FOREWORD

The current Criteria and Procedures for New Program Authorization in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi provides the necessary information for higher education institutions (HEIs) in their process of application to the Abu Dhabi Education Council (ADEC) to obtain a “No Objection” letter for offering a new study/academic program – bachelor and above - in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi. The document provides information regarding:

- Fundamental principles of ADEC upon which the new program authorization procedure is based;
- ADEC’s approach to authorization of new programs to function in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi;
- Requirements a new program proposal must meet in order to obtain ADEC’s “No Objection”.

To ensure coherence with the ADEC strategic priorities the ADEC authorization criteria underpin their operationalization through spelling those priorities out in the principles that are embedded in the ADEC’s procedures.

The ADEC strategic priorities are as follows:

- **Quality:** raise the quality of Abu Dhabi’s higher education system to internationally recognized levels;
- **Alignment:** align higher education with Abu Dhabi’s social, cultural, and economic needs;
- **Research:** build and maintain a research ecosystem to drive an innovation-based economy;
- **Access:** provide all qualified students with affordable access to higher education.

The ADEC criteria look at the quality of educational provisions, access to higher education, alignment with the national development plans as well as an aspiration to establish a knowledge-based society through evaluating the impact and the value added that the new programs bring to the HE system and the Emirate of Abu Dhabi society at large.

The ADEC’s authorization procedure is mission- and evidence-based in nature, which is underpinned by the fitness-of-purpose approach to quality assurance where the purpose is set by the socio-economic and cultural needs in alignment with the Abu Dhabi strategic priorities.

The ADEC criteria and procedures for authorization of new programs are developed based on an in-depth investigation of the Abu Dhabi higher education needs. The criteria and procedures are also benchmarked against the good practice at the international level with
particular consideration of the standards set by the overarching umbrella quality assurance networks to ensure alignment with the best international trends.

The ADEC criteria, guidelines and procedures are subject to revision at regular intervals to ensure relevance to the Abu Dhabi socio-economic and cultural needs as well as validity.

The criteria and procedures in this manual apply to all types of higher education providers in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi – federal, government and private.
# LIST OF ACRONYMS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ADEC</td>
<td>Abu Dhabi Education Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>ANQAHE</td>
<td>Arab Network of Quality Assurance in Higher Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>APQN</td>
<td>Asia-Pacific Quality Network</td>
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<td>CAA</td>
<td>Commission of Academic Accreditation</td>
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<td>EAD</td>
<td>Emirate of Abu Dhabi</td>
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<td>ENQA</td>
<td>European Network of Quality Assurance</td>
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<td>HE</td>
<td>Higher Education</td>
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<td>AQAC</td>
<td>ADEC Academic Quality Assurance Committee</td>
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<td>HEI</td>
<td>Higher Education Institution</td>
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<tr>
<td>INQAAHE</td>
<td>International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education</td>
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<td>MIS</td>
<td>Management Information System</td>
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<td>MoHESR</td>
<td>Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research</td>
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<td>MoU</td>
<td>Memorandum of Understanding</td>
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<td>NQA</td>
<td>National Qualifications Authority</td>
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<td>QA</td>
<td>Quality Assurance</td>
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<td>QF Emirates</td>
<td>Qualifications Framework of Emirates</td>
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<td>QI</td>
<td>Quality Improvement</td>
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I. Statement of Authority

A HEI which is interested in offering a new program in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi (EAD) must follow the prescribed criteria and procedures as outlined in this manual to obtain a “No Objection” from ADEC before filing an application with the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MoHESR) Commission for Academic Accreditation (CAA) for initial accreditation. No entity (e.g. individuals, institutions, consortia or organizations) may advertise, solicit, recruit, enroll, or offer a new program in the EAD until it meets the criteria set in this manual and is authorized for operation by ADEC.

ADEC was established in accordance with law No. 24 of 2005, issued by His Highness Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed Al-Nahyan, the UAE President, the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces and the Ruler of Abu Dhabi.

ADEC’s mission is to improve the quality and outcomes of schooling and higher education within the EAD, and to guide and define the overall profile and quality of higher education offerings within the Emirate. The Executive Council has delegated authority to ADEC with respect to leading, influencing and implementing educational initiatives and growth within the EAD.

The current criteria and procedures are supported by an operating Memorandum of Understanding (2014) between the MoHESR and ADEC.

