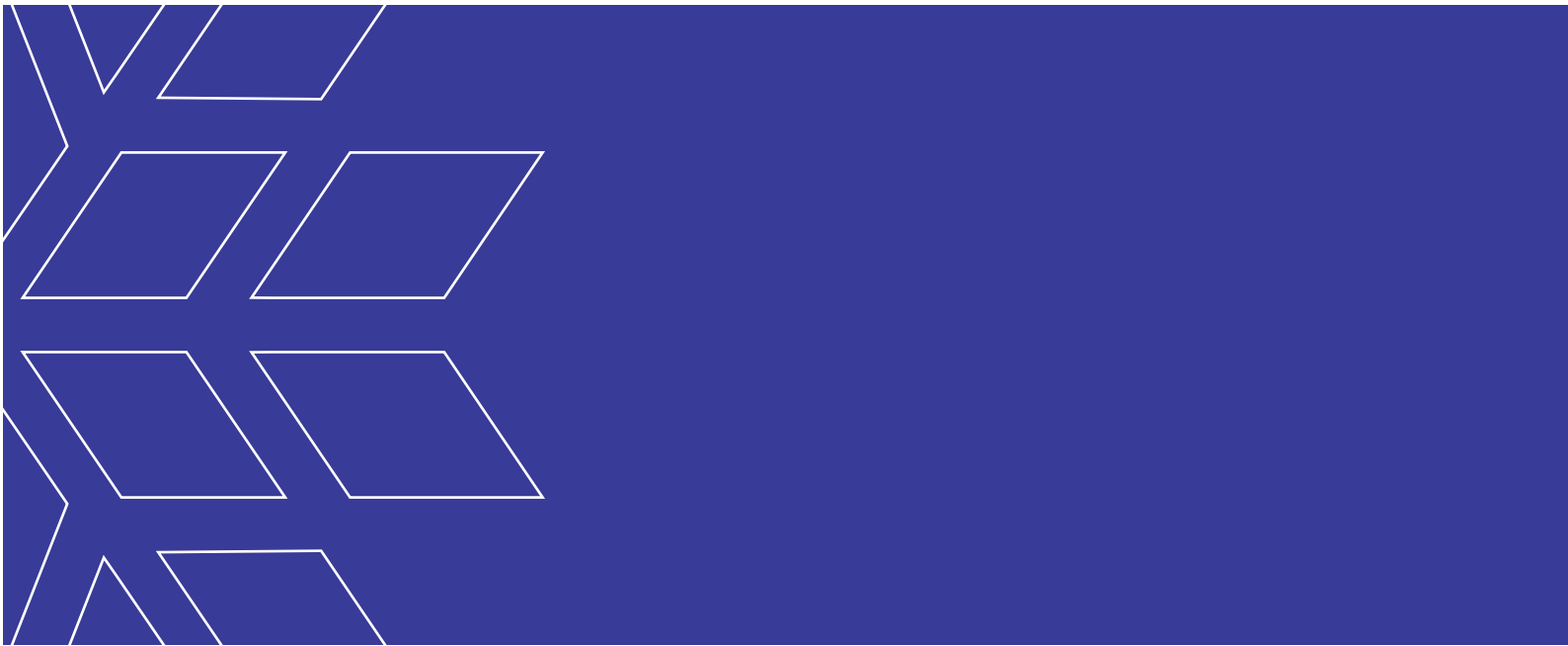




Academic Accreditation Policies

Pursuant to the Education and Training Evaluation Commission's Board of Directors' decision in the Eighth Meeting of its Second Session held on Monday 28/06/1443H corresponding to 31/01/2022.





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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The National Center for Academic Accreditation & Evaluation (NCAAA), part of the Education & Training Evaluation Commission (ETEC), is the only statutory body responsible for the evaluation and accreditation of all higher education institutions and programs in the public and private sectors in Saudi Arabia.

These policies have been prepared to keep pace with the comprehensive transformation in the academic accreditation carried out by the Center, and in line with the role expected of higher education institutions and programs. They have been prepared according to a vision that achieves the strategic dimension of academic accreditation represented by focusing on outputs, outcomes, impacts, and added values, achieving national and international competitiveness, and gaining the confidence of the local and international communities in the Saudi education system and its outcomes.

This Academic Accreditation Policy Book includes all the policy statements that govern academic accreditation in Saudi Arabia. It addresses NCAAA responsibilities and the responsibilities of the institutions and the programs. In addition, it describes policies related to all phases of the academic accreditation: application, review, and accreditation decision. Moreover, it describes all post accreditation decision activities. Furthermore, included as well are policies governing academic accreditation standards, the work of independent reviewers, the accreditation committee, and the academic accreditation councils.

This Policy Book is accompanied by other publications from NCAAA to govern all procedural aspects related to academic accreditation. These publications include the Accreditation Handbook and the related guidelines.



1) TERMS AND DEFINITION

The following terms shall have the meanings assigned thereto unless the context requires otherwise:

- ◆ **Academic Accreditation Standards:**
Statements comprising the principles, quality practices and conditions that must be met by institutions or programs to be accredited by the NCAAA.
- ◆ **Accountability:**
The responsibility of an individual, an institution or an organization to another authority for his or her, or its activities.
- ◆ **Accreditation:**
Formal certification by a recognized authority that an institution or a program meets required academic accreditation standards.
- ◆ **Accreditation Council:**
Specialized Academic Accreditation Council, responsible for making the accreditation decision for programs.
- ◆ **Benchmarks:**
A Reference points, approved standards or agreed practices to compare the levels of performance quality, achievement or characteristics and features.
- ◆ **Board of Directors:**
The governing body of Education and Training Evaluation Commission.
- ◆ **Center:**
National Center for Academic Accreditation and Evaluation (NCAAA).
- ◆ **Code of Conduct:**
A set of rules and ethics regulating the actions of NCAAA staff involved with the Center's business.
- ◆ **Commission:**
Education and Training Evaluation Commission
- ◆ **Complaint:**
A formal allegation against the NCAAA work and procedures or an institution or program for not complying with the NCAAA academic accreditation standards.
- ◆ **Conditional Accreditation:**
An accreditation for an institution/ program that meets key standards and indicators, but has some shortcomings, with the aim of giving the institution or program an opportunity for improvement or development



to ensure full accreditation within a specified period of time.

- ◆ **Conflict of interest:**
A situation in which the personal interest of a participant involved with the NCAAA accreditation and decision-making processes comes into conflict with the concerned institution or program.
- ◆ **Continuous Improvement:**
Ongoing enhancement of inputs, processes and outcomes that improve the quality of performance, usually across the whole range of an institution's/program's activities.
- ◆ **Eligibility for Accreditation:**
Institutions or programs are considered eligible for the final accreditation review visit when they meet the eligibility requirements set by the NCAAA.
- ◆ **Eligibility Review Report:**
A report prepared by the NCAAA after visiting the institution or program to check if it meets the eligibility requirements set by the NCAAA.
- ◆ **Evidence:**
Evidence or data indicating the achievement of indicators or standards.
- ◆ **Follow-Up Report:**
An annual report containing key data that reflects institutional or programmatic profile and KPIs.
- ◆ **Full Accreditation:**
This status level indicates that the institution/program has successfully demonstrated through external evaluation that it is in full or substantial compliance with all NCAAA institution/program accreditation standards.
- ◆ **Full Compliance:**
The Institution/program satisfies the requirements of the Standard.
- ◆ **Higher Education:**
A postsecondary education that leads to award of an academic degree.
- ◆ **Higher Education Institutions:**
National or foreign entities (organizations) with legal authorities that provide higher education and award academic degrees or professional certifications.
- ◆ **Hybrid Visit:**
A review visit carried out both in person (onsite) and online by a panel of reviewers to examine the institution/program premises and facilities, interview administrative staff, faculty, students, alumni, and employers.
- ◆ **Independent Reviewer:**
An expert from similar institution or program with experience on quality assurance and accreditation verifies the accuracy and objectivity of the evaluation process carried out by the institution or the program.
- ◆ **Interim Report:**
A report submitted to the Center every two years reflects the progress that an institution or a program has made on accreditation recommendations.

- ◆ **Inputs:**
The resources available to and used by an institution to present its programs and conduct its activities. Inputs include financial and human resources, facilities and equipment, and students.
- ◆ **Institutional Accreditation:**
Accreditation of a higher education institution certifying that it meets the required standards of quality assurance for the delivery of an institution.
- ◆ **Minimal Compliance:**
The Institution/program lacks the strength of compliance with this Standard to ensure that the quality will not be compromised. Therefore, immediate remedial action is required prior to the next review.
- ◆ **Non-Compliance:**
The Institution/program does not satisfy the requirements of this Standard.
- ◆ **Online Visit:**
A review visit carried out online by a panel of reviewers to examine the institution/program premises and facilities, interview administrative staff, faculty, students, graduates (alumni), and employers.
- ◆ **Outcomes:**
The results of teaching, learning, research, and other activities of an institution or a program.
- ◆ **Outputs:**
The products or services offered by an institutions or a program aligned with its strategic objectives normally expressed in quantitative terms.
- ◆ **President of the Commission:**
President of the Education and Training Evaluation Commission
- ◆ **Processes:**
Processes or process is what is done in an institution to use the inputs available to it to produce its outputs and outcomes. The term includes teaching processes, assessment procedures, and processes for managing research and community activities as well as a wide range of other activities that have direct or indirect impact on educational programs.
- ◆ **Program:**
A set of courses, activities and learning experiences designed to achieve specific objectives and learning outcomes over a period of time and which, upon successful completion leads to a specific scientific degree or qualification.
- ◆ **Program Accreditation:**
Accreditation of a higher education program certifying that it meets the required standards of quality assurance for the delivery of a program.
- ◆ **Provisional Accreditation:**
Accreditation granted on a temporary basis for a new institution or program after NCAAA assessment of its plans for development.
- ◆ **Quality Assurance:**
Regular and planned review processes involving continuous follow-up to ensure that the institutions or programs meet the specified standards or requirements to maintain the required level of quality performance

and services and developing it to match the levels of practice in internationally distinguished institutions or programs.

◆ **Review Panel:**

An independent team of reviewers including the chair designated to conduct the final review visit and prepare the review panel report.

◆ **Review Panel Report/ External Review Report:**

A document prepared by the review panel that contains descriptions of the institution or program performance with respect to the NCAAA academic accreditation standards, including appropriate comments, commendations, recommendations, and suggestions, followed by the accreditation decision recommendation.

◆ **Self- evaluation Scales:**

A document in which an institution or a program evaluates itself on a scale of five against the standards set by the NCAAA.

◆ **Self-study Report:**

A self-evaluation report on the quality and effectiveness of an institution or a program seeking accreditation prepared by the institution or program itself and based on the standards set by the NCAAA.

◆ **Site Visit:**

A visit by a review panel to an institution or a program that has applied for external review or accreditation to collect and analyze field data and evidence and prepare the review and evaluation report by predetermined

standards that determine scope of review.

◆ **Specialized Academic Programs:**

Academic programs that are offered by higher education institutions in the fields of Islamic studies, Arabic language, engineering, or health specialties, or any other specialized programs included within these regulations.

