as per the agreed schedule; and/or
- b. the accreditation status of an HEI or its programmes (i.e., the HEI's ability to continue to meet the OAAAQA's Standards and requirements).

Where an HEI is unsure whether an issue constitutes a major change that needs to be reported, the HEI is required to communicate in writing with the OAAAQA over the subject to clarify the matter further and agree the way forward. The OAAAQA may also follow up on the notified change to ensure that an HEI has responded appropriately and that the HEI's students, staff and programmes are not adversely affected by the change.

3.1 Major Change Impacting Upon Scheduling of an EQA Activity

Rescheduling an EQA activity is only possible if proven to be the result of an unavoidable major change or event.¹ Where circumstances beyond the control of an HEI prevent the institution from submitting their self-assessment document in line with the agreed schedule, the HEI must notify the OAAAQA providing all relevant information about the major change or event they are experiencing or likely to experience, and explain its impact on the HEI's ability to submit their self-assessment document as per the agreed deadline. Similarly, if an HEI wishes to reschedule a Panel Visit after a self-assessment document has already been submitted, the HEI should notify the OAAAQA of the major change

¹ As of 1 January 2023, this marks an OAAAQA Board-approved departure from the former practice of applying to reschedule an EQA activity under the terms of the OAAAQA Policy on Deferrals of a Scheduled External Quality Assurance Activity.

justifying the request. In the case of an HEI requiring an amendment to the Conditional Accreditation or Probation period or the re-accreditation submission date, the HEI must notify the OAAAQA of the major change warranting this request. Major changes or events in this category include (but are not limited to) the following:

In the case of all EQAs:

1. Phased or immediate closure of the HEI or a programme;
2. Merger, subsuming or restructuring of the institution into another entity or its acquisition by another entity;
3. Change of institutional classification (e.g. from College to University College)
4. Closure of a campus due to health and safety concerns;
5. Substantial changes to academic affiliation arrangements;
6. Force majeure.

Additionally, in the case of PSA and GFPQA EQAs, as applicable:

- Persistent inability (that is, more than one attempt) to List or Re-List a qualification on the National Register of Qualifications belonging to a programme scheduled to undergo PSA or PSR.
- Significant changes to programme mode of delivery, design, learning outcomes, the curriculum, or programme assessment which are beyond the control of the HEI (e.g., in case of franchised or hosted programmes).
- Significant changes to programme design leading to relicensing.
- Significant changes to key academic policies, such as student assessment and progression or change of the title of the award or level of the qualification on the OQF. Such changes also need to be communicated to the OAAAQA for evaluation against the Policy on Major Change Notification for the Oman Qualifications Framework.

Major change in this category does **not** cover situations such as the non-appointment or absence of an institutional head (e.g., Vice-Chancellor or Dean); shortage of staff due to attrition or vacation; inconveniences related to infrastructure development; or the development of new strategic plan or other improvement plans (e.g., changes in institutional mission and goals). The OAAAQA expects that risk management systems within an HEI should be able to mitigate against these, and other similar circumstances considered as routine challenges.

3.2 Major Change Impacting an Accreditation Status

Before receiving an accreditation certificate, the most senior representative of an HEI, the Chair of the Board of Trustees and the Chair of the Board of Directors, are required to sign a declaration (see Appendix C), affirming that the HEI undertakes to notify the OAAAQA of any major changes subsequent to attaining institutional and/or programme accreditation. The OAAAQA distinguishes between two types of major changes: self-reported changes and externally-reported changes. In the case of **self-reported** changes, an HEI must notify the OAAAQA of any major change or event that has occurred or is likely to occur which may impact its Institutional and/or Programme Accreditation status and its ability to continue to meet the OAAAQA's Standards and requirements. In the case of **externally-reported** changes, a supervising ministry or entity may initiate a major change notification to report a change or event that may potentially have an impact on the accreditation status of an HEI. The OAAAQA may also consider and assess an externally-reported major change notification based on verifiable information from a trusted source.

3.2.1 Major Change Impacting Upon Institutional Accreditation Status

Major changes and events which impact an HEI's accreditation status may include (but are not limited to) the following:

- Disruptions to the governance arrangements (such as problems or challenges arising from changes of ownership or shareholding; changes to the legal status of the HEI; significant restructuring of the governing body and academic governance bodies).
- Changes in financial viability or standing (such as appointment of an external administrator, liquidator or receiver, which needs to be approved by the supervising entity; withdrawal of funding by a key shareholder).