Extract from the MoU between ADEC and MOHESR (November, 2014) (translation from Arabic)
Proposed Mechanism

1- Higher Education Licensing Protocol
   a) The current operating procedures shall continue. All applicants seeking to operate higher education activities in Abu Dhabi Emirate shall undergo ADEC’s Higher Education Licensing process as outlined in the ADEC Higher Education Licensing Policies. Successful applicants shall be issued a “No Objection Letter” from ADEC, however, such letter will not guarantee the approval from the UAE Commission for Academic Accreditation (CAA). After that step, applicants must submit an application for initial licensure to MOHESR CAA.
   b) Institutions seeking renewal of MOHESR licensure, or which anticipate any changes to the nature of their operations or their premises, or seek to relocate or open a new branch, shall duly re-engage in the process set out in Article A above.
   c) Institutions seeking to offer new programs must obtain ADEC’s approval before submitting the relevant application for initial licensure from CAA. Such process shall start after ADEC sets an implementation date.
II. The Quality Assurance Framework in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi

The newly establishing HEIs as well as programs intending to function in the United Arab Emirates are to obtain a license/initial accreditation from the MoHESR CAA. To be effective the HEIs and programs are to renew their license/accreditation on a 5-year cyclical basis.

Thus, at the federal level, the quality assurance framework in the United Arab Emirates evolves around institutional and program components and includes the following mechanisms:

- Initial Institutional Licensure (IL) for new Higher Education Institutions;
- Licensure (L) and Renewal of Licensure (RL) for existing Higher Education Institutions
- Initial Program Accreditation (IA);
- Accreditation (A) and Renewal of Accreditation (RA) for existing programs.

The quality assurance framework at the federal level falls under the jurisdiction of the CAA.

At the emirate level, in the EAD in particular, the quality assurance framework extends to include the following mechanisms:

- Authorization of new higher education institutions;
- Re-authorization of existing higher education institutions;
- Authorization of new programs;
- Authorization of substantive changes.

The quality assurance framework in the EAD falls under the jurisdiction of the ADEC.

The two approaches – CAA and ADEC – are distinctive and complement each other in the sense that CAA’s quality assurance framework looks at the extent to which the HEI or program is fit for the purpose/mission it has been established for, while the ADEC quality assurance framework specifically looks at the fitness-of-purpose in relation to the Abu Dhabi strategic priorities. Thus, all the proposals submitted to ADEC for authorization of new HEIs and programs as well as re-authorization of existing HEIs to function in the EAD should underpin fitness to the socio-economic and cultural needs frame of reference with an explicit emphasis on the value added, impact and alignment with the strategic priorities of Abu Dhabi.

ADEC quality assurance procedures precede CAA’s (re)-licensure and initial accreditation procedures for new HEIs, existing HEIs, substantive changes, and new programs. ADEC No Objection letter is a prerequisite for the applicants to apply to the CAA for respective procedures.

The current procedural manual sets the detailed approach that ADEC underpins and the HEIs should follow while conducting authorization of new programs in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi.
### III. Criteria for New Program Authorization