◆ **Stakeholders:**

They include students and graduates (alumni), faculty, staff, employers, providers of funds, members of the communities served by the institution and any other groups with which the institution/program is involved.

◆ **Substantial Compliance:**

The Institution/program currently satisfies the requirements of this Standard but the potential exists for the situation to change such that the requirements of this Standard may not be satisfied before the next review.

◆ **Substantive Change:**

For an accredited institution, a substantive change is any change that requires a modification of the license granted by the Ministry of Education. It may also include relocation to new premises, use of additional premises, and any change related to changing of ownership.

For an accredited program, a substantive change is any change that significantly affects the learning outcomes, structure, organization, or delivery of a program or the basis for its accreditation.



2) THE ACADEMIC ACCREDITATION POLICY

2.1 | Scope

Academic accreditation in Saudi Arabia is guided by the stated policies in this Policy Book. The National Center for Academic Accreditation and Evaluation (NCAAA) (hereafter “the Center”) is the statutory body, under the umbrella of the Education and Training Evaluation Commission (ETEC), responsible for the accreditation and evaluation of higher education institutions and programs in Saudi Arabia, in the public and private sectors, by virtue of the Council of Ministers’ Cabinet Decision No. 108 dated 14/02/1440AH (October 23, 2018).

The NCAAA provides various handbooks, manuals, standards, and other publications that detail how the policies are to be interpreted and set any requirements for how they are to be implemented in typical and specific situations. All handbooks and manuals are publicly available on the Center’s section on ETEC’s website.

The stated policies in this Academic Accreditation Policies (Policy Book) and the relevant supporting documents shall be communicated with all the relevant parties involved in academic accreditation in Saudi Arabia. The policies shall be followed by the Center, its staff, its consultants, its committees, the independent reviewers, the Accreditation Committee, the Academic Accreditation Councils, and the higher education institutions and programs in the public and private sectors in Saudi Arabia. Moreover, international higher education institutions and programs operating in Saudi Arabia, and those operating outside Saudi Arabia and applying for accreditation from the Center must follow the stated policies included in this Policy Book, and the other supporting documents.

2.2 | Development Methodology

These policies have been prepared to keep pace with the comprehensive transformation in the academic accreditation carried out by the Center, and in line with the role expected of higher education institutions and programs. They have been prepared according to a vision that achieves the strategic dimension of academic accreditation represented by focusing on outputs, outcomes, impacts, and added values, achieving national and international competitiveness, and gaining the confidence of the local and international communities in the Saudi education system and its outcomes.

This Policy Book was developed after a thorough revision of the previously published Handbook Parts 1, 2, and 3 by the Center in 2009, as well as analyzing the generally good



practices published by reputable international quality assurance networks such as INQAAHE and ENQA. All the Center's updates were reflected in this new Policy Book and reviewed by the entire Center's staff. The Policy Book was circulated to all universities in Saudi Arabia for system-wide consultation. In addition, the Book was circulated to a sample of stakeholders, including national and international reviewers, as well as some regional and international quality agencies and networks. Their inputs were considered, and an updated version of the Policy Book was prepared and approved by the Center's Supervisory Committee. The final approval was made by ETEC Board of Directors.

2.3 Validity

The effective date of this Policy Book is the date on which it was approved stated on the front-page of this document. Policies are annotated as revised or edited to reflect various changes that have occurred since the original approval. Each policy carries the date of approval; any revision dates are annotated as well.

The Policy Book is published on the Center's website, and the copy on the website supersedes any printed copies or published materials that describe the policy. The Center informs all constituents of any significant policy changes and will implement those changes in a publicly available schedule.

2.4 Policy Review, Revisions, and Amendments

The Center recognizes that higher education and quality are rapidly changing and that the Center's policies contained herein need to reflect these changes. Therefore, the Center commits to reviewing its policies and procedures at least every three years, or sooner if deemed necessary, to evaluate their responsiveness to higher education, their effectiveness in providing quality assurance, and their usefulness in assisting the institutions and programs in achieving their quality goals. Revisions, amendments, or deletions will be approved in accordance with ETEC regulations, and the most recent version of the Policy Book will be published.



3) NATIONAL CENTER FOR ACADEMIC ACCREDITATION AND EVALUATION (NCAAA)

This section provides details about NCAAA, including historical background, responsibilities, information disclosure and records management, and self-evaluation.

3.1 Historical Background

The National Commission for Academic Accreditation & Assessment (NCAAA) was established by the Higher Council of Education in 2004. By a Royal Decree No. 7/B/6024 on 9/2/1424 H (corresponding to April 12, 2003), the Commission was recognized as an administratively and financially independent corporate body responsible for quality assurance and academic accreditation affairs in postsecondary education. It aims to develop the quality of both public and private postsecondary education under the Supreme Council of Higher Education's supervision. Afterward, the supervising entity was modified to be the Supreme Council of Education, according to the Royal Decree 7/B/55759.

In 2016, a Royal Decree No. 94 on 7/2/1438 H (corresponding to November 8, 2016) was issued to establish the Education Evaluation Commission (EEC), reporting directly to the Council of Ministers. EEC was an administratively and financially independent body responsible for the evaluation activities for all types of education and training in Saudi Arabia. The National Commission for Academic Accreditation & Assessment was moved to be under EEC, and it became the National Center for Academic Accreditation & Evaluation (NCAAA). Other entities for testing and assessment, public education evaluation, and technical and vocational training were also merged under EEC and were called centers.

The Royal Decree No. 108 dated 14/02/1440 H (corresponding to October 25, 2018) includes amending the Education Evaluation Commission's name to be the Education and Training Evaluation Commission (ETEC) and amending the legal bylaws of the Commission and its centers, including NCAAA.

3.2 NCAAA Responsibilities

NCAAA is committed to fulfilling its responsibilities defined in the Center's legal documents, including its bylaws, in alignment with the national vision and international good practices. The following paragraphs describe the main responsibilities of the Center, which are conducted through collaboration and engagement of partners specially the higher education institutions, industry and labor market. NCAAA responsibilities can be summarized as follows.



3.2.1 Development and Implementation of Academic Accreditation Standards and Processes.

The Center, with collaboration with higher education sector and its communities of interest including the public, develops academic accreditation standards. The Center applies standards both for institutions as a whole and for the individual programs offered by accredited institutions. The Center has a statutory obligation to ensure that all accreditation standards are achieved through its accreditation processes. The Center continually evaluates the effectiveness of its Standards and its processes for applying them and makes such changes as conditions warrant.

The Center accredits institutions and programs that are defined as higher education within the National Qualifications Framework for Saudi Arabia (NQF-KSA), which establishes levels and lengths of study appropriate to specific credentials.

3.2.2 Accreditation of Foreign Institutions and Programs Offered in Saudi Arabia or Offered Abroad and Seeking Accreditation.

NCAAA provides accreditation to institutions operating legally outside Saudi Arabia and international institutions operating inside Saudi Arabia, and seeking accreditation by the Center, as well as the following foreign program types:

- ◆ Programs developed abroad, but offered by a local institution in Saudi Arabia;
- ◆ Programs offered in Saudi Arabia, but leading to a foreign, not a Saudi credential;
- ◆ Programs offered by international institutions operating legally in Saudi Arabia; and
- ◆ Programs offered by international institutions operating legally outside of Saudi Arabia and seeking accreditation by the Center.

3.2.3 Monitoring Higher Education Performance Data in Saudi Arabia..

By requiring all institutions and programs to use national Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), the NCAAA will provide national performance database that institutions and programs can use for benchmarking purposes to inform internal and external accountability demands and decision making. Moreover, NCAAA will regularly publish an annual report(s) on the overall performance of institutions and programs or based on thematic areas in their performance such as teaching and learning, research, among other areas.

3.2.4 Conducting Evaluation Studies for Institutions and Programs in Saudi Arabia.

The Center conducts, in collaboration with stakeholders, studies in its fields of specialization to improve academic and professional performance in the institutions and programs. Such studies may include a particular sector or theme, such as studying the quality of preparatory year in Saudi universities, evaluating the quality of teaching and learning during crises and pandemics, alignment of graduates in particular sector to labor market, etc.

3.2.5 Collaboration with Organizations Inside and Outside Saudi Arabia.

The Center exchanges information, experience and scientific publications with other accrediting bodies and quality assurance networks throughout the world, subject to the relevant laws. The Center organizes and participates in local and international academic and professional events, including symposia, conferences, workshops, and exhibitions. The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) serves as the Center's official liaison with such organizations, but may, when appropriate, designate others to represent the Center in national and international settings.

The pursuit of resources may involve collaborating or forming alliances with organizations that share common goals and objectives. Such organizations may be national or international and may be not-for-profit or for-profit. They include industrial corporations, other accrediting bodies, and quality assurance organizations that have recognition and authorization to operate from a national educational ministry, a national or international peer organization, or some other appropriate authority.

Partnerships can provide financial support, in-kind support (e.g., clerical support, printing, copying, telephone, and fax), or both and may include any, or all, of the following elements: staff and professional development, exchange of reviewers, grant writing, research grant, sponsorship, licensing, web-based promotions, memoranda of understanding, and reciprocal or joint recognition of accredited programs. The arrangements should

- 1) Comply with applicable laws of Saudi Arabia,
- 2) Comply with the policies and procedures of the Education and Training Evaluation Authority
- 3) Avoid any real or perceived conflicts of interest,
- 4) Be managed by the Centre and its partners ethically and with integrity,
- 5) Not prevent the Centre from exercising independent judgment in all decision-making,
- 6) Be documented through signed written agreements, and
- 7) Incur no unbudgeted financial liability for the Centre.

The Center negotiates the use of intellectual property, copyright materials, and other products and services developed through the partnership, cooperative agreement, collaboration, alliance, and other mutual agreement. The Center will review and approve, in advance of their use, the Center name, logo, and identifying marks.

Any Center partnership does not imply endorsement of the products or services provided by the partner(s) unless otherwise specified in the agreement.

3.2.6 Regulation and Monitoring of the Application of Programs in Saudi Arabia for Academic Accreditation by International Agencies.

The Center regulates the application of programs offered by accredited institutions in Saudi Arabia for accreditation by international agencies to ensure the quality of the services provided. The Center publishes a separate document on the regulations and their updates.

3.3 Information Disclosure and Records Management

The Center is committed to publishing its materials. The Center maintains a records management program that ensures the security, accessibility, authenticity, and integrity of information exchanged between the institutions and review panels, personnel data, financial transactions, and other information essential to the Center's accreditation and quality assurance responsibilities. The Center makes publicly available an up-to-date list of accredited institutions and programs and any changes in their accreditation status, in both Arabic and English languages.

3.3.1 Centre Website

The Center maintains a website where it posts its Policy Book and all published documents including all external review final reports related to the accreditation of institutions and programs, reports of evaluation studies, among others. The Center may choose to add to the website other useful national and international materials related to higher education quality assurance and good practices. All documents and materials published by the Center in electronic or printed forms are protected by the national and international copyright laws and regulations and any violation to this will accordingly result in official actions.

