2.a.2 Benchmarking policy

Subject	Quality Assurance	*Effective From*	Sep - 2011
Policy #	2.a.2	*Latest Revision*	Dec - 2023
Title of The Policy	Benchmarking policy	*Next Review*	Dec - 2024
Responsible Entity	QAIRC	*Policy Pages*	5

Definitions	**AAU:** Al Ain University **QAIRC:** Quality Assurance and Institutional Research Centre **CAA:** Commission for Academic Accreditation **ADEK:** Abu Dhabi Department of Education and Knowledge **SSR:** Self Study Report
Purpose	This policy defines the benchmarking strategies considered for an AAU Institutional/program. The main purpose of this policy is to align the University's performance with national and international standards in the UAE. This policy encourages benchmarking and external referencing with similar institutions to ensure the maintenance of quality standards and the promotion of continuous improvement across all academic entities.
Scope	To achieve the objectives of the university related to quality, and academic accreditation and to improve its national and international standards among fellow universities. The policy details on the, • National and international accreditation processes and benchmarking against local and international practices. • Preparation and compilation of data for the (Worldwide and Regional) universities ranking and formulating the recommendations for continuous improvement.
Statement	AAU uses a range of formal and informal benchmarking activities to monitor its performance in educational programs and institutional planning. **Components involved in AAU Benchmarking:** ✓ **Benchmarking with study plans (peer universities)** The benchmarking of educational programs is done on a program basis where each college identifies peer colleges (national, regional, and international) and compares its study plans and course descriptions. ✓ **National Accreditation (Institution / Program)** All AAU programs are licensed and accredited by the UAE, MoE. This accreditation helps to set a benchmark in terms of Quality Structure as the accreditation is based on the CAA Standards. AAU systematically follows the standards and looks in for any references as it is well defined. ✓ **International Accreditation (Program)** International accreditations are a major recognition of AAU programs. Six AAU colleges

have received international accreditation (Engineering-ABET, Pharmacy-AACPE, Law-HCERES, Education-CAEP, Business-AACSB and Communication-AQAS).

✓ **Academic Periodic Program Review, APPR (Program)**
The "Academic Periodic Program Review, APPR" is a process that allows the University to assess the well-being of an academic program, the academic development of the program, and strategic issues affecting the program. The review includes how well the program aligns with the missions and goals of the AAU, the College, and the Department respectively. All the academic programs are reviewed once every 3-4 years, except the programs granted with international accreditation.

✓ **Center for Higher Education Data and Statistics (CHEDS) (Institution / Program)**
Another level of benchmarking used by AAU is the data requested by the "MoE – Center for Higher Education Data and Statistics (CHEDS)" and by ADEK, from all UAE-based educational institutions and Abu Dhabi institutions, respectively. This CHEDS data is used by the MoE for the "UAE University Classification" which provides a good baseline for benchmarking against peer local universities.
AAU also engages in benchmarking by providing data as requested by the "MoE - Center for Higher Education Data and Statistics (CHEDS)" from all educational institutions within the UAE, including those in Abu Dhabi.

✓ **AAU Fact Book (Institution / Program)**
The AAU Fact Book is published annually by the QAIRC and represents a convenient source of statistics and information both at the institutional level and college level as well.

✓ **International Ranking**
AAU employs international ranking as a benchmarking tool to assess its performance and competitiveness in the global higher education landscape. AAU aligns its mission with global educational standards and best practices. This commitment to benchmarking against world-class institutions promotes transparency, accountability, and continuous improvement, ensuring that AAU remains at the forefront of higher education, both locally and on the global stage.
(Ranking associations include, QS world ranking, QS Arab region ranking, THE Impact Ranking (Worldwide), THE Arab University Ranking, UI GreenMetric World University Rankings).

✓ **College advisory boards**
In accordance with AAU's established standards, every College operates with an "Industrial Advisory Board." This board plays a pivotal role in offering recommendations, expert insights, and support to actively contribute to the strategic advancement of the Colleges and Deanships, particularly in the context of their professional and technical programs.

Procedures	The benchmarking strategies followed and utilized at AAU are detailed. • **National and International Accreditation**

The process of accreditation is established by the UAE MoE, aiming to ensure high-quality, relevant, and innovative educational programs. Following each ERT visit, the institution receives a report outlining requirements and suggestions to be addressed. These requirements/suggestions are formulated by the CAA ERT in a spirit of constructive engagement, with the aim of ensuring that the CAA Standards are met, and to help the AAU in its desired objective to establish renewal of licensure (institutional level) and accreditation (programs level).