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<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Sub-criteria</th>
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| 1. Fitness to Socio-economic and Cultural Needs | 1.1 Alignment with Abu Dhabi strategic priorities: The proposal clearly demonstrates how the new program goals and objectives are aligned with the Abu Dhabi socio-economic and cultural vision and contribute to the promotion of its strategic priorities.  
1.2 Response to socio-economic and cultural needs: There is a clear articulation of the socio-economic and cultural needs that graduates from this program would fulfil.  
1.3 Employability of graduates: The HEI is tracking the employment of its graduates to raise their employability as well as to better serve the needs of the market. |
| 2. Sustainable and Differentiated Provision | 2.1 Value-added of the program: The proposed program is differentiated from existing programs offered in Abu Dhabi higher education institutions, and offers a uniqueness that will add scope and value to existing provision.  
2.2 Feasibility and sustainability of the program: The proposed program is feasible and sustainable in the medium and long-term. |
| 3. Programs | 3.1 Alignment with the qualification framework: The learning outcomes of the program are in line with the Emirates Qualifications Framework (QF Emirates) at the defined level and ensure development of skills in the field of research and/or the professional practice.  
3.2 The learning outcomes: The intended learning outcomes of the program are clearly stated with regard to knowledge, skills, and competencies and are aligned with international requirements. |
| 4. Research and Innovation | 4.1 Research innovation: The proposal clearly states the institutional intentions related to research and development in line with Abu Dhabi’s socio-economic and cultural needs, defines the proposed areas of research and the potential research endeavours and thus promotes a culture of innovation and a knowledge-based society.  
4.2 Research outputs and outcomes: The research outcomes and outputs are visible at the national, regional and international levels. |
| 5. Resources | 5.1 Faculty and administrative staff: The planned faculty and staff recruitment approach is clear and effective. It ensures faculty have the necessary qualifications to enable students effectively to achieve the intended learning outcomes.  
5.2 Learning resources: The institution has secured student access to learning resources (e.g. library, labs) to ensure achievement of the learning outcomes.  
5.3 Student services: The institution has secured access to student support services necessary to ensure the learning expected of its students as well as promote career aspirations  
5.4 Physical resources: The planned campus and facilities (infrastructure) are sufficient for the successful implementation of the program and achievement of the intended learning outcomes.  
5.5 Funding: The funding model is feasible and sustainable; the projections ensure implementation of the program objectives and guarantee achievement of the learning outcomes/qualifications by the students. |
| 6 Quality Assurance | 6.1 Quality assurance: There is a well-planned robust process for assessing program effectiveness internally and externally (plans for national and international accreditations). It is planned to safeguard quality of existing provision as well as promote enhancement.  
6.2 National and international accreditation: the institution has a strong track record of international accreditation of its existing programs and has a robust plan for ensuring international accreditation of the new ones |
IV. Procedure

i. The procedural steps

All the HEIs planning to offer a new study/academic program leading to a bachelor degree and above are to apply to ADEC for authorization leading to a grant of a “No Objection” letter prior to submitting an application for initial accreditation to the CAA.

Overall, the duration of the procedure is up to 3-4 months (see Annex A for the flowchart). In case there is a need to amend the application for completeness by the applicant, additional two weeks might apply.

Step 1: Prepare and submit application

Description/Definition: The HEI planning to offer a new program should fill in the ADEC New Program Authorization application form (Appendix E). The application should be analytical in nature and should adhere to ADEC criteria for new program authorization. The application should be submitted in one official hard copy and a soft copy to the ADEC HE Sector.

Responsible: HEI

Inputs:
- The ADEC New Program Authorization application form
- The Application filed by the HEI intending to offer a new study program.

Outputs: The ADEC acknowledgement of the application receipt

Time line: All the new programs should be submitted at least four months prior to the deadline for submitting the full application for Initial Accreditation to the CAA.

Step 2: Pre-screen application for technical compliance

Description/Definition: Once the application is filed, the case is sent to the ADEC QI Section Manager and is assigned a QID Expert. The QID Expert receives and reviews the application along with the required supporting documents for technical compliance with the ADEC criteria and requirements.

Responsible: ADEC QI Division Manager; QI Section Manager
ADEC HE Quality Improvement Division

**Outputs:**
- ADEC letter of application acceptance
- ADEC contract with the HEI

**Timelines:**
One week upon the receipt of the application

**Step 3: Amend application**

**Description/Definition**
In case of detection of any non-compliance with the ADEC requirements, the application is sent back to the HEI for revision and resubmission.

**Responsible:**
ADEC QI Section Manager, HEI

**Outputs:**
- ADEC letter of non-compliance to the HEI
- Resubmitted application

**Timelines:**
Two weeks upon the receipt of the letter of non-compliance.

**Step 4: Select and appoint external reviewers**

**Description/Definition:**
The ADEC QID Expert identifies potential external reviewers and submits the list for approval to the ADEC Academic Quality Assurance Committee (AQAC). The external reviewers are contracted and are to sign ADEC non-disclosure/confidentiality statement, ADEC conflict of interest and service commitment statements.

**Responsible:**
ADEC AQAC

**Inputs:**
- ADEC policy and procedure for external reviewer selection
- List of external reviewers
- ADEC non-disclosure/confidentiality statement
- ADEC conflict of interest statement
- ADEC service commitment statement

**Outputs:**
- Letter appointing the panel members
- ADEC service commitment statement signed by external reviewers
ADEC HE Quality Improvement Division

Statements of confidentiality and conflict of interests signed by the reviewers

Timelines: One week upon the submission of the list to the ADEC AQAC the external reviewers’ panel is appointed.