3.3.2 Essential Documents on Quality Assurance and Accreditation

The Center publishes the Standards for Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions and the Standards for Accreditation of Higher Education Programs. The Center also publishes the following documents to provide specific instructions for institutions/programs and participants in the Center review and decision-making structures and processes: Academic Accreditation Handbook, Review Panel Handbook including Guidelines for Preparing the Review Panel Report. While necessary for the Center's operation, these instructions may

change with time as the Center learns from experience and strives for applying more effective or more efficient processes. Furthermore, the Center publishes all required templates and forms in Arabic and English languages.

3.3.3 Dissemination of Information about the Accreditation Status of Institutions and Programs

The Center is committed to publishing a full, regularly updated list of the accredited institutions and programs, and any subsequent changes in their accreditation status through its website, official media accounts, and channels. The Center will also publish a list of institutions/programs which applied for accreditation, in progress or did not apply. This list is also announced and published through events, including the Annual Quality Forum, webinars, and the conferences organized by NCAAA or ETEC. The list is published in both Arabic and English languages.

Other information that will be made publicly available on the ETEC-NCAAA website includes, but not limited to,

- ◆ the name of the institution/program, including the logo, degree level of the program, and degree levels offered by the institution,
- ◆ the date of accreditation,
- ◆ the organization type (Public or Private),
- ◆ the accreditation status (Full, Conditional, Denial, Withdrawn of Accreditation OR Revoked),
- ◆ the accreditation report, or the executive summary,
- ◆ the strengths and areas for improvement for each accreditation standard,
- ◆ the KPIs' values indicating the performance of institutions and programs, and
- ◆ Good practices developed by the accredited institutions and programs.

3.3.4 Maintenance, Retention, and Disposition of Center Records

The specific guidelines for retention and disposition of the Center records are outlined in a Center records retention schedule. Records retention periods in the schedule apply only to the designated "official" copy of the record (i.e., the one copy of the record established as the official file copy); no duplicates are made for information or convenience purposes.

Records are identified as any papers, books, electronic files, CDs, photographs, and digital copies. They include special project reports, institutional/programmatic self-study reports, self-evaluation scales and supporting evidence, correspondence, eligibility reports, minutes of formal meetings, institutional publications, review panel records, review panel reports, institution/program

response to recommendations, response of Review Panel Chair to the institution/program, follow-up reports, public disclosure statements, change of status from conditional to full accreditation, and change of status from college to university, and other materials that are generated or received by the Center and its staff in connection with the Center's accrediting function. The retention schedule for these types of records is two cycles of accreditation.

Inactive hardcopy records (i.e., those whose frequency is so low that their removal from the office would not hamper the Center's operations) are archived until scheduled for destruction.

NCAAA follows the national policy for documentation issued by The National Centre for Archives & Records, as facilitated by the ETEC Center for Documentation.

For data security, extra copies of the records and the documents are kept at the NCAAA CEO office and at the ETEC archive in a separate building.

3.4 NCAAA Internal Quality Assurance

The Center is committed to implementing an internal quality assurance system at the level of its operations and procedures, and works continuously to improve and develop performance in all academic, administrative and financial aspects, in order to achieve effectiveness, raise spending efficiency, achieve the satisfaction of beneficiaries of its services and continuously improve their experience. The Center is also committed to making benchmarks of its performance, in accordance with international best practices and the recommendations of prestigious international networks for quality. The center collects data to assist in its ongoing self-evaluation. The self-assessment includes the following:

3.4.1 NCAAA Internal Quality Assurance Committee

The Center forms a permanent internal quality assurance committee that reports to the Chief Executive Director of the Center, and undertakes the management and implementation of the basic tasks of the quality assurance system, according to the methodology of closing the quality loop of Planning, Implementation, Review and Development. The Committee prepares the necessary reports and devises proposals for the development of work procedures in light of the evaluation results.

3.4.2 Evaluation of the Accreditation Processes

After completing each review, the Center invites the institution to provide confidential comments on the value and effectiveness of the review process, including evaluating the panel's contribution to the quality assurance processes of the institution or the program. The Center uses these comments in reviewing its procedures and in the selection of personnel for future reviews.

The Center also invites the Review Panel to provide any informative comments on the institution's self-study and review process. These comments will not be included in the Review Panel report but are used by the Center to review and improve its arrangements. This information may be shared with the institution.

Furthermore, the Center invites the Review Panel Chair to evaluate each member and the members to evaluate the Chair.

The overall evaluation results may be distributed to other ETEC centers and departments for improvements, such as the Training Department.

3.4.3 Ongoing Quality Processes

The Center implements evaluative follow-up quality processes, including benchmarking and internal and external quality audits, for all the services it provides. It also calls on international and national experts, as needed, to review and comment on newly proposed initiatives and documents.

3.4.4 Annual Report

As per ETEC's bylaws, the Center prepares an annual report on its progress, and the CEO provides recommendations to the ETEC Board's Executive Committee for improvement of the processes of evaluating academic performance and accreditation.



4) OVERVIEW OF ACADEMIC ACCREDITATION IN SAUDI ARABIA

The NCAAA sets specific expectations for the institution's quality processes that institutions and programs must follow. The extent to which an institution or program follow these quality processes and meet academic accreditation standards inform the Center's decisions on granting an accreditation status. The Center's Accreditation Handbook provides detailed guidance on these processes. The following policies are outlined in detail in the following sections:

- ◆ Governance of Academic Accreditation,
- ◆ Principles of Academic Accreditation,
- ◆ Academic Accreditation Standards,
- ◆ Independent Reviewers for Academic Accreditation,
- ◆ Phases of Academic Accreditation,
- ◆ Activities after the Accreditation Decision, and
- ◆ Appeals and Complaints.



5) GOVERNANCE OF ACADEMIC ACCREDITATION

The NCAAA is an independent authority within ETEC, and its accreditation processes are entirely independent of any external influence. NCAAA emphasizes the independent nature of accreditation decisions and does not influence any accreditation decision directly or indirectly. The Accreditation Committee thoroughly reviews the final Review Panel Reports and the accompanying correspondence between the institution/program and the Review Panel Chair regarding the Review Panel recommendations. The Accreditation Committee makes the final accreditation decisions for institutions. For programmatic accreditation, the Accreditation Committee provides recommendations to the specialized Academic Accreditation Council. The Council solely makes the final accreditation decisions for the concerned programs.

5.1 | The Role of the Accreditation Committee

The Accreditation Committee is composed of at least nine independent national and international experts in quality assurance. None of them is affiliated with NCAAA. The Committee is responsible for ensuring the consistency of all Review Panel Reports, and the alignment between the reports' findings and the accreditation recommendations of the independent review panels. For institutional accreditation and re-accreditation, removing accreditation condition(s), and withdrawing accreditation, the Accreditation Committee is responsible for the final accreditation decisions. However, for programmatic accreditation and re-accreditation, the Accreditation Committee only reviews the consistency of the review panel reports and provides recommendations to the specialized Academic Accreditation Council.

5.2 | The Role of Specialized Academic Accreditation Councils

In 2020, ETEC's Board of Directors approved the establishment of five Academic Accreditation Councils for programmatic accreditation: Engineering & Computer Sciences Academic Accreditation Council (ECSAC), Arabic & Islamic Studies Academic Accreditation Council (AISAC), Health Specialties Academic Accreditation Council (HSAC), Sciences & Mathematics Academic Accreditation Council (SMAC), and Humanities & Education Academic Accreditation Council (HEAC). The ETEC Board of Directors appoints independent members from academia and industry in these councils to ensure transparent and diverse representation for the accreditation decisions. Each accreditation council is responsible for accreditation decisions for programs within their scope of the discipline. The operating pro-



cedures of these accreditation councils are set forth and outlined in the document “Regulations of Specialized Accreditation Councils” approved by the Board of Directors in 2020.

5.3 The Accreditation Decision-Taking Process

The Review Panel Report, written by independent Review Panel, including accreditation recommendations, the institution’s/program’s response to the draft report, and the reviewers’ reply to that response on institutions/programs applying for NCAA accreditation or re-accreditation are the primary input to the Accreditation Committee for making the final accreditation decision for institutions, and for providing accreditation recommendations to the Academic Accreditation Council in case of programmatic accreditation.

Removal of the condition(s) is decided upon after the institution/program has addressed and resolved the imposed condition(s) and achieved the compliance with the standard(s). For removing the condition(s), the External Reviewers Report based on the institution/program report addressing the imposed condition(s) on it, the Committee/Council considers both reports in making the final decision.

The quorum for any decision to be put to the vote is at least 70% of the Council or Committee. A minimum agreement of 75% of those present will be required for any decision to be adopted. When a member is considered to have or declares a conflict of interest for personal or institutional reasons, then the member’s institution/program will be placed last on the agenda. At the time of discussing this institution/program, the member will leave the meeting, and the total number of votes will be reduced accordingly. Information regarding operating procedures and business orders is given in detail in the documents titled “Accreditation Committee – Role and Functioning”, and “Regulations of Specialized Accreditation Councils”.



6) PRINCIPLES OF ACADEMIC ACCREDITATION

The following principles apply to all academic accreditation activities in Saudi Arabia, whether conducted by NCAAA or any of the licensed entities by the Education and Training Evaluation Commission.

6.1 | Emphasizing Institutional Responsibility for Quality

The Center holds that institutions delivering programs in Saudi Arabia are responsible for the quality of their educational programs and the quality of all their facilities and activities. NCAAA, as an external quality assurance organization, has a vital role in assisting institutions in planning and introducing strategies for continuous improvement and in evaluating and publicly reporting on what is achieved. This role, however, does not remove responsibility from the institution; an external organization can help, but it cannot deliver quality.

Although an institution may decentralize some of its responsibilities or delegate authority to an internal unit, such as a college or department, this does not remove responsibility from the institution as a whole. Reviews of quality by the NCAAA for institutional accreditation address the total institution, and reviews of programs for program accreditation address everything that affects the program's quality.

An institution/program accredited by the Center exercises full responsibility for all educational offerings provided under its name, irrespective of the level of the credential awarded or whether they be on campus, in community colleges, provided at different locations, or delivered through online or distance education. There is no distinction for courses and programs given in male and female sections. Facilities and resources in male and female sections, in the main campus and all branches, must be functionally equivalent. Institutional and program self-study processes will collect quality data from all locations using the same processes. While delivery arrangements may vary according to different circumstances in different locations, overall standards for accreditation must be met in each. Comparable learning outcomes must be achieved. The Center provides more details on how an institution fulfills these responsibilities through published materials on its website. The Center holds the institutions and programs responsible for the following areas:

6.1.1 Quality Assurance System

Quality assurance processes in an institution should involve not only the educational programs it offers, but also facilities and equipment, staffing, relationships with communities served by the institution, and the administrative



processes that link all these together. Therefore, an institutional quality assurance system should involve individuals and academic and organizational units throughout that institution, not only those directly involved in delivering educational programs. In summary, the expectations include leadership and coordination of quality evaluation and improvement processes based on the institution's mission and goals, preparation of detailed planning and reporting procedures, and implementation of those procedures in a continuing cycle of annual planning, monitoring, and review. These serve as a vital review and planning mechanism for the institution/program itself and as the basis for independent external reviews by the NCAAA.

