

Applying Quality Assurance Standards in Newly Established Universities: Issues and challenges

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Abstract: While the number of public and private universities is increased rapidly in Arabic countries there is an increased focus on quality assurance, accountability and performance. All of these Universities seek constantly to form a QA framework which is consistent with the goals of high education and specifies generic standards of learning outcomes for each level of qualification. This paper deals with issues and challenges facing the successful application of a Quality Assurance System (QAS) in the high education institutions. The implementation of such systems includes three main phases which are Initial self evaluation, Developmental Review and Accreditation processes. The paper discusses the various challenges encountered in these main phases of a QAS process. It further looks at constructive and harmful aspects of each step as well as the measures taken to overcome them. In conclusion, an understanding of the issues and challenges allows for suitable protective actions to achieve the best possible performance over time.

Keywords: Accreditation standards – Quality assurance – Academic institutions - Issues and challenges

تطبيق معايير ضمان الجودة في الجامعات المنشأة حديثاً: قضايا وتحديات

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ملخص:

في حين أن عدد الجامعات الحكومية والخاصة يزداد بوتيرة متسارعة في دول الوطن العربي ، إلا أن هناك تركيزاً متزايداً على ضمان الجودة والمساءلة والأداء. تسعى كل هذه الجامعات باستمرار إلى تشكيل إطار لضمان الجودة يتوافق مع أهداف التعليم العالي ويحدد المعايير العامة لنتائج التعلم لكل مستوى من مستويات التأهيل. ولهذا فإن هذه الورقة البحثية تتناول القضايا والتحديات التي تواجه التطبيق الناجح لنظام ضمان الجودة (QAS) في مؤسسات التعليم العالي. يتضمن تنفيذ هذه الأنظمة ثلاث مراحل رئيسية هي التقييم الذاتي الأولي ، والمراجعة التنموية وعمليات الاعتماد. تناقش الورقة التحديات المختلفة التي تمت مواجهتها في هذه المراحل الرئيسية من عملية ضمان الجودة. كما يبحث في الجوانب البناءة والسلبية لكل خطوة وكذلك التدابير المتخذة للتغلب عليها. في الختام ، يتيح فهم القضايا والتحديات اتخاذ إجراءات وقائية مناسبة لتحقيق أفضل أداء ممكن بمرور الوقت.

الكلمات المفتاحية: معايير الاعتماد - ضمان الجودة - المؤسسات الأكاديمية - قضايا وتحديات

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1. Introduction

University of Hail (UoH) is one of the Saudi Universities that is officially established on 7 June 2005. The first students were admitted on 11 February 2006 (www.uoh.edu.s). Some Saudi universities experienced the process of accreditation through international accrediting agencies while others have started with National accreditation process through the National Commission for Academic Accreditation and Assessment (NCAAA) (<http://ncaaa.org.sa>). In September 2012 the university has taken the decision to start applying the QAS according to the requirements of the NCAAA and the process began. Prior to this data programs and institutions in UOH were subject neither to formal evaluation nor to accreditation. This led to the creation of a number of new programs resulting in duplication in some discipline and shortages in other without minimum quality standards.

The NCAAA has been established by the Higher Council of Education as an independent authority with responsibility for accreditation and QA in post secondary education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on 2004 to oversee both the public and the private universities. The National QA framework is launched in 2007 to ensure the quality of student learning outcomes, to ensure the management and

support services provided within institutions, and the contributions to research and the communities served by post-secondary institutions (<http://ncaaa.org.sa>). The framework combines internal and external quality assurance mechanisms and ensure that QA serves both the improvement and accountability purposes. The implementation process is done through achieving three main phases which are Initial self-evaluation, Developmental Review and Accreditation processes.