- Any internal or external events or occurrences that have a significant impact on an HEI's ability to continue operating or to continue offering programmes, including the temporary or permanent suspension of operation in the institution.
- Significant changes to the HEI's admission policies (such as the intention to admit male students in an all-female HEI; the intention to expand the specialisations offered by the HEI).
- Major changes to the HEI's structure (such as the closure of existing units or the creating of new units which impact the HEI's operations and programme delivery arrangements).
- Major changes in an HEI's affiliation arrangements and agreement (such as the cancellation or suspension of affiliation agreements; the withdrawal of degree awarding by affiliates; the engagement of new affiliates; significant changes to terms and conditions in the affiliation agreements; any events that impact the affiliate's ability to continue operating).
- Changes affecting students (such as problems or challenges associated with a significant change or closure of existing premises or the establishment of new premises in a different location; a major change to infrastructure or an event which significantly impacts the infrastructure; or changes to, or issues with, third party arrangements, which significantly affect the delivery of programmes and/or the academic or support services provided to students; suspension of student intake for any reason).
- Changes which impact the reputation of the HEI (such as systemic breaches to academic integrity regulations; loss of data due to security breaches; inability to recruit staff due to non-compliance with relevant legislations; inability to attain or retain international accreditation endorsed by the OAAAQA).

3.2.2 Major Change Impacting Upon Programme Accreditation Status

Major changes and events which impact a programme's accreditation status may include (but are not limited to) the following:

- Significant changes (30% or more) to programme mode of delivery, design, learning outcomes, curriculum, and/or programme assessment.
- The intention to introduce new specialisations or pathways within an existing programme.
- Significant changes to programme design leading to relicensing.
- Significant changes to key academic policies, including major changes to student assessment and progression.

- Change of the title of the award or level of the qualification on the OQF. Such changes also need to be communicated to the OAAAQA for evaluation against the Policy on Major Change Notification for the Oman Qualifications Framework.
- Any significant deliberate or external change that affects the HEI's ability to meet the required programme Standards and Criteria set out by the OAAAQA. Changes affecting students on a programme (such as changes to resources and/or infrastructure which impact the delivery of a programme; changes to, or issues with, third party arrangements, which significantly affect the delivery of a programme; suspension of student intake on a programme for any reason).

4. Procedure

4.1 EQA Rescheduling Notification Procedure

4.1.1 Notification by HEI

- (a) An HEI is required to notify the Centre for Higher Education Quality Assurance (CHEQA) at the OAAAQA in writing, using the prescribed template and with supporting evidence (see Appendix A), when the HEI undergoes a major change that may impact the scheduling of an EQA activity as stipulated previously in Section 3.1. Applicable activities include the submission of an ISA/ISR Application, PSA/PSR Application, GFPQA Portfolio, or an EQA Panel Visit.
- (b) The HEI must describe the major change, its rationale (if the change is initiated by the HEI) and its expected impact on the scheduling of any EQA activities in the provided template (Appendix A, Part A) and request alternative dates for rescheduling the EQA activity (Appendix A, Part B).
- (c) An HEI must notify OAAAQA of any major change at least six months prior to the commencement of an EQA submission or be subject to a late notification fee, as per the OAAAQA Policy on Fees Charged for OAAAQA External Quality Assurance Activities and Appeals.
- (d) If an emergency arises which requires the postponement of a Panel Visit **after** the submission of an EQA application, the OAAAQA must be immediately notified.

4.1.2 Deliberation by OAAAQA

- (a) CHEQA considers the information in the completed Appendix A and determines whether the notification amounts to sufficiently critical grounds for rescheduling (see Section 3.1 of this policy).
- (b) CHEQA approves or rejects the HEI's request and responds to the HEI within six weeks. If a request is approved, the HEI will be provided with a revised date for an EQA application submission or EQA Panel Visit. Otherwise, the HEI is informed that the request for rescheduling an EQA activity has been rejected.
- (c) If an HEI's request for rescheduling a reaccreditation activity is approved by the OAAAQA, it is given an interim status of *Undergoing Institutional/Programme Reaccreditation* upon the expiry of their current status and until the outcome of the reaccreditation are approved.
- (d) Any change in the schedule agreed by the OAAAQA leads to public notification of the postponement and amendments to the relevant EQA schedule.

4.2 Major Change Affecting Accreditation Status Notification Procedure

4.2.1 Notification by HEI

- (a) An HEI is required to notify CHEQA at the OAAAQA in writing, using the prescribed template and with supporting evidence (see Appendix B), when the HEI undergoes a major change that may impact its accreditation status as stipulated previously in Section 3.2.
- (b) The HEI must describe the major change and its rationale (if the change is initiated by the HEI), evaluate its anticipated or current impact and explain measures taken to mitigate any risk to its accreditation outcomes.
- (c) The HEI must notify OAAAQA of any major change as soon as it occurs or as soon as the HEI is aware that it is likely to occur. In case of multiple major changes happening around the same time, only one notification should be submitted detailing all of the changes.