A central part of the institution's responsibility for its quality assurance for accreditation purposes by the center, involves assessing itself against appropriate key performance indicators (KPIs) using internal and external benchmarks or reference points with analysis and applications for improvement. These may be performance descriptions of the academic accreditation standards provided by the NCAAA, and benchmarks relating to the performance of other comparable institutions/programs within Saudi Arabia or elsewhere. The institution/program can add any extra standards or KPIs for self-evaluation purposes.

6.1.2 Preparatory or Foundation Programs

Preparatory or foundation programs can help ensure that students beginning a higher education program have the necessary knowledge and skills to succeed. However, these precede the higher education program and are not part of it. Credits assigned to these programs shall not be included in the credit rating, Grade Point Average (GPA), of the higher education program. The Center does not include these programs in its accreditation of programs, but it expects an institution offering them to set the curriculum and performance standards to address the specific learning needs it is seeking to address and to support them in ways necessary for their success.

6.1.3 Courses

A course is the property of the institution, which then bears the responsibility to assure that expectations of the course are met and that student achievement in the courses meets stated expectations. A course usually fits within a program and must be evaluated to ensure that it contributes to meeting the program learning outcomes in a planned way.

6.1.4 Shared, Joint or Franchised Programs

An institution delivering a shared, joint or franchised program and issuing the qualification is ultimately responsible for the design and development of such a program and all the resources and services associated with the program's delivery.

6.1.5 Programs at International Sites

A program offered in a location outside of Saudi Arabia should, if it is to be accredited by the Center, meet all the accreditation requirements set by the Center, as well as any requirements set by the local quality and/or accrediting authority where it is located.

6.2 Responsiveness to Educational Diversity

The Center recognizes that flexibility in organizational arrangements is necessary to meet diverse community needs and respond to differing missions. Moreover, diversity is also essential if creativity and innovation are to be encouraged and improvements are to develop over time. Therefore, specific requirements for meeting the Center's standards may vary for different types of institutions, such as research, teaching or applied institutions. However, while there are essential differences in expectations for some indicators, the quality of learning expected for academic awards does not vary. The Center requires consistent student achievement standards no matter what institution students attend, how their programs are organized, and where the educational process occurs. Moreover, the Center expects that its processes are consistently implemented and followed by all institutions and programs.

6.3 Commitment to Continuous Quality Improvement

Relationships of trust and support are essential within institutions, between institutions/programs and the NCAAA, and between institutions/programs and the reviewers with whom they work. Willingness to acknowledge areas that need improvement and working to address them is considered strength, not a weakness. It must be possible for individuals, for groups within institutions, and for institutions as a whole, to acknowledge difficulties and discuss plans for overcoming them with transparency. Attempting to conceal problems is a serious weakness.

The primary objective of the Center's system for accreditation and quality assurance is continuous improvement. The system is based on the fundamental assumption that institutions wish to operate with high and increasing levels of quality, comparable to, and wherever possible, exceeding international standards. The most important function of the Center is to assist institutions in achieving those improvements. This means that the style of interaction within an institution that is effectively working for quality improvement, and between the Center and the institution during external reviews should be characterized by cooperation, openness, transparency, sensitivity to mission and objectives, and constructive support in identifying and resolving difficulties.

6.4 Balancing Inputs and Outcomes in Quality Processes

The Center's academic accreditation standards continue to include historical considerations of quality based on inputs such as faculty qualifications, provision of equipment and facilities, and adequacy of resources. However, the overall emphasis of the standards

is the consideration of the evidence-based quality of educational outcomes and institutional performance of its other core functions. Compelling evidence should be provided by the program to prove the achievement of the discipline-specific key learning outcomes.

6.5 Primacy of Evidence

Institutional and Center conclusions about quality will be based as far as possible on directly observable evidence and use of related information providing additional indirect evidence rather than subjective judgments. Where interpretations are required, for example, where indicators provide indirect evidence of achievement of objectives, such interpretations should be independently verified.

6.6 Consistent Application of Standards

The Center values its responsibility of determining standards and indicators for academic accreditation, ensuring that those standards are applied consistently for all institutions and programs, regardless of the type of institution/program (public, private for-profit, private not-for-profit) and regardless of the region in Saudi Arabia. The Center achieves consistent application of its standards for accreditation through the following:

- 1) The academic accreditation standards, methodology, relevant policies, procedures, and templates are explained in detail and made available for all institutions and programs on the NCAAA website;
- 2) The selection of reviewers is conducted in accordance with declared criteria that guarantee they are qualified and competent;
- 3) The training and orientation of reviewers is provided to ensure a unified and objective review process. They are provided with guidelines for the review process and professional conduct that ensure an objective and consistent review process;
- 4) The avoidance of conflict of interests is ensured through a declaration of no conflict of interest;
- 5) A template for the external Review Panel Report is provided to ensure that the reviewers address all standards and indicators of accreditation in their review process and reporting;
- 6) The Accreditation Committee ensures that the NCAAA standards, policies, and procedures are consistently applied and interpreted for all institutions and programs under review; and
- 7) Regular meetings are conducted with NCAAA staff and consultants to ensure the consistency of implementation of NCAAA policies and procedures.

6.7 Engagement of Stakeholders

Stakeholders include students and graduates, teaching and supporting staff, employees, employers, providers of funds, members of the communities served by the institution, and any other groups with which the institution is involved. The stakeholders have a right to be involved in an institution's quality assurance system, and their perspectives should be considered for the system to be effective.

6.8 Transparency

The Center commits to transparency in all its policies, procedures, standards, processes, decisions, and actions. These are documented and publicly available. The rights of appeal and complaints are always available in clear and defined channels.

6.9 Commitment to Integrity

The Center makes every effort to keep its processes free of conflict of interest, objective, and fair. All participants involved in the accreditation and decision-making processes (including review panel members, accreditation committee members, academic accreditation council members, NCAAA assigned staff and observers) must sign documents that attest to an absence of conflict of interest. Moreover, the Center also expects all participants in its processes to maintain confidentiality about the process, thereby allowing the published reports, responses, and Center actions to speak for the process. The institution/program has the right to accept the nominated reviewers or declare any real or apparent conflict of interest. In its handbooks and guidelines, the Center provides specific guidance on conflict of interest and maintenance of confidentiality. The code of conduct and prohibition of undue influence are described below.

6.9.1 Code of Conduct

The Center adheres to a strict Code of Conduct for its staff members that requires them to act in a professional, ethical manner at all times while protecting the rights and well-being of the universities, colleges, organizations, and persons involved with the Center's quality assurance and accreditation processes. Staff members must be objective, fair, honest, diligent, and constructive in their dealings with these organizations or individuals. The staff members and review panels agree and sign a declaration supporting the requirements of the Code of Conduct. The most important aspects that must be adhered to include, but not limited to, the following:

- ◆ Commitment to the praiseworthy behavior, moral/etiquette and sayings.
- ◆ Respect the culture of the institution and its employees.
- ◆ Commitment to the review framework and not to evaluate the institution according to his/her previous experiences or outside the evaluation framework.

- ◆ Maintaining the privacy of the institution and its employees, and what is available to him/her to view during the review process and not using it for anything other than the purpose for which it was intended.
- ◆ Not notifying the institution or program of any impressions or recommendations made by members of the review team.

6.9.2 Prohibiting undue Influence

As part of the Center's integrity values, undue influence by the institution or program or its stakeholders, is prohibited. It is not acceptable for the higher education institution/program to exert any undue influence on the Review Panel, NCAAA staff, or Accreditation Committee concerning accreditation processes and decisions. Undue influence by the institution/program and/or its stakeholders may take several forms, including, but not limited to, the following:

- ◆ communication about the accreditation recommendation/decision with individual Review Panel, Accreditation Committee members, or Academic Accreditation Council members during the accreditation processes (except, of course, as a formal part of the site visit),
- ◆ explicit or implied threats made against the Review Panel, NCAAA staff, Accreditation Committee members, or Academic Accreditation Council members,
- ◆ explicit or implied promises of benefits to the Review Panel, NCAAA staff, Accreditation Committee members, or Academic Accreditation Council members, and
- ◆ gifts and overly generous hospitality.

In the event of undue influence occurring, it will be reported to the CEO of NCAAA. Excessive and proven undue influence may require the review process to be cancelled or the accreditation status to be withdrawn, and the institution/program will be required to apply for a new accreditation at its own expense, no sooner than one year. The accreditation status of this institution/program will be announced as non-accredited until issuing another accreditation status after review.

6.10 Independence of Decision Making

To ensure independence in accreditation decision-making, NCAAA strictly adheres to the following principles:

- 1) All accreditation visits must be conducted by an independent review panel, who must write a Review Panel Report at the end of each visit, including recommendations for quality improvement.

- 2) All accreditation recommendations and Review Panel Reports must be independently reviewed by the Accreditation Committee, and checked for consistency and adherence to the NCAAA policies, procedures, and standards.
- 3) The final accreditation decision is issued by the Accreditation Committee for institutional accreditation, and by the specialized Academic Accreditation Council for programmatic accreditation.
- 4) Institutions and programs have the right to appeal against accreditation decisions through an independent Grievance Committee, which reports to the ETEC's Board of Directors.
- 5) NCAAA staff serve in the following capacities:
 - ◆ To provide advice to applicants on the Center's requirements,
 - ◆ To review application materials to ensure that necessary information has been included, and seek further submissions or modifications when needed,
 - ◆ To facilitate a review for full and continuing accreditation, meet with the institution/program to establish arrangements and timelines, and provide assistance and advice during the period of preparation, and
 - ◆ To edit a draft report to ensure clarity and consistency, eliminate inadvertent errors, and make sure the report is in a form suitable for release.

6.11 Responsiveness to Complaints

The Center will accept complaints directly related to its work or to conditions that may raise questions about an institution's or program's continued compliance with the Center's Standards. It provides guidance in a separate complaints policy (Section 15). However, the Center will not intervene in the internal procedures of the institution or program or act to resolve grievances for the institution. Moreover, it assumes no responsibility for mediating grievances or disputes with students, faculty, professional staff, or other members of the institution.

6.12 Accreditation by Foreign Providers

The Center will not intervene in the autonomy or accountability of an institution or program; however, it does respond to requests for approval or concurrence from foreign providers to accredit programs within Saudi Arabia. The NCAAA typically will grant its approval if:

- 1) The institution/program is recognized and licensed by the Ministry of Education;
- 2) The institution is accredited by the NCAAA; and
- 3) The foreign accrediting body meets the following conditions:
 - ◆ it is licensed by ETEC-NCAAA or working under ETEC's regulations regarding foreign accreditation bodies.

- ◆ has verifiable governmental, national, or private not-for-profit recognition to accredit higher education programs within its home country;
- ◆ has standards that are consistent and do not conflict with the NCAAA Standards for Accreditation of Higher Education Programs;
- ◆ has the capacity to accredit substantially equivalent programs in Saudi Arabia;
- ◆ invites the NCAAA to place an observer on the accreditation team; and
- ◆ submits upon request by the Center an addendum to the accreditation review report that addresses the unique and special interests of the NCAAA.



