STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE

SOP CODE	SOP TITLE
ZQA-002-02	**PROCEDURE GOVERNING MOCK INTERNAL QUALITY AUDITS**

PART 1

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Prof. Godfrey Baldacchino **Pro-Rector**	**Date of next revision:**

PART 4 (To be filled in by OOTS, QSU or RSSD)

☐ This procedure has been revised and is no longer valid as from:	☐ Date of NEXT REVISION is extended until:	☐ SOP rendered obsolete on:
(Write date)	(Max. 4 years)	(Write date)

1. Reason for revision

1.1. All references to the NCFHE were replaced to refer to the MFHEA instead, following the re-establishment of the National Commission for Further and Higher Education as the Malta Further and Higher Education Authority in 2021.

2. Purpose and scope

2.1. The purpose of this SOP is to document the procedure governing mock internal quality audits organised by the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) as part of its internal quality assurance process.

3. Definitions

3.1. Audit panel: The panel conducting the mock audit

3.2. Entity: The Faculty / Institute / Centre / School undergoing the mock audit

3.3. MFHEA: Malta Further and Higher Education Authority

3.4. Pro-Rector: The Pro-Rector responsible for quality assurance

3.5. QAC: Quality Assurance Committee

3.6. QSU: Quality Support Unit

3.7. UM: University of Malta

4. Responsibilities

4.1. Roles and Responsibilities of the QSU

4.1.1. Prepare a document compiling a set of commendations, issues and recommendations relevant to the entity.

4.1.2. Oversee the scheduling of all the necessary meetings during the Mock Audit process, following liaison with the Audit Panel members and the entity.

4.1.3. Brief the Student Panel Members on their role during the Mock Audit process, and provide them with the necessary documentation for them to prepare their participation.

4.1.4. Take minutes of proceedings during the Mock Audit interview and forward to the Pro-Rector for vetting and approval.

4.1.5. Forward the approved minutes to the entity Dean/Director.

4.1.6. Prepare a draft document to collate the reflections and recommendations of the Audit Panel following the Mock Audit interview.

4.1.7. Send the finalized document containing the Audit Panel's reflections and recommendations to the entity Dean/Director for feedback.

4.2. Roles and Responsibilities of the Pro-Rector/QAC Chair

4.2.1. Inform entities that they are to undertake a Mock Audit process.

4.2.2. Vet and approve QSU's document compiling commendations, issues and recommendations relevant to the entity.

4.2.3. Select and appoint the Academic Panel Member from amongst QAC members.

4.2.4. Vet and approve the Student Panel Members' proposed questions during the Panel Planning Meeting.

4.2.5. Prepare and present suitable questions during the Mock Audit interview.

4.2.6. Vet and approve the minutes of the Mock Audit interview as taken by QSU.

4.2.7. Provide reflections and recommendations to be included in a document following the Mock Audit interview.

4.3. Roles and Responsibilities of the Academic Panel Member

4.3.1. Attend all the necessary meetings during the Mock Audit process.

4.3.2. Prepare and present suitable questions during the Mock Audit interview.

4.3.3. Provide reflections and recommendations to be included in a document following the Mock Audit interview.

4.4. Roles and Responsibilities of the Student Panel Members

4.4.1. Attend an introductory meeting with QSU, the Panel Planning Meeting and the Mock Audit interview.

4.4.2. Prepare relevant questions to be presented during the Mock Audit interview, after consulting the relevant documentation.

4.5. Roles and Responsibilities of the Entity

4.5.1. Provide QSU with relevant documentation from which commendations, issues and recommendations can be elicited.

4.5.2. Ensure relevant entity members are present during the various meetings of the Mock Audit process.

4.5.3. Send a list of the entity members who will be present during the Mock Audit interview to QSU.

4.5.4. Book and prepare a suitable venue for the Mock Audit interview.

4.5.5. Answer the questions posed by the Audit Panel during the interview truthfully and respectfully.

4.5.6. Provide QSU with initial feedback following the Mock Audit interview.

4.5.7. Provide QSU with feedback on the minutes taken during the Mock Audit interview, to be approved or amended as necessary.

4.5.8. Provide QSU with feedback on the reflections and recommendations document.

4.5.9. Invite the Audit Panel for a final Debriefing Session to discuss the reflections and recommendations document and conclude the Mock Audit process.

5. Health and Safety requirements

5.1. N/A

6. Procedure

6.1. Compilation of Commendations, Issues and Recommendations

6.1.1. As a basis of discussion for the Mock Audit interview, QSU is to prepare a document collating commendations, issues and recommendations relevant to the entity. These may be extracted from relevant documentation supplied by the entity, such as the outcomes of stakeholder meetings, alumni tracer studies, student feedback sessions, external examiners' reports, and other relevant reports published by the entity.