Step 5: Submit application for external desk-review

Description/Definition: The full application package is sent to the external reviewers for desk-review after the submission is approved by the AQAC as compliant with the ADEC criteria.

Responsible: ADEC QI Section manager

Inputs: The application package

ADEC external reviewer’s template and guidelines

Timelines: Within one week after the external panel appointment

Step 6: Conduct external desk-review

Description/Definition: The external reviewers conduct the desk review. Close to the end of the review a one-day-session takes place in ADEC under the QI Section manager’s and QID Expert’s lead to draw the major findings and recommendations for the follow up (if any). The international reviewer will join the conference through video conference.

Responsible: External reviewers and ADEC QID Expert

Outputs: Individual reports of the external reviewers

Timelines: Three weeks upon the receipt of the application package.

Step 7: Prepare summary report

Description/Definition: The panel Chair along with the ADEC QID Expert prepares a summary report to be submitted to the AQAC for decision taking. The summary report is circulated among the external reviewers for confirmation.
Step 8: Take decision
Description/Definition: The summary report is sent to the ADEC AQAC for decision taking.
Responsible: ADEC AQAC
Inputs: The summary report template
Outputs: Minutes of the session
Timelines: Within one week upon the submission of the summary report.

Step 9: Inform the applicant on the decision taken
Description/Definition: In case of a positive decision a No Objection letter is issued to the HEI intending to offer a new study/academic program. The No Objection letter is signed by the ADEC Director General and is sent to the applicant.

In case of a negative decision a Non Approval letter is issued to the HEI intending to offer a new study/academic program. The Non Approval letter is signed by the ADEC Director General and is sent to the applicant. The new application for this particular program will not be accepted until clear justification of the socio-economic needs is stated by the HEI and is accepted by ADEC.

In case the decision taken entails further improvement of a new program a letter of recommendations with follow up activities is issued to the applicant. The decision to further improve the program is taken in case the program is an innovative one and brings value to the Abu Dhabi labor market enhancement, however, the external reviewers evaluated it as partially meeting the criterion. The time-line for a new application is set in the letter. The letter of recommendation and follow up is signed by the ADEC Director General and is sent to the applicant.

Responsible: ADEC AQAC; QI Division Manager, QI Section Manager
Inputs: The No Objection letter template
The Non Approval letter template

Outputs: 
The No Objection letter addressed to the HEI
The Non Approval letter addressed to the HEI
The letter of recommendations and follow up

Timelines: Within one week upon the decision taking.

Step 10: Inform the CAA on the decision taken

Description/Definition: Once the decision is taken, ADEC informs the CAA on the results of the procedure for the CAA consideration.

Responsible: ADEC AQAC; QI Division Manager, QI Section Manager

Inputs: The sample letter to the CAA
The No Objection letter template
The Non Approval letter template

Outputs: The letter to the CAA on the specific case and decision
The No Objection letter addressed to the HEI
The Non Approval letter addressed to the HEI
The letter of recommendations and follow up

Timelines: Within 10 working days upon the decision taking.
ii. **Scheduling the procedure**

The HEIs intending to establish a new program are to file an application for authorization to ADEC at least four months before submission to the CAA for initial accreditation.

iii. **Expenses related to the procedure**

Considering ADEC re-authorization is conducted with involvement of national and international reviewers, the following expenses apply to each procedure:

- Expenses related to the application handling;
- Expenses related to the external reviewers.

All the expenses related to the procedure are borne by the applicant.

The costs related to the external reviews must accompany the agreement signed between ADEC and the applicant HEI. Each procedure will be calculated individually and the costs may vary depending on the nature of the procedure and the invited external reviewers.
V. The External Review

i. Composition of the Panel

ADEC HE Quality Improvement Division sets up an external reviewer panel to conduct new program authorization review. The panel is assisted by the ADEC QID Expert assigned once the application is filed. The external reviewers must meet the following requirements:

- the panel should be composed of at least 2-4 external reviewers, depending on the majors to be offered.
- the panel should command the following competencies:
  - expertise regarding recent developments and research in the field of study
  - international expertise preferably in the field of study and quality assurance
  - practical experience in the field of study
  - experience in teaching and learning
  - skills in developing study programs.
- the panel should be chaired by one of the panel members based on the internal agreement between the panel members themselves or as appointed by the ADEC AQAC.