7) ACADEMIC ACCREDITATION STANDARDS

The Center creates and promulgates standards for institutional and programmatic accreditation that are based on good practices in higher education throughout the world and adapted to meet the particular circumstances of higher education in Saudi Arabia. To gain or maintain accreditation with the Center, an institution/program must comply with the related standards and the Center's policies and procedures. They are used as the official reference in judging the quality. The Center provides the necessary guidance through multiple channels, including handbooks, manuals, and the website.

The following subsections describe the development and review of the academic accreditation standards, their types, characteristics, and periodical review.

7.1 | Development and Review of the Academic Accreditation Standards

NCAAA follows the "Standards Preparation Handbook" issued by ETEC General Administration of Standards, in the development and subsequent review and improvement of its standards and procedures. NCAAA standards, policies, processes and procedures are informed by multiple international quality assurance networks and professionals. The standards are developed and reviewed by an expert panel. In the review process, a comparative analysis of standards issued by international accrediting bodies is performed, and an expert panel of international and national experts is consulted, ensuring that the standards are comprehensive and sufficiently rigorous.

The NCAAA standards are similar to other quality assurance agencies' focus areas in terms of scope and content but give special attention to matters of particular importance in Saudi Arabia. The standards allow considerable flexibility in response to variations in mission and the characteristics of the students and communities served by the institution/program.

A pilot study on the implementation of the standards or the updated ones, including trial self-studies and self-evaluation scales of selected institutions and programs is to be carried out to evaluate the degree of difficulty of the standards. Input provided by institutions and programs on the Standards is considered by the NCAAA during its Standards review processes.



7.2 Types of Academic Accreditation Standards

The Center provides five types of academic accreditation standards and their as follows:

- ◆ Standards for Institutional Accreditation
- ◆ Standards for Program Accreditation
- ◆ Standards for Postgraduate Program Accreditation
- ◆ Standards for E-learning and Distance Education Accreditation
- ◆ Accreditation Standards for Centers and Programs of Arabic Language for Non-Native Speakers.

The details and process of these academic accreditation standards are published immediately on the Center's website after they are approved by the Board of Directors.

7.3 Characteristics of Academic Accreditation Standards

7.3.1 Consistency with Requirements of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) of Saudi Arabia and Key Learning Outcomes

The Center's standards—but particularly the standard on teaching and learning—are created on the foundation of the National Qualifications Framework for Saudi Arabia, in which national definitions are provided for degree titles, required numbers of credits, and learning outcomes for areas of learning appropriate for levels of credentials awarded in Saudi Arabia, as well as discipline-specific Key Learning Outcomes (subject benchmark statements) for the discipline. Institutional/Programmatic self-study and the review panel evaluation must affirm that the expectations of the National Qualifications Framework for Saudi Arabia and the Key Learning Outcomes are achieved by the students.

7.3.2 Role of Mission

The institution's mission, together with the goals and objectives derived from it, are for the institution to determine. However, the Center's standards require that the mission be appropriate for an institution of its kind and circumstances and that its fulfillment is consistent with generally accepted standards of performance in higher education.

7.3.3 Evidence-Based Evaluation

The NCAAA expects that institutions and programs will provide sound and sufficient evidence to show that they meet the Center's Standards.

7.3.4 Required Benchmarking

The judgments by an institution/program and the Center about quality and meeting of standards are not just about whether a resource is available, a process is followed, or an outcome is achieved, but more importantly about how

good these are compared with standards of performance at relevant quality institutions of a similar kind either national or internationally. These benchmarks should be used by institutions and programs in setting performance targets as part of continuous improvement process.

Institutions and programs should pay attention in selecting appropriate and reasonable comparisons for benchmarking to ensure relevance and impact of continuous improvement. It is valuable for institutions and programs to conduct benchmarking with the national average of KPIs published by NCAAA.

7.4 Periodical Review of the Academic Accreditation Standards

The Center maintains a comprehensive, systematic, and inclusive policy for review of the Standards, demonstrating that they are appropriate for evaluating the quality of the education provided by the institutions/programs it accredits and that they are relevant to students' needs. The Center reviews each of the standards individually and the standards as a whole at least once every five years, reaffirming the relevant standards, and seeking institutional comment on those for which NCAAA or stakeholders propose significant changes. If the Center determines that it needs to make changes to its standards during this review, the Center will initiate action within 12 months.

The qualifications, credentials, and experience of the individuals participating in the development and review of the standards include, but are not limited to

- ◆ High level experience in quality assurance systems for higher education institutions and programs;
- ◆ Experience in devising, developing, and reviewing academic standards for higher education institutions/programs; and
- ◆ Experience in managing quality assurance processes in an educational environment.

The team follows the "Standards Preparation Handbook" issued by the Administration of Standards at ETEC. Such revisions to the standards are undertaken with appropriate notice to the institutions and other relevant constituencies. A grace period of at least one year will be allowed before the new standards become effective for new applications. NCAAA provides an opportunity to comment on any proposed changes and takes into account relevant comments. Revisions, amendments, or deletions will be approved through the Board of Directors and made publicly available.



8) INDEPENDENT REVIEWERS FOR ACADEMIC ACCREDITATION

The Center uses various independent review panels to conduct the review consistently and in accordance with NCAAA policies and procedures, which results in providing a professional recommendation for an accreditation decision. Nevertheless, the final accreditation decisions are made solely by the Accreditation Committee or the specialized Academic Accreditation Council to assure the Center adherence to its published policies and procedures.

NCAAA uses independent external review processes for verification of conclusions from self-studies and evaluations of performance. To ensure the validity and reliability of the external reviews, the NCAAA will:

- ◆ appoint reviewers and review panels that have qualifications and experience that are adequate and appropriate for the institution or program being reviewed,
- ◆ provide training and/or detailed briefing as appropriate on the particular expectations and requirements for the reviews undertaken,
- ◆ ensure that conflicts of interest do not exist for reviewers through a relationship with an institution or program being reviewed,
- ◆ ensure that external review panels act independently when making judgments, conclusions, or recommendations to the NCAAA,
- ◆ select reviewers who have effective oral and written communication, teamwork, professional and interpersonal skills, and adhere to the NCAAA Code of Conduct, and
- ◆ ensure the commitment to effective quality management practices and continuous quality improvement.

NCAAA Review Panel Chairs are recognized for leadership, experience, currency in quality assurance, and experience with NCAAA policies, standards and review process. The Chair has a crucial role in driving the NCAAA review process, ensuring that all relevant issues are included and discussed. The Review Panel Chair must be familiar with NCAAA standards, relevant documents, audit requirements, and possible accreditation actions.

All Review Panel members are evaluated by the institution's officials and NCAAA at the end of each review. In addition, each member of the review panel will complete a form for the evaluation of the Chair; furthermore, the Chair will evaluate each member's performance. The evaluation will be used to enhance the selection of review panels and improve the quality of the site visit. An unsatisfactory performance by a reviewer will result in the reviewer being excluded from the database.

In its "Review Panel Handbook", the Center provides specification on its expectations of external reviewers.



9) ACCREDITATION PHASE 1: APPLICATION PHASE

The NCAAA aims to contribute to the enhancement of quality and excellence in higher education institutions and programs through academic accreditation and evaluation. To make the accreditation process and procedures practical and effective, the Center applies the following phases: application phase, review phase, and accreditation decision phase. The policies related to these phases will be discussed in this section and the following two sections.

The institution or program seeking accreditation review signs a service contract with NCAAA. The information provided in the signed contract is the official means of communication regarding all issues related to accreditation, and any change(s) in contact information either by the Center or institution / program without notifying the second party in an official way shall not be considered. Personal communication and by any means other than the official methods mentioned in the contract shall not be considered. Any substantive changes, such as change in program title, program specification, program learning outcomes, subsequent to signed contract that will affect the evaluation of the institution or program will not be considered, and may result in contract termination. Failure to comply with the contract specially the time frame and document delivery will lead to its cancellation, and the institution and program will bear the financial legal consequences.

9.1 Eligibility

The Center sets specific requirements that an institution/program must meet for Center consideration.

9.1.1 Eligibility Requirements

As basic requirements, the Center accepts the application of an institution or program for accreditation only if it is officially licensed and has graduated at least one cohort of graduates. Other eligibility requirements are published on the Center's website.

The institution or program seeking accreditation with the Center submits the required documentation, including self-study report, as specified in the Accreditation Handbook.

The Center conducts a preliminary check of the submitted documentation to ensure adequacy of information and that the institution/program is fulfilling the eligibility requirements. This will help the Center to proceed with conducting the review. The eligibility report does not indicate that the institution/program has achieved the targeted compliance of all the standards, and it has no



correlation or impact on the final accreditation decision.

The institution/program retains the right to withdraw from the accreditation processes if the institution/program has not submitted the necessary documents yet, the date of the site visit has not been established, and the formulation of the review panel has not been determined. The institution/program bears the financial consequences in case of withdrawal.

9.1.2 Required Information and Required Formats

The institution/program should submit the core documents in the Center's provided templates. The Center provides guidance on how to complete these templates.

9.1.3 Operating within Licensed Scope and Title

The Center does not consider institutions or programs that offer programs outside of the Ministry of Education's approved scope of activities. It also does not consider an institution or program if it is using a title that misrepresents its license.

9.1.4 Partnership in Academic Programs

A Saudi Arabian institution may offer a course or program developed in another institution nationally or internationally under licensing, franchising, or other contractual arrangements. As a prerequisite for seeking NCAAA accreditation, such a program must be officially licensed by the appropriate authority in its home country.

9.1.5 For Cross-Border Education

An international institution may establish an organization in Saudi Arabia to operate a branch campus or campuses. As a prerequisite to seeking institutional or programmatic accreditation by NCAAA, an international institution should be officially licensed in Saudi Arabia by the relevant authority and must follow the national accreditation requirements and standards.

9.1.6 Center's Right Regarding Submitted Institution/Program Reports

The Center has the right to share institution and program reports submitted to the Center, to the entities engaged in monitoring the Center's accreditation processes and evaluating its performance, such as international quality commissions and networks. The entities do not participate in evaluating the institution's/program's performance.

10.1.7 Main Campus and Branches

Accreditation of branches of institutions and programs is subject to the following policies and controls:

- ◆ The accreditation decision covers the main campus and branches mentioned in the accreditation contract that were included in the review process, and this does not apply to branches that did not enter into the review

process. In the event that the institution or program desires to accredit branches affiliated with it, this will be with additional fees and can be part of a basic review process, or it can be an independent review process, and the accreditation decision is issued in the name of the branch subject to evaluation.

- ◆ Branches wishing to apply for institutional accreditation which were not included in the evaluation processes during the accreditation of the parent institution (main campus), may submit an independent application. It is not permissible to submit a branch for institutional accreditation without the main campus of the university having obtained the institutional accreditation. The university has the right to add an accreditation request for one of its branches when there is a valid institutional accreditation contract with additional fees.
- ◆ At the program level in the branches, programs that are offered with standard specifications, and are managed by a single entity, are considered as a single program offered in several locations. This must be indicated in the accreditation contract, with the addition of the fees for reviewing each branch separately. As for the programs that are offered with different specifications, or a different qualification, even if they are offered at the same campus/branch, they are treated as independent programs. Programs affiliated with branches that have not been subject to institutional evaluation are not entitled to apply for program accreditation unless the branch submitted to the program undergoes evaluation according to institutional accreditation standards.

