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94/10 ආනන්ද රාජකරුණා මාවත කොළඹ 8, ශ්‍රී ලංකාව  
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## CODE OF CONDUCT FOR INSTITUTIONAL AND PROGRAM REVIEWERS

### PREAMBLE

This Code of Conduct (“the Code”) describes rules of good behaviour for reviewers engaged in the external reviews conducted by the Quality Assurance Council of the University Grants Commission (QAC-UGC) and covers the entire task from accepting the assignment to submission of the final report to the QAC. The Code gives the basic principles and guidelines with which all members of review panels should comply, and reviewers are expected to conduct reviews within the spirit of the Code. Upon signature of their review contracts, all reviewers consent to comply and respect the principles, rules and guidelines stipulated in this Code. In case of any doubt concerning the applicability of a particular section of the Code, the reviewer should contact the Director QAC of the UGC for clarifications.

Verifiable evidence concerning a breach of the Code by a reviewer, or evidence of any other unprofessional conduct not covered in this Code, may result in termination of the reviewer’s contract by the QAC and/or listing of the reviewer as ineligible for future contracts, and/or reporting to the Council of the reviewer’s University.

An external quality assurance (EQA) review analyses the fitness of an institution’s/Faculty’s processes for managing and assuring the expected outcomes of academic activities including study programs undertaken by the institution/faculty and the quality of student learning experience and standards of awards. It evaluates the extent to which internal quality assurance (IQA) mechanisms adopted by the institution/ faculty can be relied upon to maintain the quality of provision of educational programmes over time.

The reviewer is expected perform EQA reviews under the guidance of QAC. The reviewer is expected to exercise maximum objectivity in weighing ground realities and hard and soft evidence provided in support of the claims made in the SER by the reviewee against the standards stipulated in the prescribed Review Manuals by the QAC. Therefore, the reviewer must have a complete understanding of the procedures detailed in the relevant review manual.

## DEFINITIONS

### 1. Confidential information:

Information that was obtained as a consequence of conducting the review and that is not publicly available

### 2. Conflict of Interest:

a. **Real Conflict of Interest:** The reviewer has personal or organizational interests which might influence the performance of his/her duties and responsibilities as a reviewer

b. **Apparent conflict of interest:** A situation where it can be reasonably perceived that the reviewer's private interests might influence the performance of his / her duties and responsibilities as a reviewer

3. **Impartial:** Absence of prejudice towards any party

4. **Independent:** Free of external pressure and staying neutral

5. **Integrity:** Acting honestly and ethically in the process, being objective and independent

6. **Misconduct:** Intentional or negligent failure to observe the rules of conduct set by this Code

## CORE VALUES

Core values that should be upheld by all involved parties include:

- A. Persistent effort to achieve the highest level of standards
- B. Conscientious and continuous pursuit of excellence in one's work
- C. Honesty, integrity and objectivity in all involved procedures
- D. Responsibility for one's actions and conduct
- E. Respect for rights, differences and dignity of stakeholders of the process
- F. Accountability to the public
- G. Transparency in all dealings
- H. Impartiality and independence in all dealings

## CODE OF CONDUCT

In the conduct of all external reviews, all reviewers are at all times required to uphold the above core values and following guidelines, and conduct themselves in a manner that does not bring the UGC or academia into disrepute, and be cognisant of the fact that their contribution is of national interest and they represent the UGC.

1. **Objectivity:** The reviewer shall at all times make a maximum effort to be objective:

- 1.1. Make sure that decisions are always based on first-hand evidence;
- 1.2. Go by the definitions provided in the review manual. On matters where definitions are not provided in the manual, the reviewers as a team may arrive at interpretations and are expected to include those in the report to be transparent;