6.1.2. These commendations, issues and recommendations may be related to the entity's workings as a whole, or to specific courses it offers.

6.1.3. Each commendation, issue or recommendation is to be tagged according to the most relevant National Quality Standard as issued by the MFHEA. The full list of these Standards is included in Appendix 8.1.

6.1.4. Once the document is finalized and approved by the Pro-Rector, QSU shall forward it to the entity's Dean/Director, explaining that the discussion during the Mock Audit interview will be based on this document and the Audit Panel's questions will stem from it.

6.1.5. Together with the compilation of commendations, issues and recommendations, QSU shall also forward to the entity the document "*Interpretation of MFHEA Standards for QAC Mock Audit*" (Appendix 8.2), which will help the entity better understand the MFHEA Standards and the indicative key questions arising therefrom.

6.2. Composition of the Mock Audit Panel

6.2.1. The composition of the panel shall be as follows:

6.2.1.1. **Chair**: The Pro-Rector responsible for Quality Assurance/QAC Chair.

6.2.1.2. **One Academic Panel Member**: To be appointed by the Pro-Rector from the members of the QAC.

6.2.1.3. **Two Student Panel Members**: A minimum of two students currently enrolled at UM. If deemed necessary by the Chair, a third student might be added to the panel. These students shall not be students of the entity under review.

6.2.2. It shall be ensured that neither the Chair nor the Academic Panel Member have a conflict of interest vis-à-vis the entity. If such conflict subsists, the Chair or the Academic Panel Member are to be replaced with another QAC member, to be appointed by the Pro-Rector.

6.3. Introductory Meeting with Student Panel Members

6.3.1. Following their appointment, a meeting is to be held between QSU and the Student Panel Members, in order to brief the students regarding what is expected from their participation in the Mock Audit process.

6.3.2. The students are to be informed of the meetings they would need to attend during the whole process, namely a Panel Planning Meeting and the Mock Audit interview.

6.3.3. The students are to be provided with the compilation of commendations, issues and recommendations relevant to the entity, as well as with the "*Interpretation of MFHEA Standards for QAC Mock Audit*" document. They shall then be asked to focus their contribution during the Mock Audit on one/two specific National Quality Standards.

6.3.4. After going through the relevant commendations, issues and recommendations tagged with their allotted Standard, and consulting the interpretation document for the indicative key questions, the students should then prepare relevant questions to be asked during the Mock Audit, following vetting of such questions during the Panel Planning Meeting.

6.4. Scoping Visit

6.4.1. The QAC Chair is to inform the relevant entity that it is to undertake a Mock Audit process. A Scoping Visit is then to be scheduled in order to help the entity understand the scope of the Mock Audit, what types of questions will be asked and how they should be answered. This meeting will also help the Panel get a feel of the preparedness and disposition of the entity towards the process.

6.4.2. The Scoping Visit is to be attended by the Panel Chair, with the Academic Panel Member also welcome to join. From the entity's side, the Dean/Director together with all the members who will be fronting the Panel should also be in attendance. The entity is to inform QSU of all the entity members expected to attend the Mock Audit interview.

6.4.3. QSU shall oversee the scheduling of the Scoping Visit to ensure a slot convenient for all expected participants.

6.5. Panel Planning Meeting

6.5.1. A few days before the Mock Audit interview, all Panel members are to meet in order to plan the way of proceeding during the interview. The questions prepared by the Student Panel Members are to be vetted by the Chair, and further direction may be given as necessary.

6.5.2. QSU shall oversee the scheduling of the Panel Planning Meeting to ensure a slot convenient for all Panel members.

6.6. Mock Audit Interview

6.6.1. The Mock Audit interview is to take place at a suitable venue selected and prepared by the entity. QSU shall liaise with the entity so as to find a suitable two-hour slot convenient for all expected participants.

6.6.2. During the interview, the Audit Panel members shall pose their questions to the entity. While the Dean/Director may wish to take the lead in answering, s/he may ask any entity member present to respond. The Audit Panel members may also direct their questions to specific entity members, according to the latter's area of expertise.

6.6.3. Following the conclusion of the Mock Audit interview, QSU shall ask the entity Dean/Director for their initial feedback regarding the Mock Audit process.