9.2 Conducting Self-Study

9.2.1 The Process of Self-Study

Self-study is a periodic, systematic process used by an institution or program through which the scope of the evaluation is comprehensive and deals with the institution or program in all areas of academic accreditation standards, including facilities, equipment, finances, all services and administrative processes, the effectiveness of the teaching and learning, and all quality assurance processes.

Institutions/programs conduct self-study processes as required by the Center to complete their applications. After achieving institutional or program accreditation from the Center, most institutions and programs follow a seven-year or five-year schedule, respectively, for their self-study processes, coordinating them with their NCAAA review.

Institutional and program self-study processes engage the cooperation of all members of the faculty, other staff, and students. Coordinated by a senior member of the staff in conjunction with a planning or steering committee,

the process follows an evaluation strategy appropriate to the institution/program and following guidelines provided by the Center. In a thorough self-study process, each unit should contribute an objective evaluation of existing performance as measured over time and against its stated goals and objectives. The Center identifies other documents and evaluation tools as necessary for robust self-evaluation, which are listed below.

9.2.2 Self-Evaluation Scales

The Center creates Self-Evaluation Scales for institutions/programs and expects institutions and programs to use these in their self-study processes. These tools should be made available to the external review team. The information about current levels of performance provides a benchmark against which future improvements can be assessed.

9.2.3 Program, Course, and Field Experience Specifications and Reports

The Center provides templates for program, course, and field experience specifications and reports that the institution and its programs complete to help the faculty and administration assure consistency across the institution, integration of all academic endeavors into the institution's quality assurance processes, and appropriate evaluation against the National Qualifications Framework for Saudi Arabia.

9.2.4 Independent Review

The Center requires institutions/programs to use independent advice on aspects of the matters considered, to verify the accuracy and objectivity of evaluation, and to verify conclusions about the evidence through independent opinions. The processes of doing this should be documented, and the report of the independent evaluator should be attached to the self-study report.

9.2.5 Self-Study Report

The Center provides in its Accreditation Handbook all specifications regarding the structure of the Self-Study reports for institutional and program accreditation. The Self-Study report should provide a coherent presentation to support the claim that the institution/program deserves the status it is seeking from the Center. For programs, the self-study report should include relevant professional requirements, such as the discipline-specific key learning outcomes, if deemed necessary by the relevant Academic Accreditation Council responsible for making the accreditation decision for the program's discipline. It should conclude with an action plan for achieving further improvements and overcoming weaknesses or problems that have been identified. The action plan should specify the actions to be taken, indicate where responsibility should lie to take each action, the resources needed, and indicate timelines for implementation.



10) ACCREDITATION PHASE 2: REVIEW PHASE

10.1 Before the Site Visit

Prior to the review visit, the NCAAA Supervisory Committee completes the formation and approval of the final list of the independent panel of reviewers. The Supervisory Committee is an internal committee within NCAAA responsible for monitoring and supervising the accreditation processes including the reviewers' assignment, review panel formation, approving the forms, templates, and guidance handbooks. The Committee consists of representatives of various NCAAA departments to ensure transparency and consistency in all procedures.

The number of reviewers varies according to the size of the institution or program, and the number of branches or locations, with a minimum of 3 members including the Chair in case of programmatic accreditation and a minimum of 4 members including the Chair for institutional accreditation. Review visits last 3-4 days for program accreditation, and 4-5 days for institutional accreditation, according to the size and number of locations of the institution or program.

The review visit can be on-site, online or hybrid, and this should be arranged and coordinated with all the involved parties, including the institution or program and the review panel team. The NCAAA prepares and approves the visit schedule in coordination with the Review Panel Chair and the institution or program. A meeting is held with the institution's/ program's officials and other concerned parties to prepare and ensure the institution's/ program's readiness for hosting the review panel.

The underlying policies and principles are the same regardless of the site visit mode; however, the following additional policies and procedures are applied in online or hybrid visits for quality and reliability considerations.

- ◆ All interviews are to be held online according to the agreed-upon review schedule using appropriate communication software and platforms.
- ◆ Institutions/programs must ensure the system has the ability to store digital documents that can be made accessible upon request.
- ◆ All online meetings must permit interactive and engaged participation by all constituencies.
- ◆ Additional evidence may be requested and uploaded.
- ◆ An on-site visit by one review member can be conducted if deemed necessary by the Review Panel Chair.



10.2 During the Site Visit

During the visit, the review panel conducts interviews with all institutional constituencies, undertakes an onsite or online campus tour of facilities and equipment, and examines more documents according to the schedule set for the visit. The Review Panel Chair is fully responsible for the review process.

In its “Handbook for Review Panels”, the Center defines the good practices it expects a Review Panel to follow, including but not limited to

- ◆ conducting meaningful interviews,
- ◆ obtaining evidence from different perspectives,
- ◆ examining selected issues in depth,
- ◆ weighing inputs, processes, and outcomes,
- ◆ checking institutional standards of learning outcomes,
- ◆ testing and verifying evidence against the Center’s standards,
- ◆ judging teaching effectiveness,
- ◆ meeting with students and teaching staff, and
- ◆ examining the quality management system.

The Center recognizes the need to allow for coordination of institutional/program accreditation processes. While the focus of program reviews will be on individual programs, arrangements may be made for considering groups of related programs simultaneously. Wherever possible, the timing of the external program and institutional reviews will be coordinated. In addition, if evaluations are conducted concurrently, the Center will make provision for consultation and exchanges of information among review panels.

Each Academic Accreditation Council might require additional professional discipline-specific requirements for Review Panel Reports of their disciplines’ programs. Reviewers are required to comply with these additional requirements, if any. The Guidelines explains the various steps from the first draft to the final Review Panel Report.

In the virtual site visit of the facilities and equipment, first, the institution pre-records a facility tour and uploads it on the assigned institutional portal. The facility tour may include but not limited to samples of offices, classrooms, laboratories, medical teaching labs, research centers, computer facilities, library, teaching facilities, praying, study, recreational, and sports areas, ground, medical service, cafeteria, and student centers (clubs), for male and female sections and predetermined branches if any. Second, an arrangement is made for an online virtual tour (a live walking tour that is to augment the pre-recorded tour) based on the advice of the panel chair about the specific locations that worth looking at for more inspections and according to the review schedule.

10.3 After the Site Visit

10.3.1 Accreditation Processes Evaluation

Immediately after the visit, NCAAA sends visit evaluation questionnaires to the institution/program, staff, students, and reviewers for their evaluation on the conduct of all accreditation processes and areas for improvement. The Supervisory Committee uses the results of these evaluations to suggest improvement plans for the accreditation processes.

10.3.2 Review Panel Report

The chair of the review team is obligated to submit the initial draft to the accreditation consultant after the end of the review, and the chair is responsible for reviewing the report and preparing it in its final form within two weeks of the end of the visit.

The role of the accreditation consultant is limited to reviewing the final draft to ensure its compliance with the Centre's requirements.

The center guarantees the institution's right to review any errors in the facts that may appear in the report, with the right to accept or reject the recommendations of the review team and to provide justification for the refusal, if any, and accepting the institution's refusal or not is the prerogative of the team chair.



11) ACCREDITATION PHASE 3: ACCREDITATION DECISION PHASE

The following subsections discuss the accreditation decision-making, the types of accreditation decisions, the validity of accreditation, the announcement of accreditation decisions, and the disclosure of accreditation status.

11.1 Accreditation Decision Making

The governance model of the Accreditation Committee is described in Section 6, including the role of the Accreditation Committee, the role of the specialized Academic Accreditation Councils, and the Accreditation decision-making process.

11.2 Types of Accreditation Decisions

The accreditation decision can be one of the following based on institution/program evaluation:

11.2.1 Full Accreditation

This status level indicates that the institution/program has successfully demonstrated that it is in full or substantial compliance with all NCAAA academic accreditation standards for institutions/programs.

Full accreditation for institutions is for seven years, while full accreditation for programs is for five years. However, the Center may, at its discretion, require an external review at an earlier time as indicated in Section 13, "Activities after the accreditation decision".

11.2.2 Conditional Accreditation

Conditional accreditation status indicates a need for significant and immediate action for improvement in order to be fully compliant with the Standards, particularly in one of the following cases:

- 1) If any of the essential indicators for the standard of Teaching and Learning, is rated minimal compliance;
- 2) If more than 50% of the essential indicators in any standard other than Teaching and Learning standard is rated minimal compliance; or
- 3) If one standard or sub-standard is rated minimal compliance, with maximum of two standards being minimal compliance.
- 4)

Conditional accreditation period, whether of an institution or a program, is for maximum of two years. However, the Center may, at its discretion, require an external review at an earlier time as will be indicated in Section 13, "Activities after the accreditation decision".

11.2.3 Denial of Accreditation

There are two cases for denial of accreditation:

- 1) If one standard is rated non-compliance (50% of the indicators of the standard are rated non-compliance, including the essential indicators); or
- 2) If three of the standards each is rated minimal compliance.

11.2.4 Withdrawal of Accreditation

The Center will withdraw the granted accreditation status, based on the decision of the Accreditation Committee for institutional decisions and specialized Academic Accreditation Council for programmatic decision, in one or more of the following cases:

- 1) If an institution/program fails to meet the specified conditions within the time specified in Conditional Accreditation. This action will be taken if the Center concludes that the non-compliance is sufficiently serious and/or it has concerns about the adequacy of the response or concerns about the institution's capacity to make the required improvements to sustain the quality of education in the longer term;
- 2) If the institution/program has made substantive changes in its activities, purpose, and/or license without notifying the Center, or if the notified changes have negative consequences on the level of quality of performances;
- 3) If the performance of the accredited institution/program has significantly changed in a manner that affects the quality of its activities and the level of compliance with the standards;
- 4) If the institution/program has not sent required follow-up reports in the predetermined time.

11.2.4 Withdrawal of Accreditation

The Center will cancel the granted accreditation in one of the following cases:

- 1) If the data or documents submitted by the institution/program to obtain the accreditation certificate proved to be untrue;
- 2) If there is evidence that the institution/program has obtained accreditation through fraud; or
- 3) If an institution or its programs has misrepresented its accredited status.

In such cases, the Center will revoke the accreditation and notify official entities, including the Ministry of Education.

11.2.6 Amending Accreditation from an Accredited College to an Accredited University

The nature and scope of an academic institution are defined in its legal license and in formal statements of mission and goals prepared by the institution. The accreditation of an institution is in part an affirmation that the institution has established policies, processes, and procedures under which its purposes can be realized and appears in fact to be accomplishing those purposes. The accreditation of an institution applies to those units and activities reviewed at the time of evaluation and included in the institutional self-study report which is a part of each accreditation process required by the Center.