- 1.3. Not use personal/subjective ideas/interpretations or interpretations used in their own study programs/institutions to assess practices adopted by the program/institution under review;
  - 1.4. Judgements must be robust and fully supported by evidence so that they can be defended, if required;
  - 1.5. Weigh and test the evidence presented by the institution with claims made in the SER and the requirements in the review manual in making judgements;
  - 1.6. Be an informed observer before contributing to decision-making by the panel.
- 2. Confidentiality:** the reviewer shall protect the confidentiality of all proceedings and information:
- 2.1. Safeguard in strict confidence, all information made available to him/her especially communications containing sensitive information, information of a personal nature and may lead to defamations if disclosed, and information already contested at Courts of Law;
  - 2.2. Not disclose any confidential information acquired during the review process to anyone external to the panel (excluding the confidential feedback provided to the Director, QAC following the review task for the continuous improvement of the review process);
  - 2.3. Not disclose any information concerning the evaluation procedure to any other party (in addition to the information given in the final full report and the feedback provided to the Director, QAC);
  - 2.4. From the date of accepting the assignment, the reviewer shall not contact any colleague or another individual of the institution or program under review and communicate whatsoever matters pertinent to the review with such individual/individuals, except through the QAC. The Review Chair may communicate with the Dean of a study program or the Director of the IQAU regarding site-visit arrangements with the awareness of the Director of the QAC on the matter.
- 3. Conflict of Interest:** The reviewer shall act with strict impartiality:
- 3.1. Identify and declare any real or apparent conflict between personal interest (direct or indirect) and interests of QAC and reviewee, that will undermine objectivity;
  - 3.2. Inform the QAC immediately of any change in interest that may conflict with that of the QAC;
  - 3.3. Consider that all parties/groups that they discuss/meet with are equally important stakeholders in the process of the review;
  - 3.4. No reviewer shall use their encounter with reviewee for his/her personal advantage.
- 4. Integrity:** The reviewer shall act honestly and ethically:
- 4.1. Conduct of the reviewer should not foster any suspicion that he/she is behaving in a particular manner of personal interest or advantage;
  - 4.2. Reviewer shall exercise maximum honesty during the entire review process;
  - 4.3. Reviewer shall not accept any direct or indirect gift, reward or hospitality or undue extra attention which may appear to place them under obligation and compromise

- impartiality. The reviewer shall discuss in the team or contact the Director, QAC immediately, if he/she feels that the situation/offer is not under his/her control
- 4.4. Reviewer shall not offer any favour or undue extra attention to any party/individual of the program or the institution under review.
  - 4.5. Reviewer shall refrain from any behaviour that could be interpreted as dishonest, unethical and unprofessional
  - 4.6. The reviewer is expected to reflect on his/her own conduct, and question and analyse the integrity and underlying motives

## **CONDUCT DURING SITE VISIT**

### **1. Evaluation during site visit**

- 1.1. The evaluation on site shall be based on claims made in the SER
- 1.2. The reviewer shall be aware that the task during the site visit is to weigh the evidence (soft or hard) provided/ witnessed/ received in support of the claims made in the SER against the standards stipulated in the review manual
- 1.3. The reviewers shall not demand or insist on further evidence or any other requirement during the site visit, but report on the evidence witnessed and the review experience. However, the reviewer may seek clarifications on ambiguous matters with documents or verbal explanations.

### **2. Relationship with the reviewee**

- 2.1. The reviewer should bear in mind that the site visit is a full-time assignment.
- 2.2. The reviewer should behave, and be perceived to behave, as a peer (equal) of the academics of the institution or the program under review, and refrain from adopting a position of 'superiority' over the reviewee.
- 2.3. The reviewer should not assume another role during the site visit other than being a reviewer. The reviewer should refrain from attempting to teach or advocating a particular view or practice to the reviewee by indicating that such practice is already being adopted by the institution/program of the reviewer etc. (i.e., revealing "I have done it but you have not"; "I have it but you don't" attitude). A reviewer may, however, make suggestions by way of sharing good practices.
- 2.4. The reviewer should be polite and courteous to all stakeholders.
- 2.5. The reviewer should be tolerant, and show respect for the rights, differences and dignity of all stakeholders.
- 2.6. The reviewer should strive to create a pleasant and productive working environment for all parties

### **3. Commitment to competency and professionalism**

- 3.1. The reviewer should exercise and maintain professional competence at all times
- 3.2. The reviewer should be prepared and pay full attention in the task
- 3.3. The reviewer should participate in the full schedule
- 3.4. The reviewer should keep careful records of observed supporting evidence, facilities and teaching practice, and discussions during stakeholder meetings.