The panel members should have complementary skills and competencies (to each other).

The panel should be independent and its independence should be guided by the ADEC Conflict of Interest Policy (see sub-section iv, Section V).

Panel members should sign a declaration of independence/conflict of interests and confidentiality prior to the review process.

ii. External Reviewer Selection Procedure

ADEC conducts new program authorization procedures by selecting and appointing external reviewers to ensure objectivity and independence of the decision-taking. To ensure transparency of the external review procedure ADEC has adopted a procedure through which it selects and appoints the external reviewers. The expert selection procedure has the following steps:

- The ADEC Higher Education Executive Director sends a letter of request to the HEIs and the potential employers to nominate at least 10 professionals in different subject-specific fields to be assessed and included in the ADEC HE expert pool. The letter of request outlines the qualifications expected of the potential external reviewers. In case of international reviewer nominations the letter of request is sent to INQAAHE, ENQA, APQN, ANQAHE and other recognized QA entities. An open call to invite external reviewers – both faculty members and employers is also possible through the ADEC portal.
- Upon the receipt of the nominations/letters of interest ADEC contacts the nominees/applicants to submit their curriculum vitae along with a statement of purpose to serve as an external reviewer.
- ADEC QI Section Manager collects all the CVs and arranges for an initial discussion of the candidates.
- After the initial discussion, the list of selected candidates is submitted to the ADEC AQAC for approval and inclusion in the ADEC database of external reviewers.
- Upon receiving an application for a new program authorization, the ADEC QI Section Manager along with the QID Expert select the external reviewers based on their qualifications from the ADEC database of external reviewers. The ADEC Conflict of Interest policy is applied during the selection to minimize the chances of any potential conflict.
- The list of the reviewers is submitted to the Division Manager for prior approval before it is submitted to the AQAC for appointment. In case of rejection of the candidates a replacement will be sought through the same database.
- Once appointed the external reviewers sign the contract with ADEC as well as Conflict of Interest and Confidentiality statement prior to the launch of the external review.

iii. Criteria for External Reviewer Selection

The following criteria are applied while selecting external reviewers:

**Faculty members (national and international):**
- A PhD in the respective field of study;
- A proven track record of research conducted in the respective field of study;
- At least 10 years of teaching experience;
- Experience in developing study/academic programs;
- Experience in review and quality assurance (desirable);
- Fluency in English is required and in Arabic is preferred in English-medium programs; fluency in Arabic is required and in English is preferable in Arabic-medium programs; in case of international candidates English is required and Arabic is preferable.

**Employers:**
- Be employed in a senior position in the market sector relevant to the program field of study;
- At least 10 years of experience supervising the new employees and evaluating employee performance;
- Teaching in respective field (desirable);
- Experience in quality assurance (desirable);
- Fluency in English and Arabic.

iv. Conflict of Interests Policy and Confidentiality

A conflict of interests occurs when an external reviewer is involved in an activity, commitment, or interest that could adversely affect, compromise, or be incompatible with his/her obligations as an ADEC external reviewer.
A Conflict of Interest can involve conflicts of time commitment, relationship interest, financial interest, competitor’s interest, or discipline-specific interests.

- **A conflict of time commitment** occurs when the external reviewer is involved in and committed to unauthorized activities that interfere with his/her obligations to ADEC thus delaying the review procedure;
- **A conflict of relationship interest** occurs when an external reviewer has a blood relative that is employed by the HEI/Program under scrutiny, which might restrict or impair the reviewer's ability to perform the external evaluation of the case objectively and independently;
- **A conflict of financial interest** occurs when an external reviewer is either employed or has been employed by the HEI for the last five years or has direct or indirect financial benefits from the HEI and program under scrutiny;
- **A conflict of competitor’s interest** occurs when the external reviewer has an interest in producing a biased report that might question the objectivity and independence of the review;
- **A conflict of discipline-specific interests** occurs when the nature of the external reviewer’s discipline could cause situations that, while not implicating one of the conflicts listed above, could question the independence of the review.

The ADEC QI Section Manager and QID Expert are expected to provide verbal and written guidance to external reviewers regarding these situations and the external reviewer’s obligation is to disclose such conflicts. To ensure this is the case, the external reviewers are asked to sign the ADEC conflict of interest statement.