Changing the status of an accredited college to a university is considered high-impact, high-risk changes that significantly affect the nature of the institution, its mission and goals, its academic colleges and programs, and the allocation of its resources. Such substantive changes initiated subsequent to the most recent evaluation are not automatically included in the institution's accreditation and must be subjected to accreditation review by the Center. The Center must be assured that this "substantive change" does not affect continued compliance with the NCAAA Standards for Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions.

After obtaining the Council of Ministers' approval for University status, the institution, requesting institutional accreditation to be extended to cover the new status, prepares an update on its implementation of the change, addressing the following standards: Mission, Vision, and Strategic Planning, Governance, Leadership, and Management, Teaching and Learning, Faculty and Staff, Institutional Resources, and Research and Innovation. A small review panel visits the institution to validate the information provided in the update, evaluate the institution's success in implementing the substantive change, and report its findings and accreditation recommendations to the Center. The Accreditation Committee considers the institutional update, the Review Panel Report and the confidential recommendation, and the institution's response to the panel report and takes decision.

11.3 Validity of Accreditation

At the institutional level, full accreditation is valid for seven years and conditional accreditation is valid for up to two years. At the programmatic level, full accreditation is valid for five years and conditional accreditation is valid for up to two years.

Institutions/programs must apply for re-accreditation before the validity period expires. All institutions applying for re-accreditation must undergo a full accreditation review.

11.4 Announcement of Accreditation Decisions

The Center commits to provide its final review report when it informs the institution/program of the details of the accreditation decision, including NCAAA action and any necessary follow-up through a notification letter signed by the NCAAA Chief Executive Officer.

11.5 Disclosure of Accreditation Status

Accredited institutions and programs are not allowed to use the ETEC's Logo in their publications or transactions, and only the accreditation stamp can be used in official institutional and programmatic documents.

The institutions or programs do not have the right to publish parts or statements of the accreditation report issued by NCAAA. If the institution's internal policy is to release any official document, the accreditation report must be published as a full report.

If accreditation is withdrawn, all statements or claims of accreditation by NCAAA must be removed from promotional and other material as soon as is reasonably practicable, and institutions/programs must immediately refrain from representing themselves as NCAAA accredited.

Institutions/Programs granted NCAAA accreditation may disclose their accredited status in informational or marketing publications, media releases, websites, and other electronic or printed media, using the following statement approved by the NCAAA

For an Institution

"The (institution name) (Branch/es) is fully/conditionally accredited by the National Center for Academic Accreditation and Evaluation (NCAAA) at the Education & Training Evaluation Commission for the period (...) to (...) and agrees to uphold NCAAA Standards for Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions. The NCAAA is the independent body for the accreditation of higher education institutions and programs in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia."

For a Program

"The (Program name) in the College of (College name) at (Institution name) (Branch/es) is fully/conditionally accredited by the National Center for Academic Accreditation and Evaluation (NCAAA) at the Education & Training Evaluation Commission for the period (...) to (...) and agrees to uphold the NCAAA Standards for Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Higher Education Programs. The NCAAA is the independent body for the accreditation of higher education institutions and programs in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia."

An institution or a program may be accredited by an international organization outside Saudi Arabia, but not by the NCAAA in Saudi Arabia. To protect the community from possible misrepresentation about the quality of an institution or program, reference to that accreditation can only be made in descriptive information or promotional literature if the following two conditions are met:

- 1) Any reference to accreditation by another agency must clearly indicate the organization from which accreditation has been obtained. It must not say simply that it is or has been accredited, which could imply that accreditation has been granted by the official accrediting body in Saudi Arabia (the NCAAA);
- 2) The accrediting body must be one that is legally operating in the country where it is established, and is licensed by ETEC to conduct business in Saudi Arabia.



12) ACTIVITIES AFTER THE ACCREDITATION DECISION

Since academic accreditation aims to ensure quality and continuous improvement, and strive for excellence, the quality assurance activities of institutions and programs do not stop when the accreditation decision is issued. The link between the accredited institutions and programs, and the Center continues through a number of activities governed by the following policies:

NCAAA has the authority to seek further information for monitoring and conduct follow-up visits whenever there is a reason to suspect that the accredited institution/program may have lost compliance with the standards or upon the request of the Accreditation Councils or the Accreditation Committee for reasons such as complaints, public concerns, or declining annual performance as indicated by KPIs.

12.1 All Accredited Institutions/Programs

The institution/program must prepare and provide NCAAA with an action plan in response to the recommendations. NCAAA will monitor the implementation of the action plan, through the periodic follow-up reports.

All accredited institutions/programs are required to submit an annual institution/program profile and key performance indicators (KPIs). The requested documents must be sent to the Center by the end of each academic year and no later than December. This information will be used to check the trend of KPIs values, as well as any decline in performance and any substantial change. If there are serious issues that might affect the accreditation status, the Supervisory Committee will escalate the issue to the Accreditation Committee for institutional accreditation, and the specialized Academic Accreditation Council for program accreditation.

In addition, after two to four years from the date of the institutional/program accreditation decision, the institution/program submits a follow-up report on the progress made on the matters it had agreed to address in its response to the Center's final action and report. The Center provides it with feedback on what is stated in the reports based on the results of the examination of reports and monitoring of actions taken. The Center has the right to visit the institution/program. Failing to submit the follow-up report and documents in the specified time will result in a warning to withdraw the accreditation. If the institution or program does not provide a follow-up report within 60 days of the warning, the accreditation will be withdrawn.



Should NCAAA decide to withdraw, deny, or choose to not re-accredit an institution for any reason, then the accredited programs within that institution will retain their accreditation status. However, if the reason is related to academic quality such as teaching and learning, then the status of the programs' accreditation will be reconsidered.

For full-accredited institutions/programs, unless there are serious problems, failure to fully implement all the recommendations may not result in accreditation withdrawal. However, the extent to which action is taken will be considered in the next institution/program accreditation review.

12.2 Conditionally Accredited Institutions/Programs

The institution/program can submit, not before six months from the date of accreditation decision and not less than six months of the date of accreditation expiration, a request supported by evidence to remove the conditions. The conditionally accredited institution/program is allowed to submit the request for removing the condition(s) only once. Failing to apply within this time will never result in extending the accreditation status. Upon a new application of a previously conditionally accredited institution/program, failing to resolve the original condition(s) will result in denial of accreditation.

A further review will be conducted to determine whether the conditions have been resolved. If all conditions have been satisfactorily resolved, full accreditation will be granted, and the period of accreditation will be extended to the date of the next comprehensive review cycle. The combined period of conditional accreditation and the extension, if granted, will not exceed seven years for institutional accreditation and five years for program accreditation.

If the conditions have not been resolved, the institution/program shall complete the accreditation period previously granted, unless it is concluded, through the Accreditation Committee/Councils that the non-compliance is sufficiently serious and/or it has concerns about the adequacy of the response or concerns about the institution's/program's capacity to make the required improvements to sustain the quality of education in the longer term. In such cases, NCAAA will request a comprehensive review at the expense of the institution/program.

12.3 Denial of Accreditation

If accreditation is denied for the first time the institution/program applies, it would normally not be accepted for reconsideration for accreditation for at least one year. This is to allow sufficient time for problems to be addressed and necessary changes implemented. This period of time may be reduced by the Center, at its discretion, if it believes special circumstances exist. The comments and recommendations made by the Review Panel should provide clear indications of what would be required for accreditation to be achieved and the Center will provide additional advice and support to the institution as required. In addition, the Ministry of Education will be notified.

If a currently accredited institution/program does not meet accreditation standards on a subsequent review (i.e., denial of accreditation), the accreditation of the program will be withdrawn. The consequence is that the institution/program is no longer accredited and must re-apply for accreditation after a minimum of one year.

12.4 Substantive Institutional or Program Changes

The Center recognizes that adjustments will be required in programs, courses, and institutional activities from time to time in response to changing circumstances. However, a substantive change may affect the accreditation status of an institution and its programs. The Center must be given the opportunity to determine whether an anticipated change constitutes a substantive change and therefore has implications for accreditation.

12.4.1 Definition of a Substantive Change

For an accredited institution, a substantive change is any change that requires a modification of the license granted by the Ministry of Education. It may also include relocation to new premises, use of additional premises, and any change related to changing of ownership.

For an accredited program, a substantive change is any change that significantly affects the learning outcomes, structure, organization, or delivery of a program or the basis for its accreditation.

12.4.2 Notification to the Center

The Center should be notified at least one full semester before any substantive change is introduced to an existing institution or program. The notification of planned initiation of a new program should be submitted nine months before the proposed first enrollment of students.

Therefore, for institutional accreditation to be extended to cover the new scope of activities, the institution must submit the proposed change to the Center for its review concurrently with the request to modify its license. The Center may conduct a review to check that its quality assurance requirements will continue to be met.

12.4.3 Failure to Notify the Center

If a substantive change is made without the Center being informed, at least one full semester in advance, the program's accreditation will lapse. The consequence is that the program is no longer accredited and must re-submit a new application for accreditation.



13) APPEALS

The following subsections discuss the filing of an appeal, the acceptable grounds for, and the Appeals Committee.

13.1 Filing an Appeal

An appeal may be made by an institution or program against an adverse accreditation decision made by the accreditation committee or one of the accreditation councils. This appeal policy is to be applied on all types of adverse accrediting actions, including denial of accreditation or re-accreditation, denial of removing condition(s), withdrawing accreditation, and denial of amending accreditation from an accredited college to an accredited university. The accreditation status of the institution or program shall not change until all procedural processes of the appeal process have been exhausted or terminated.

The institution/program submits an appeal to ETEC President within 60 days of receipt of the accreditation decision's written notification. The appeal must specify the basis on which the appeal is made and must cite evidence supporting its appeal. The appeal fee must accompany the letter of appeal. The appeal fee is refundable if the accreditation decision is changed.

The ETEC President, within 30 days of receipt of the appeal request, will consider the submission, and if he/she believes based on provided evidence that there are reasonable grounds for considering the grievance, he/she will forward the request to the Appeals Committee.

13.2 Acceptable Grounds for Appeals

An appeal must be based on the evidence available to the review panel and NCAAA at the time of the visit, and it must not refer to facts or conditions that were not presented to the review panel at the time of the visit or before that.

The grounds of appeal include:

- 1) substantive errors of fact or observation during a site visit;
- 2) misinterpretations of the evidence provided in a self-study report or in a report requesting removing the condition(s);
- 3) failure of a Review Panel or External Reviewers to follow the NCAAA's published standards, policies and procedures that are sufficiently serious to undermine the validity of the evaluation;

- 4) significant errors in which the NCAAA staff or persons it appoints handled the procedures published in the NCAAA Accreditation Handbook.

13.3 Appeals Committee

The Grievance Committee is formulated by ETEC's Board of Directors. The Committee reports to ETEC's Board of Directors and consists of at least five members who must not have any conflict of interest with the appeal request. The Committee will limit its review to the matters identified by the institution/program in its appeal and to the evidence that was available to the review panel, NCAAA, Accreditation Committee, and/or Academic Accreditation Council.