The steps involved in the process of national and international accreditation are as below:

✓ **Compliance**

National Accreditation

- For any initial and renewal of the institutional licensure /re-authorization must be through the submission of the SSR in alignment with the criteria, guidelines, and procedures established by the ADEK and CAA. Since AAU is located in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi, the first approval authority is ADEK (authorization), then the process proceeds to the CAA (licensure), ensuring full compliance with their procedural manuals.
- For the initiation of the new academic programs, the SSR adheres to the criteria, guidelines, and procedures established by ADEK and CAA at the program level.
- For the renewal of existing academic programs, the SSR follows the CAA program licensure renewal procedural manual (only without ADEK).
- Any program and institutional structural (substantive) changes will adhere to ADEK & CAA substantive change procedures.

International Accreditation

- The SSR is carefully aligned with the accreditation guidelines/methodologies specified by the relevant international accreditation agencies.

✓ **Accountability**

- The QAIRC creates an SSR template based on the external accreditation standards.
- The QAIRC shares this template with various departments, such as Deanships, Colleges, Centers, Units, and QAIRC itself, assigning each a specific deadline for providing the required information and evidence.
- The QAIRC reviews and audits the information which is received from the different authorities to verify adherence to the standards, reflecting our commitment to accountability throughout the institution.

✓ **Audit and Submission**

- The QAIRC collects, consolidates, and reviews all the information received from various departments to ensure compliance with the set standards.
- Comprehensive report is submitted to the External Review Team (ERT).

✓ **Continuous Improvement**

- External Review Team (ERT) Visit: Reviewing pertinent documents to gather information and insights.

- ERT Report: ERT delivers requirements and suggestions.
- QAIRC Initial Response: QAIRC distributes requirements, gathers evidence, and reviews to enhance compliance.
- Further communication between the two parties could occur if the ERT requirements are not completely met.

✓ **Acquire Licensure**

- Upon successfully meeting all ERT requirements, the governing authorities/agencies issue an approval letter for Licensure or Accreditation. This accomplishment signifies that the institution/program has obtained accreditation, allowing it to continue operations and provide accredited services.

✓ **Enhancing Quality**

- Later to the approval letter from the CAA/ADEK for accreditation/ licensure, as the QAIRC believes and works as per the maker-checker policy within the internal departments, to ensure the quality outlining the areas of improvements.
- The QAIRC formulates and updates the Strategic and operational plan and follows up within the departments which will be reflected in areas such as institutional governance, quality assurance, recruitment of faculties, enhancing the existing program and development of new programs.

- **Academic Periodic Program Review, APPR (Program)**

The procedure to APPR will be followed as per the APPR policy and the weeding course policy.

- **Center for Higher Education Data and Statistics (CHEDS) (Institution / Program)**

✓ **Data Sources and Collection**
The data for the above-stated four pillars are gathered from various sources within AAU and are submitted to MoE through the CHEDS data collection system (portal). QAIRC actively collaborates with its academic and administrative units to ensure the accurate and timely submission of data based on the CHEDS dictionary (user guide) shared with them. The information submitted to CHEDS includes a wide array of data, such as student enrollment, graduates, applicants, scholarships, employee information, financial data, AAU services, attrition rates, faculty workload, academic programs, publications, surveys, lab, and class sizes, etc.

✓ **Data Audit / Review**
The QAIRC conducts a thorough review and audit of the data collected from various units to ensure its alignment with the CHEDS dictionary. This process involves verifying that the data conforms to the field descriptions, data types, sample data, and acceptable values as specified in the CHEDS dictionary. This careful validation ensures the accuracy,

	completeness, and consistency of the data, in preparation for submission to the CHEDS portal.
	✓ Data Utilization The data collected and submitted to CHEDS not only serve the purpose of complying with MoE's requirements but also contribute to the creation of various AAU documents, including the Factbook, Annual Reports, KPI (Key Performance Indicator) Reports, and other institutional documents. This data is pivotal in AAU's continuous improvement initiatives and our commitment to meet national and international education standards. • **AAU Fact Book (Institution / Program)** **✓ Fact Book Preparation and Data Collection** • The QAIRC is responsible for the preparation of the Fact Book at both the institutional and college levels. • Data for the Fact Book is collected, consolidated, and reviewed from various responsible units, centers, and colleges within AAU. **✓ Fact Book Utilization** The AAU Fact Book is not only a reference document, but a vital tool for performance analysis, decision-making, and improving academic quality. • **International Ranking** The QAIRC prepares and submits the data required for ranking as per the ranking methodology. The ranking fact files of the previous years are analyzed for self-benchmarking to perform better in the future and incorporate the areas for improvement as KPIs in the Strategic and Operational Plan. • **College advisory boards** • Every college operates with an industrial advisory board, to actively contribute to the strategic advancement of the Colleges and Deanships, particularly in the context of their professional and technical programs. • The advisory Board meets every semester, and whenever needed. • During the discussion in the meetings, the minutes are prepared, and previous meeting minutes are ratified. • The pinpoints are taken into consideration and the same is implemented to accomplish the agenda of the meeting.
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