All the reviewers are to sign a declaration of independence/conflict of interests and ADEC Non-Disclosure/Confidentiality prior to the launch of the external review. In these declarations, the reviewers attest to having taken note of the conflict of interest and non-disclosure policy. The final report submitted to AQAC for decision taking should include a declaration that the assessment has been carried out independently and the findings may not be disclosed by any other party but the ADEC.

v. **External Evaluation: the approach**

Considering the value of innovative and valuable programs are the cornerstone of the HE success, ADEC’s external evaluation is carried out on a three-point scale to allow for the strong cases with some technical deficiencies to improve their proposals. Thus, the following interpretation of the three-point scale underpins the logic of external evaluation:

- **meets the criterion** – this scale applies if the proposal is an excellent one and provides all the necessary analysis and evidences content- and technical-wise that justify compliance with the criteria, value added and relevance to the socio-economic needs, in particular.
- **partially meets the criterion** – this scale applies in exceptional cases when the market need is clearly stated and the value added and relevance of the endeavor is explicit, however, there are administrative and technical issues still to be addressed to meet the criterion.
- **does not meet the criterion** – this scale is applied when there are clear deficiencies in the proposal and it fails to justify the socio-economic needs, relevance and the necessary capacity to offer the program/establish or run a HEI.

The external reviewers should provide a list of major findings with substantiated analysis for each of their conclusions as well as provide a list of recommendations for the follow up and further promotion of the quality and relevance of the proposal/program.

Based on the desk review of the independent reviewers the panel Chair along with the ADEC coordinator develops a proposal to the ADEC AQAC for decision taking. The proposal should include a substantiated final conclusion on **the value added and relevance** of the program on the same three-point scale. The proposal should also include recommendations for the follow-up activities.
VI. Appeals

ADEC’s decisions on authorization of new programs are open to internal appeal to the ADEC HE Appeals Committee, which is established on case by case basis. The petition to appeal should be submitted in writing to the HE Appeals Committee and should be filed within 30 calendar days of receiving the letter of non-approval (see Annex B for the flowchart).

The appeals process involves nomination of two independent experts (other than those ones involved in the initial procedure) to investigate the case in full, including the whole application submitted by the HEI, the panel report as well as recommendations. On average, the appeals process lasts 8 weeks. Depending on the scope of the appeal, the timeline may vary. Having scrutinized the case the invited experts submit a brief report on the findings to the HE Appeals Committee. The Committee takes a decision drawing on the expert report within two weeks. HE Appeals Committee’s decision after internal appeal is final.

All the expenses related to the appeals procedure are borne by the appellant.

The ADEC appeals procedure includes the following steps as outlined below:

**Step 1: Submit Appeal for Review**

**Description/Definition:** The Applicant aggrieved by the actions of ADEC with respect to denial of No Objection Letter may file a petition to appeal the decision by the independent and non-partisan appeals committee.

**Responsible:** Appellant

**Inputs:** Letter of Non-Approval, Appeals Petition

**Timeline:** The petition to appeal needs to be submitted in writing and should be filed within 30 calendar days of receiving the letter of non-approval.

**Step 2: Receive & Review Appeal**

**Description/Definition:** The ADEC Director General receives and reviews the appeal, along with any supporting documents provided by the applicant. Upon reviewing and assessing the appeal the Director General sends the appeal to the HE Sector Executive Director and, thereof, HE Quality Improvement Division for registration and processing the case.

**Responsible:** ADEC Director General, HE Executive Director, QI Division Manager
Step 3: Register Appeal, Schedule Appeals & Prepare Response

Description/Definition: The QI Section Manager registers the appeal (with the supporting documents, if any) in the Appeals Registry.

A review schedule is set for the appeal. The review panel is composed of 2 external reviewers, depending on the majors to be offered.

The QI Section Manager prepares a response letter to the Appellant that states the logistics of the review and provides information on any requirements that need to be prepared and submitted. The Response letter is shared with the QI Division Manager for review.

Responsible: ADEC QI Section Manager

Inputs: Appeals Petition

Outputs: Response Letter

Timelines: Within two weeks upon the case registration.

Step 4: Approve Response

Description/Definition: The QI Division Manager reviews the Response letter received from the QI Section Manager and identifies any changes that need to be made. Once the letter is finalized, it is mailed to the Appellant.

Responsible: ADEC QI Division Manager

Inputs: Response Letter

Outputs: Response Letter

Timelines: One day upon the receipt of the response letter.