Saudi Arabia has a unique experiment in women's education in which the two sexes are totally separated. The females occupy all the leading positions at their campus except some of the teaching jobs are given to male teachers and this teaching process is implemented via the closed TV circuit (**Woman in Saudi Arabia Cross - Cultural Views**). Every Institution be involved in self-assessment for improvement should establish a quality center; this center manages and monitor all the teaching and administrative activities inside the institution to develop an appropriate quality system for their departments and colleges. University of Hail has taken the decision to establish a QA vice Deanship at each faculty to implement this main QAS task managed by a QA Vice dean, a director of QA, QA secretary and administration, and QA programs representatives. This infrastructure located in the male campus to manage the QA activities in both main campuses, male and female. In this paper eight challenges have been identified among the specified QAS phases, each of these challenges needs a different research article to highlight it and to propose a suitable and more proper solution. In this paper the positives and negatives of each challenge are determined, where in Section One a QA infrastructure has been identified, Section Two....., section Three.

2. QA infrastructure

The Vice Deanship of QA and Development (VDQAD) are belonging to the Deanship of Quality and Development (DQD), so it applied the QA guidelines and rules of DQD. DQD is one main deanship of the University of Hail that it seeks to achieve the quality assurance standards in the practice of academic and administrative campus (www.uoh.edu.sa). According to the DQD rules, each deanship in each faculty should has a QA organizational chart as shown in **Figure 2.1**.