6.6.4. QSU shall take minutes of the proceedings. These minutes shall be used for internal records, and are not presented to Senate.
   6.6.4.1. Once the minutes are finalized, QSU shall forward them to the Pro-Rector for feedback and approval.
   6.6.4.2. Following approval, the minutes are to be sent to the entity's Dean/Director, upon which the entity may base its own considerations for further improvement.
   6.6.4.3. The entity shall then inform the Pro-Rector whether they agree with the minutes as they stand, or whether they wish to propose any amendments.
   6.6.4.4. Once an agreement is reached and the necessary amendments are made, the minutes as approved by the Pro-Rector and the entity's Dean/Director shall be considered final.

6.7. Post-Audit Panel Meeting

6.7.1. The Panel Chair and the Academic Panel Member shall meet within reasonable time after the Mock Audit interview to review the experience and decide on the main thrusts of the feedback to be given to the entity.

6.7.2. On the basis of the initial entity feedback and the finalized minutes, QSU shall prepare a draft document collating the reflections and recommendations of the Mock Audit Panel. This document shall serve as the basis for the meeting, during which the Panel Chair and the Academic Panel member shall contribute their own reflections and recommendations, both on the Mock Audit process itself as well as on the issues discussed during the interview.

6.7.3. Once this document is finalized, QSU shall send it to the entity Dean/Director with an invitation for feedback. The entity shall also be informed that the Audit Panel would welcome an invitation by the entity to discuss the document and the whole Mock Audit process during a final debriefing session.

6.8. Debriefing Session

6.8.1. The Mock Audit process is concluded through a final meeting between the Audit Panel (the Chair and the Academic Panel Member), QSU, and the entity Dean/Director. Other relevant entity members are also welcome to join in this session.

6.8.2. This Debriefing Session shall be based on the document containing the Panel's final reflections and recommendations, as previously forwarded to the entity Dean/Director.

6.8.3. QSU shall oversee the scheduling of the Debriefing Session to ensure a slot convenient for all expected participants.

7. References

7.1. N/A

8. List of appendices/worksheets

8.1. Appendix 1: The National Quality Standards issued by the MFHEA

8.2. Appendix 2: Interpretation of MFHEA Standards for QAC Mock Audit

Appendix 1: The National Quality Standards issued by the MFHEA

1. **_Policy for quality assurance_**: *entities shall have a policy for quality assurance that is made public and forms part of their strategic management.*

2. **_Institutional and financial probity_**: *entities shall ensure that they have appropriate measures and procedures in place to ensure institutional and financial probity.*

3. **_Design and approval of programmes_**: *self-accrediting providers shall have appropriate processes for the design and approval of their programmes of study.*

4. **_Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment_**: *entities shall ensure that programmes are delivered in a way that encourages students to take an active role in the learning process.*

5. **_Student admission, progression, recognition and certification_**: *entities shall consistently apply pre-defined and published regulations covering all phases of the student 'life-cycle'.*

6. **_Teaching staff_**: *entities shall assure the competence and effectiveness of their teaching staff.*

7. **_Learning resources and student support_**: *entities shall have appropriate funding for their learning and teaching activities and sufficient learning resources to fully support the students' learning experiences.*

8. **_Information management_**: *entities shall ensure that they collect, analyse and use relevant information for the effective management of their programmes and other activities.*

9. **_Public information_**: *entities shall publish information about their activities which is clear, accurate, objective, up-to-date and readily accessible.*

10. **_On-going monitoring and periodic review of programmes_**: *entities shall implement the 'Quality Cycle' by monitoring and periodically reviewing their programmes to ensure their continuing fitness for purpose.*

11. **_Cyclical external quality assurance_**: *entities should undergo external quality assurance, approved by MFHEA, at least once every five years.*

Appendix 2: Interpretation of MFHEA Standards for QAC Mock Audit

Interpretation of MFHEA Standards for QAC Mock Audit

1. Policy for quality assurance	
MFHEA Standard Description	*Focus from Standards during QAC Mock Audit*
Entities shall have a policy for quality assurance that is made public and forms part of their strategic management. Internal stakeholders shall develop and implement this policy through appropriate structures and processes, while involving external stakeholders. The policy should take into account various methods of monitoring processes and outcomes, including those generated by learning analytics software.	UM entity should have entity-specific policies and procedures related to teaching and learning that complement and give further detail with respect to UM-wide policies and procedures

Indicative Key Questions

• What are your key strategic priorities for the next five years?
• What evidence is available to demonstrate the effectiveness of the quality assurance system?
• What role do students play in the assurance of quality?
• What plans are there to improve the quality of the learning experience of students across the institution?

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2. Institutional Probity – Not applicable for UM Mock Audit exercise

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3. Design and approval of programmes	
MFHEA Standard Description	*Focus from Standards during QAC Mock Audit*
Entities shall have processes for the design and approval of their programmes.	Entity has procedures for the development and review of proposals for revised or new programmes prior to submission to PVC.