3.5. The reviewer shall strive to be punctual, and adhere to the site visit schedule as much as possible, especially with regard to meetings with stakeholders.

3.6. The reviewer shall dress appropriately.

### 3.7. Communication

3.7.1. The reviewer should maintain purposeful dialogues focused on the program or institution under review

3.7.2. The reviewer should be open and clear as much as possible in the discussions

3.7.3. The reviewer should ask questions in a friendly and constructive manner, creating a conducive environment that minimizes stress and builds trust and respect

3.7.4. The reviewer should refrain from being sarcastic and intimidating

3.7.5. The reviewer should avoid personal questions and deal carefully with any sensitive information that may be divulged by stakeholders

3.7.6. The reviewer should ensure that views of all are entertained, valued and listened to, and foster exchange of opinions

3.7.7. The reviewer should not use prescriptive language, but instead make suggestions for change where appropriate

## 4. Providing feedback

4.1. The reviewer should ensure that feedback on findings is given in a constructive and qualitative manner

4.2. The review panel must report honestly and fairly on their findings during the site visit, with regard to strengths and weaknesses under each review criterion

4.3. The review panel should keep the specific outcomes (grade, scores etc) confidential during the site visit and declare those only through the report

4.4. The review panel must ensure that judgements are accurate and reliable and reflect ground level operations of the institution/program

## 5. Conduct within the Review Panel

5.1. Reviewers must ensure that each panel member is an equal partner and cooperate in taking specific responsibility under the guidance of the Chair of the panel

5.2. All reviewers should attend private meetings of the panel when convened by the Chair

5.3. All reviewers should ensure that the final outcomes are decided collectively and by consensus. If there is a significant difference of opinion among members of the review panel, the opinion of the majority should be final.

## 6. Review Chair

6.1. should conduct, command and exercise authority in a fair and responsible manner

6.2. should oversee the review process in an all-inclusive manner

6.3. is expected to make and keep the schedules

6.4. is expected to be responsible for communications with the QAC and the reviewee

6.5. should ensure that the views of all participants are valued and taken into account, and foster open exchange of opinions

- 6.6. should ensure that everyone in the meeting feels comfortable with the review panel
- 6.7. at the end of each meeting, should recapitulate the main topics covered in the discussion in order to make sure that all issues have been brought to debate
- 6.8. should strive to ensure that there are no unsettled issues or concerns by the end of every meeting

## REPORT WRITING

1. The reviewer should remain in regular contact with the Review Chair and other members of the Review Panel until the Review Report has been finalized and submitted to the QAC.
2. All members of the Review Panel should share their contributions to the review report by email in a timely fashion, so that the Review Chair is able to produce a single, comprehensive review report that is consistent with the guidance set out in the relevant review manual.
3. Each member of the Review Panel should carefully read those sections of the Review Report written by other members of the panel and ensure that they are in agreement with the views expressed therein. Ultimately, every reviewer is responsible for the full content of the final report.
4. Each reviewer should strive to meet deadlines set collectively by the Review Panel, in order to meet the QAC deadlines for submission of the preliminary report, followed by the draft Review Report and the finalized Review Report.

## MATERIAL REFERENCED

- a. ENQA Code of conduct, accessed at [https://enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/ENQA-Agency-Reviews\\_Code-of-Conduct.pdf](https://enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/ENQA-Agency-Reviews_Code-of-Conduct.pdf)
- b. <https://www.eurosai.org/handle404?exporturi=/export/sites/eurosai/.content/documents/materials/Quality-Assurance-Review-Handbook-2012.pdf>
- c. <https://www.must.edu.mo/images/QA/CODE%20OF%20CONDUCT.pdf>
- d. *Manual for Review of Undergraduate Study Programmes of Sri Lankan Universities and Higher Education Institutions*. UGC, 2015
- e. *Manual for Institutional Review of Sri Lankan Universities and Higher Education Institutions*. UGC, 2015.