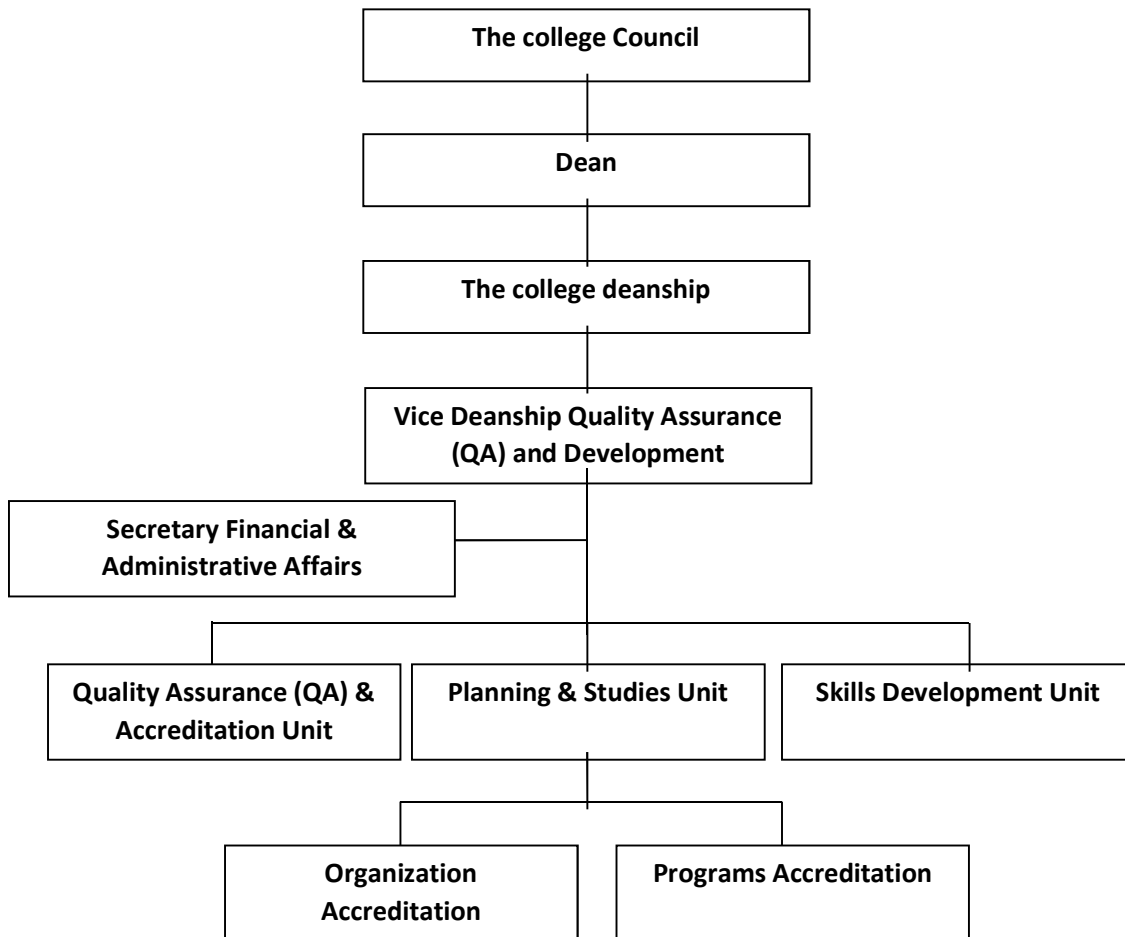


Figure 2.1 Quality Assurance (QA) Organization Chart

According to this figure it is incumbent upon each faculty to appoint a Vice Dean for QA and development and in turn, this Vice Dean is appointing of the Director of Quality and Development unit, a secretary and administration, and a representative of the quality in each academic program. The vice deanship of QA and development is leading and coordinate quality assurance initiatives in their institutions and to establish the Internal QA System (IQAS) to ensure the internal accountability is guided by some key principles. This procedure is implemented again according to DQD rules in the male campus while in the female campus the scenario is different. The female Vice Dean is playing the role of Vice Dean of QA and development and also there is a QA supervisor.

There are many challenges that are facing Hail University like all other universities with some mini differences; these challenges as shown and classified in Figure 2.2 are:

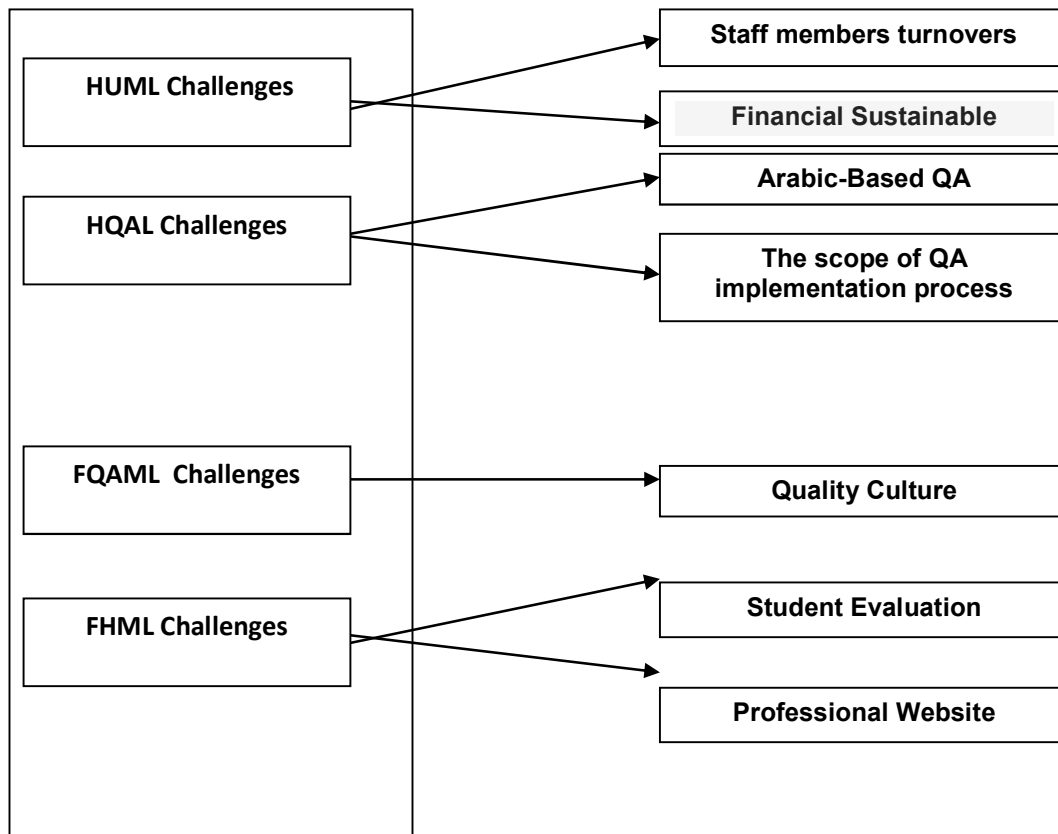


Figure 2.2 QA challenges according to the responsibility roles

High turnover of the staff members, using the Arabic language as the main language for communication and documentation processes, Inadequate funding sources for QA, the quality culture needs to be implemented in a different suitable way, the scope of QA improvement process focus mainly on academic side rather than the administrative one, Student evaluation of courses mostly appear to be rushing and lacking matured judgment, the lack of a professional web site that present the actual QA achievements and the communication type between male and female at the level of QA leadership. **Figure 2.2** shows these challenges classified according to the responsibility roles. Where HUML stands for High University Management Level, HQAL stands for High Quality Assurance Level, FQAML stands for Faculty Quality Assurance Management Level, and FHML stands for Faculty High Management Level.

Staff Members turnovers

Professional development is important because of its potential impact on the sustainability of the University teaching staff. Training teaching staff has reported feeling more confident and more satisfied with their jobs. These outcomes could lead to better staff retention and lower turnover rates. In order for an organization to be successful, they must continuously ensure the satisfaction of their employees [1].

Financial Sustainable

Here I focus on budgets for implementing QAS. One of the important factors in the establishing a QAS is the sustainability of financial support to all those involved in the implementation process. The lack of financial support will adequately effect the serious implementation of the different QAS activities [2 and 3].

Arabic-based Quality Assurance

The implementation of the QAS in Arabic language will negatively affect the future entitlement to international accreditation as all phases of all the workshops, documents and evidences were in Arabic [4].

The scope of QA implementation process

A decision has to be taken by the senior leadership to give the validity to those who lead quality standards so as to apply QAS to administrators. Otherwise no quality will be implemented [5].

Quality Culture

There must be a strategy for the deployment of more sophisticated culture of quality more than a decade workshops at the university level.

Student Evaluation

Spread the culture of quality among students should inform them of the extent of the benefits significantly from implementing QAS, otherwise student evaluation of courses mostly appeared to be rushing and lacking matured judgment

Professional Website

It is necessary to restructure the Web site so that it will reflect the actual reality of the university and shows the implementation level of QAS which at the end will be reflected on the international assessment of the University [6].

3. Summary and Results

From the above-mentioned challenges in quality assurance in Hail University, the following are the activities and different suggestions for improvements the weakness points in application the quality practices as:

a- Staff Members turnovers

From the mission of Hail University are development of the teaching staff skills in the various activities and quality practices through workshops and training courses on policies and mechanisms associated with quality and academic accreditation, However, Hail University need also, to develop standards to ensure the selection of qualified faculty and their activity evident in the implementation of quality activities [7 and 8]

b-Financial Sustainable

Despite the technical and financial support from the leaders of the University of Hail to the various activities and practices of quality, but this support needs to be more for the processing of the headquarters of quality colleges and Deanships and motivate faculty to participate in the activities of quality and accreditation in addition to support projects related

c- Arabic-based Quality Assurance

Hail University started the majority of the activities and practices of quality at the University of Hail, using the Arabic language, but this may consider as weakness for international accreditation for academic programs, and thus was the unification of the language that offers them various documents related to the activities of quality in English, has been helped by the fact, that All versions of the National assessment and Accreditation has become in only English language [7 and 8].

d-Quality Culture for students

The students are the major output of Hail University, and for which it is of interest in the application of the practices and activities of quality and therefore must

spread the culture of quality among all university students and increase their participation in the implementation of those practices and be a student from within the executive team for all projects and active relevant so

e- Professional Website

Despite the availability of an updated website of the University of Hail and also the site of the Deanship of quality and development, but it must be updated periodically to the site with all the activities and practices related to the activities of quality as well as periodic updating of websites for all university faculties and Deanships in University.

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