4.2.2 Deliberation by OAAAQA

- (a) CHEQA considers the information in the completed Appendix B and determines whether the notification amounts to sufficiently critical grounds to warrant a review of the institutional and/or programme accreditation status (see Section 3.2 of this policy). CHEQA may request additional evidence to support the information provided in Appendix B. As part of its deliberation, CHEQA will consider the remaining duration of accreditation validity. Reviews will normally be conducted only when the HEI has eighteen months or more remaining of its accreditation status. If there are less than eighteen months of accreditation status remaining, the review may be deferred until subsequent Reaccreditation or Reassessment activities take place.
- (b) If a review of the accreditation status is required, CHEQA will convene a new EQA Panel to conduct the review (see Section 4.2.3 below).
- (c) CHEQA informs the HEI of the outcome of OAAAQA deliberations within four weeks. In cases where a review is required, CHEQA informs the HEI of the date for submitting the self-assessment document and evidence, as well as the dates of the Panel Visit if required.

4.2.3 Panel Review

- (a) Where an accreditation status review is required following deliberation of a major change notification, the HEI is invited to submit (by an agreed submission date) a self-assessment document and evidence demonstrating how they continue to meet or will soon meet any Standards or Criteria that are identified by OAAAQA as requiring a review.
- (b) A new EQA Panel is convened and instructed to act in the same way as an ISR or PSR Panel with a focus only on those Criteria affected by the notified major change. Just like ISR and PSR, fees are charged on a pro-rata basis and calculated based on the number of Criteria affected by the major change. A Panel Visit may be undertaken as part of the review. This may be conducted either in person or through a virtual conference.
- (c) After the review, the EQA Panel determines whether the accreditation status is retained or revoked. An ***Accreditation Revoked*** status is given to an HEI or a programme in case of a decision to withdraw the accreditation following the review. The outcome of the review is considered by OAAAQA CEO and presented to the OAAAQA Board for endorsement.

- (d) An HEI may lodge an appeal against the outcome, as per the procedures stipulated in the OAAAQA Appeals Manual, provided there are legitimate grounds. The outcomes of any appeal process are final, and there is no recourse to legal action.
- (e) The outcomes of a review are made public in the same way as the outcomes of any EQA activity, in accordance with the relevant EQA Manual.

5. Failure to Notify the OAAAQA of a Major Change

HEIs that fail to notify the OAAAQA of any major change are considered in breach of this policy. Actions, such as public disclosure of the failure to comply with this policy, may be taken in the interest of stakeholders and to protect the integrity of OAAAQA's processes. Sanctions may also include, but are not restricted to the following:

- (a) If the OAAAQA rejects an HEI's request to reschedule an EQA activity and the HEI fails to submit its EQA self-assessment document according to the published schedule and deadline, the institution or programme will be given ***Accreditation Revoked*** status and the status will be published on the OAAAQA's website.
- (b) If an HEI fails to inform the OAAAQA of a major change affecting the institution or any of its programmes which the OAAAQA deems potentially detrimental to the accreditation status of the institution or a programme, the OAAAQA will revoke the accreditation status and certificate without recourse to Panel review and the institution or programme will be given ***Accreditation Revoked*** status. This change of status will be published on the OAAAQA's website.

6. Abbreviations

CEO..... Chief Executive Officer, OAAAQA
 CHEQA..... Centre for Higher Education Quality Assurance
 DG Director General
 EQA External Quality Assurance (activity)

GFPQA.....	General Foundation Programme Quality Audit
HEI.....	Higher Education Institution
ISA.....	Institutional Standards Assessment
ISR.....	Institutional Standards Reassessment
NRQ.....	National Register of Qualifications
OAAAQA	Oman Authority for Academic Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education
OQF.....	Oman Qualifications Framework
PSA	Programme Standards Assessment
PSR	Programme Standards Reassessment

7. References

The Tertiary Education and Quality Standards Agency (TEQSA) Provider obligation to notify TEQSA of material changes to its operations was used as a benchmark in the preparation of this policy. The TEQSA policy is available at: : <https://www.teqsa.gov.au/sites/default/files/material-change-notification-policy-5-0.pdf> (accessed on 27 February 2024)

Appendix A: Notification of Major Change Form – Rescheduling of an OAAAQA EQA Activity

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Notification of Major Change and Request for Rescheduling Form

Please read the OAAAQA Policy on Major Change Notification for Higher Education External Quality Assurance Activities before submitting this form. If the major change is resulting in your institution's closure, complete only Part A.

This form is used by a Higher Education Institution (HEI) to notify OAAAQA that it is unable to meet a scheduled External Quality Assurance (EQA) activity due to major change within the HEI and, where relevant, to suggest alternative dates. Please complete the form below and send it by email to the DG CHEQA at OAAAQA: CHEQA@oaaaqa.gov.om **at least six months** in advance of the scheduled EQA submission date to avoid a late notification fee.