Indicative Key Questions

• With respect to one of the programmes for which data has been submitted for this Mock Audit, could you give an example of the faculty-specific stages followed in for the design, approval and implementation of the programme?
• Could you explain the relationship between the programme's learning outcomes and the assessment methods?
• How are students involved in the design and review of programmes?
• How does the provider assure itself that staff teaching on programmes have the appropriate skills and knowledge?

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4. Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment	
MFHEA Standard Description	*Focus from Standards during QAC Mock Audit*
	Same as in National Standard

Entities shall ensure that the programmes are delivered in a way that encourages students to take an active role in creating the learning process, and that the assessment of students reflects this approach.

Indicative Key Questions

- How effective are the pedagogical methods in ensuring that students achieve the learning outcomes?
- What measures are taken to encourage students to take an active role in the learning process?
- What feedback is provided for students to assist the learning process? How long do students wait to receive the information?
- How does the provider ensure that assessment arrangements are conducted fairly and consistently?

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5. Student admission, progression, recognition and certification

MFHEA Standard Description	*Focus from Standards during QAC Mock Audit*
Entities shall consistently apply pre-defined and published regulations covering all phases of the student 'life-cycle'.	Focus on induction

Indicative Key Questions

- What provision is made for the induction of students in their first term/ semester?

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6. Teaching staff

MFHEA Standard Description	*Focus from Standards during QAC Mock Audit*
Entities shall assure the competence of their staff.	Same as in National Standard

Indicative Key Questions

- What feedback is provided to academic staff to improve their teaching?
- Are there opportunities for students to evaluate their courses? What use is made of the information?
- What entity-level support is provided for the professional development of staff and for research and scholarly activity, where applicable?
- How are the P/T casual staff chosen/recruited?
- Are part-time staff (casual or otherwise) effective members of the academic community? Are they adequately supported in their role by the entity?

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7. Learning resources and student support

MFHEA Standard Description	*Focus from Standards during QAC Mock Audit*
Entities shall have appropriate funding for learning and teaching activities.	Focus on: • quality of student support services, • quality of teaching labs, where applicable

Indicative Key Questions

- What academic advice and guidance is available by the entity for students?

- What measures are used to monitor the performance of these academic support services?
- How often do students meet with their academic tutors?
- What arrangements are in place to support students who encounter difficulties in their studies?

8. Information management

MFHEA Standard Description	*Focus from Standards during QAC Mock Audit*
Entities shall ensure that they collect, analyse and use relevant information for the effective management of their programmes and other activities.	Same as in National Standard

Indicative Key Questions

- Does the entity have appropriate arrangements in place for the systematic collection, analysis and evaluation of key information about its students and staff?
- How does this information inform the entity's self-evaluation and planning?
- Is this information made widely available within the entity to inform management decision making?
- Are arrangements in place for tracking student participation and progression?

9. Public information

MFHEA Standard Description	*Focus from Standards during QAC Mock Audit*
Entities shall publish information about their activities, including courses/ programmes, which is clear, accurate, objective, up-to date and readily accessible.	Same as in National Standard

Indicative Key Questions

- How does the provider make information available about its courses/ programmes for prospective students and other stakeholders?
- What checks are in place to ensure that public information is accurate and up-to-date?
- Are students consulted about the usefulness of the information provided?

10. Ongoing monitoring and periodic review of programmes

MFHEA Standard Description	*Focus from Standards during QAC Mock Audit*
Entities shall implement the Quality Cycle by monitoring and periodically reviewing their programmes in terms of their IQA policy and standards.	Same as in National Standard

Indicative Key Questions

- What evidence does the provider have that programmes/courses are meeting the expectations of the employers? Do employers play a role in monitoring and reviewing programmes?
- How are students' views taken into consideration as part of the review process?
- Can the provider give an example of a programme that has recently been discontinued or revised as a result of monitoring or review?

- Does the provider carry out any analysis of the relationship between the input and output standards? Is it possible to identify the 'value added' attained by completing individual programmes?
- What external involvement is included in the monitoring and review process? How does the provider know that its programmes are of a comparable standard to similar courses offered by other providers (and in other jurisdictions)?
- Are there programmes of study that have been offered in the last 5 years but which have not secured any student interest or not enough student interest to warrant their running? How is the entity dealing with these?
- Do the Board of studies meet physically at least once a year, as per UIM requirements?
- Is the Annual Programme Review being undertaken? How is it being used?

11. Cyclical external quality assurance – Not applicable for UM Mock Audit exercise