The Appeals Committee shall select the Appeal Panel members from among experienced peer reviewers. The Appeal Panel shall consist of three members and shall be comprised of Peer Reviewers who are academic and administrative representatives of member institutions. A peer reviewer is disqualified from serving on an Appeal Panel if she or he has a real or apparent conflict of interest, participated in any way in the process leading to the action being appealed, or has had any prior employment relationship with the Appellant. No individual currently serving on the Commission may serve as a member of the Appeal Panel.

The Appeal Panel will submit its report on the matter to the Grievance Committee within 60 days.

- 1) Appeals Committee's possible actions are:
- 2) rejecting the grievance if the institution's appeal documentation does not undermine the validity of the accreditation decision, or
- 3) identifying serious matters that deserve an independent re-evaluation of the institution/program affected by the grievance and formulating an independent team to undertake the re-evaluation that might include a site visit.

The Committee will make the final decision, and the accreditation status will be determined accordingly. The decision will be communicated to the ETEC President, NCAAA, the Accreditation Committee, the relevant Accreditation Council, and the institution/program. The decision will also be published on the website. The institution or program will not have the right to appeal for the second time.



14) COMPLAINTS

NCAAA seeks to maintain and enhance its professional performance and good reputation in providing quality assurance and accreditation services. NCAAA values complaints, as they assist it to improve its performance and assure its integrity.

NCAAA is committed to being responsive to the stakeholders' needs and concerns and resolving their complaints as quickly as possible. This complaints policy has been designed to guide different stakeholders on how NCAAA receives and handles complaints. The following subsections describe two categories of complaints: those against accredited institutions and programs and those against NCAAA.

14.1 Complaints against Accredited Institutions and Programs

NCAAA will investigate and act upon complaints from students, graduates, or other individuals or institutions regarding accredited institutions and programs concerning compliance with NCAAA academic accreditation standards. NCAAA acknowledges the right of educational institutions to read and comment on any complaints against them and pledges to protect the complainant's best interest. The Center would also consider withholding the identity of the complainant if he or she requests that it do so.

Complaints submitted to NCAAA against accredited institutions and programs are addressed as follows:

- 1) Complaints are submitted to the NCAAA CEO via regular correspondence, e-mail, fax, or handed in person to the CEO's office, supported by the relevant evidence available. Complaints have to be presented in a written form, and anonymous complaints are not considered.
- 2) By submitting the written complaint, the complainant authorizes NCAAA to release the complaint and any associated documents to the institution against which the complaint is submitted. NCAAA, however, retains the right to withhold the name of the complainant from the institution if it finds that revealing the complainant's identity may harm his/her interests.
- 3) The NCAAA CEO assigns the Supervisory Committee to study the subject of the complaint and its relevance to compliance/non-compliance to the academic accreditation standards. Only complaints that are related to potential non-compliance with one or more of the accreditation standards are considered.

- 4) If the complaint is found to be relevant to the institution's compliance, the NCAAA CEO sends a copy of the complaint to the institution's legal representative to reply within 14 days.
- 5) The NCAAA CEO forms an investigation committee constituted of the NCAAA's relevant General Manager of Accreditation, ETEC's legal representative, and two expert reviewers to study the complaint and the institution's reply. The investigation committee must present one of the following three recommendations to the CEO within seven days:
 - ◆ dismissal of the complaint, justified by reasons,
 - ◆ recommendation for more investigations, including a visit, if needed, or
 - ◆ recommendation for withdrawal of accreditation, justified by reasons.
- 6) In the case that a recommendation is a withdrawal of accreditation, or in the case that the results of additional investigation came with the same recommendation, the issue is forwarded to the Accreditation Committee or the relevant Accreditation Council to take the final decision, which will include one of the following options:
 - ◆ Approve the recommendation, i.e., withdrawing the accreditation
 - ◆ Issue a warning, or
 - ◆ Retain the accreditation status.
- 7) NCAAA notifies the complainant of the result of the investigations and the decision taken within a maximum of 45 days of the submission of the complaint, only if it implies complainant's rights.

14.2 Complaints against NCAAA

NCAAA provides professional, respectful, and timely service in all its interactions with stakeholders and is committed to adhering to its policies and procedures. However, the NCAAA recognizes that on occasions, services may fall short of expectations, and the conduct of an NCAAA member, staff, or representative might fall below expectations. In that respect, NCAAA will investigate and act upon complaints from the reviewed institutions and programs regarding non-adherence to the declared policies and procedures, breach of confidentiality, or any form of misconduct by members or representatives of the NCAAA.

NCAAA is committed to ensuring that all complaints against NCAAA are managed in a responsive, efficient, effective, and fair manner. Complainants will be treated with respect and will receive a professional level of service throughout the complaint management process.

Complaints submitted against NCAAA are addressed as follows:

- 1) Complaints are submitted formally in a written form and signed, to ETEC's President, supported by the relevant evidence.
- 2) ETEC's President refers the complaint to the CEO to study the subject of the com-

plaint and whether it can be considered as a violation of NCAAA policies and code of conduct. Only complaints that are related to potential misconduct are considered. If the complaint is against the CEO, the ETEC's President will assign a member of the Board of Directors to consider the subject.

- 3) By submitting the written complaint, the complainant authorizes NCAAA to release the complaint and any associated documents to the person against which the complaint is submitted.
- 4) Within 14 working days of receiving the complaint, NCAAA will inform the complainant whether his/her complaint falls within this policy's scope if it implies a complainant's rights.
- 5) If the complaint is found relevant to a breach in the code of conduct, ETEC's President forms an investigation committee to study the complaint and the person/administration's reply against which the complaint is made. The investigation committee may invite the complainant to a meeting to discuss the complaint in person.
- 6) After completing an investigation, the investigation committee responds in writing to confirm the investigation outcome and the reasons for either upholding or rejecting the complaint. If NCAAA has upheld a complaint and proposes a remedy, all individuals affected will be contacted to discuss this further. Remedies might include, but are not limited to
 - ◆ an official apology to the complainant,
 - ◆ disciplinary action against the employee,
 - ◆ disregarding all or part of the results of the review in question and conducting a partial or complete new review without extra fees,
 - ◆ removing the reviewer from NCAAA reviewers' database,
 - ◆ fining the person breaching the disclosure agreement, and/or
 - ◆ informing official entities.



15) SERVICE CHARGES

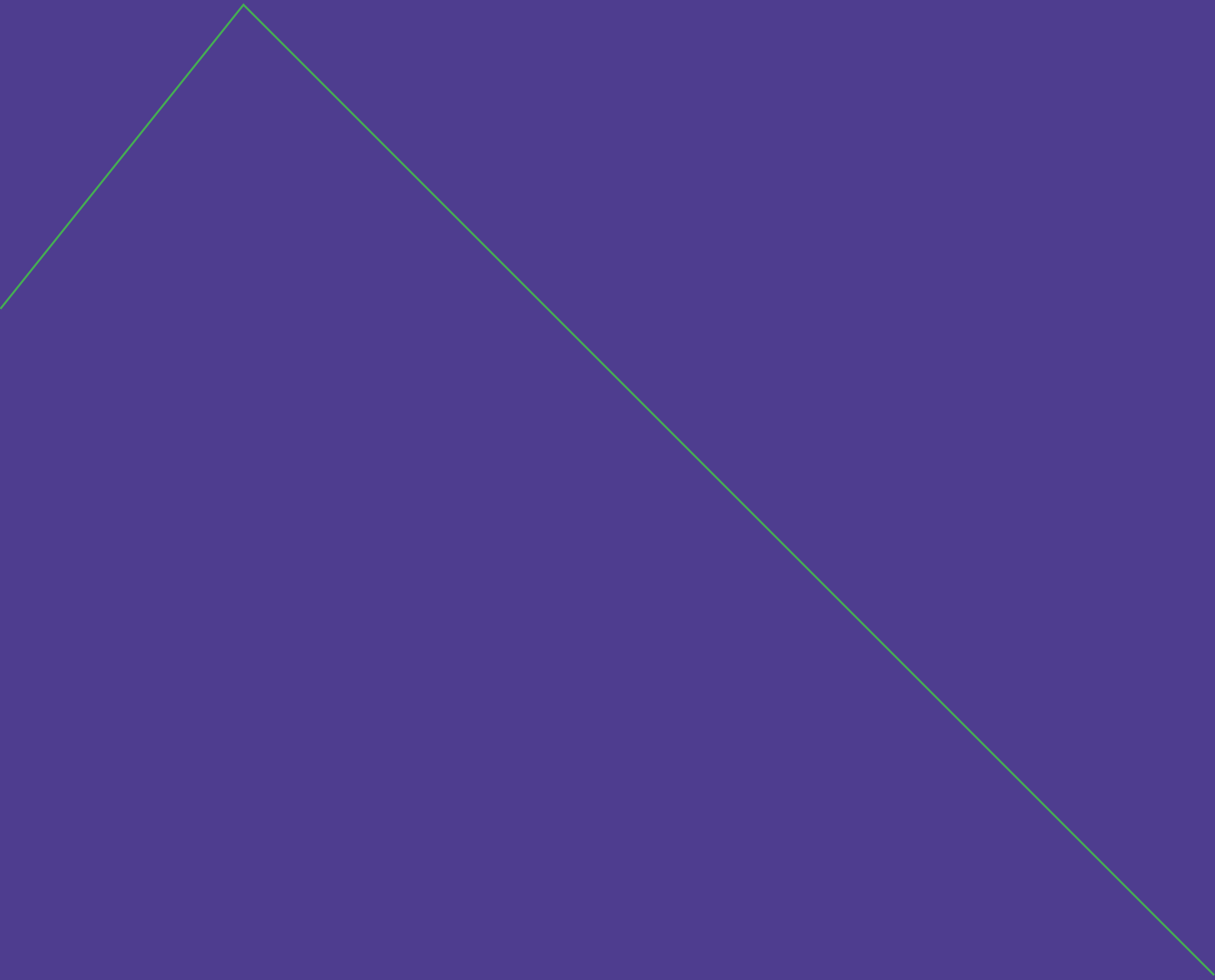
The Center is a non-profit organization and operates on a cost-recovery basis. According to Legal Decrees and Orders (Internal Regulatory Arrangements of the Education and Evaluation Commission, Article Nine: 1, the income of ETEC and its Centers includes remuneration of its charges for the services and business provided. The ETEC's Board of Directors determines the fees for each service. The following rules apply.

- 1) The institution/program must cover the expenses of accreditation services.
- 2) Accreditation and other services fees are declared to the institution/program before applying for the service.
- 3) The service fees are specified in the contract signed by the institution's/program's officials.
- 4) The institution/program is responsible for the financial consequences of any changes or delay in their commitment specified in the contract.



16) COMMITMENT TO THE POLICY BOOK

Application for academic accreditation in Saudi Arabia implies that the institution/program has read, understood, and accepted the accreditation policies included in this book and all policy articles. All parties and individuals involved in academic accreditation activities must read, understand, and accept to adhere to all policies strictly. Violation or non-commitment to the policies outlined in the Policy Book, especially those related to others' rights or codes of ethics/conduct, may lead to legal and disciplinary action according to the type of violation and its seriousness.



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