Part A: Key Details	
HEI Name	
Date of Submission of this Notification Form	[dd/mm/yyyy]
Type of EQA Activity/Activities Affected by Major Change	[eg, PSA Submission; ISR Visit]
Name of Programme(s) Affected by Major Change	[eg, BA Accountancy]
Description of Major Change	[eg, merger with HEI x; closure in 20XX]

Rationale for Major Change (if initiated by the HEI)	<i>[eg, reason for the merger with another HEI]</i>
Anticipated Impact of Major Change	<i>[eg, no student intake after 20XX]</i>
EQA Criteria/ Scope area affected by Major Change	<i>[eg, ISA Criteria 1.1 because...]</i>

Part B: Rescheduling Request			
Scheduled Dates of EQA Activity Affected by Major Change		<i>[eg, PSA Submission: dd/mm/yyyy]</i>	
Requested Alternative Date(s)		<i>[eg, PSA Submission: dd/mm/yyyy; PSA Visit: dd/mm/yyyy]</i>	
List here the details of your HEI's contact person who may be approached by the OAAAQA in relation to this request:			
Contact Person's Name		Email	
Designation		Telephone	
This form is submitted for and on behalf of the HEI by the HEI's most senior representative:			
Representative's Name		Signature	
Designation		Date	

Appendix B: Notification of Change Form – Impact on Accreditation Outcome

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Notification of Major Change and Impact on Accreditation Outcome Form

Please read the OAAAQA Policy on Major Change Notification for Higher Education External Quality Assurance Activities before submitting this form.

This form is used by a Higher Education Institution (HEI) to notify OAAAQA of major change within the HEI/ a programme and to evaluate any possible impact of that change on an accreditation outcome. Please complete the form below and send it by email to the DG CHEQA at OAAAQA: CHEQA@oaaaqa.gov.om

Part A: Key Details	
HEI Name	
Date of Submission of this Notification Form	[dd/mm/yyyy]
Type of EQA Outcome Potentially Affected by Major Change	[eg, Institutional Accreditation Outcome (dd/mm/yyyy)]
Name of Programme(s) Affected by Major Change	[eg, BA Accountancy Accreditation (dd/mm/yyyy)]
Description of Major Change	[eg, change of affiliation arrangement]

Please provide a description of the major change, including dates and details			
Rationale for Major Change <i>(if initiated by the HEI)</i> Please provide a rationale for any major change that is initiated by the HEI	<i>[eg, why is the seeking a new affiliate]</i>		
Evaluation of Major Change Please provide a full account of the anticipated impact of the change. There is no word limit.	<i>[eg, quality assurance activities are now solely the HEI's responsibility]</i>		
List here the details of your HEI's contact person who may be approached by the OAAAQA in relation to this notification:			
Contact Person's Name		Email	
Designation		Telephone	
This form is submitted for and on behalf of the HEI by the HEI's most senior representative:			
Representative's Name		Signature	
Designation		Date	

Appendix C: HEI Declaration to Notify OAAAQA of Major Changes

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HEI Declaration to Notify OAAAQA of Major Changes

Please read the OAAAQA Policy on Major Change Notification for Higher Education External Quality Assurance Activities before submitting this form.

This form is completed by a Higher Education Institution (HEI) before receipt of an accreditation certificate. The most senior representative of an HEI, the Chair of the Board of Trustees and the Chair of the Board of Directors are required to sign a declaration that the HEI will notify the OAAAQA of any major changes subsequent to the attainment of an institutional or programme accreditation status. This includes any major changes that impact meeting the requirements of any institutional or programme criteria. Please complete the form below and send it by email to the DG CHEQA at OAAAQA: CHEQA@oaaaqa.gov.om before the date of the accreditation certificate awarding ceremony.

HEI Name	
Date of Submission of this Declaration Form	<i>[dd/mm/yyyy]</i>
Type of EQA	<i>[Institutional or Programme Accreditation]</i>
Name of Programme(s)	<i>[eg, BA Accountancy Accreditation]</i>

HEI Declaration	<p><i>We hereby declare to notify the OAAAQA of any major changes, as per the definitions and provisions of the OAAAQA Policy on Major Change Notification for Higher Education External Quality Assurance Activities, that may have an impact on the accreditation status of the above mentioned EQA activity in a timely, transparent and proactive manner, and in a manner that upholds the quality of academic standards of our institution and the affected programme(s) and protects the interests of our students.</i></p>				
List here the details of your HEI's contact person who may be approached by the OAAAQA in relation to this declaration:					
Contact Person's Name			Email		
Designation			Telephone		
This declaration form is signed by the HEI's most senior representative (VC or Dean), along with the Chair of the Board of Directors and the Chair of the Board of Trustees:					
Name of the Head of the HEI			Signature		
Name of the Chair of the Board of Trustees			Signature	Date	
Name of the Chair of the Board of Directors			Signature	Date	