Step 5: External Review of the Case
Description/Definition: The case is sent to two independent external reviewers for evaluation

Responsible: External Reviewers

Inputs: The appeals petition with all the supporting documents

Output: The External Reviewers’ reports

Timeline: Two to six weeks upon receiving the case by the reviewers depending on the scope of the appeal.

Step 6: Summary of the Report

Description/Definition: The QI Section Manager prepares the summary of the external reviewers’ reports.

Responsible: QI Section Manager

Inputs: The reports of the external reviewers

Output: Summary of the reports

Timeline: Within one week upon receipt of the reports.

Step 7: Conduct Appeal Convention & Decide Final Order

Description/Definition: The HE Appeals Committee convenes to take decision on the case.

The Committee’s secretary is responsible for recording the notes from the convention, including the decision to be taken.

The HE Appeals Committee discusses and makes the decision based on the documents in the case file including external reviewers’ report.

Once the decision is taken by the HE Appeals Committee, the Committee Secretary prepares the recommendation to be signed by the Committee’s Chair submitted to the DG’s sign off.

Responsible: HE Appeals Committee

Inputs: Case file

Outputs: Appeal Decision

Timeline: Within two weeks upon the submission of the summary report

Step 8: Receive Letter Overturning/Upholding Decision
**Description/Definition:**
The appellant receives the final decision made by the H HE Appeals Committee and signed off by the Director General. If ADEC’s prior decision is overturned, the appellant’s application for a letter of No Objection proceeds. If ADEC’s prior decision is upheld in the Appeals process, the appellant is not permitted to appeal the decision further and the case file is closed and archived. The decision taken by the HE Appeals Committee is final and binding.

**Responsible:**
ADEC Director General, HE Appeals Committee Chair, ADEC QI Division Manager

**Inputs:**
Appeal Decision

**Timelines:**
Within one week after the decision taking.
VII. ANNEXES  
i. ANNEX A: New Program Authorization Procedure (Flowchart)
ANNEX B: Appeals Procedure (Flowchart)

Submission of the appeals petition (within 30 calendar days of receiving the letter of non-approval)

The QI Division Manager receives and reviews the appeal and sends the appeal to the QI Section Manager for registration and to schedule an external review and hearing with the Appeals Committee (within 1 week upon the petition submission)

The ADEC QI Section Manager registers the appeal in the Appeals Registry, sets a review schedule and appeals hearing date. The QI Section manager prepares a logistics letter sends it to the appellant (within two weeks of the case registration)

The case is sent to two independent external reviewers for evaluation. The review of the case lasts 2 weeks

The external reviews are sent to the QI Section Manager. The QI Section Manager prepares summary of the report within one week of the reports submission

The Appeals Committee to take decision on the case (within two weeks upon receiving the summary report)

The decision on overturning/upholding the decision is sent to the HEI (within one week upon the decision-taking)

Overturn decision

Issue of No Objection Letter

Uphold Decision

Issue of Non Approval Letter
iii. ANNEX C: Confidentiality Statement (template)

ADEC CONFIDENTIALITY STATEMENT

Review procedure case #: ______________________________________________

Title of the HEI: ______________________________________________________

Title of the Program under Review: ______________________________________

Reviewer name and title: ______________________________________________

Signature of the reviewer: __________________________________

Date: ____________________

I understand that the external review procedure I am invited to conduct entails access to the documentation that is confidential both for ADEC and the program that is under review.

Therefore, I undertake not to divulge any of the information obtained either from ADEC or from the documents that have been entrusted for external review to any third parties until I have received a formal permission from ADEC to do so.

Signature of the reviewer: __________________________________

Date: ____________________
iv. ANNEX D: Conflict of Interests Statement (template)

ADEC CONFLICT OF INTERESTS STATEMENT

Review procedure case #: ______________________________________________

Title of the HEI: _______________________________________________________

Title of the Program under Review: ______________________________________

Reviewer name and title: ________________________________________________

Hereby I declare that I am not involved in any of the conflicts of interests whatsoever that would risk the objectivity and independence of my review including the ones outlined below:

- **A conflict of time commitment** occurs when the external reviewer is involved in and committed to unauthorized activities that interfere with his/her obligations to ADEC thus delaying the review procedure;

- **A conflict of relationship interest** occurs when an external reviewer has a blood relative that is employed by the HEI/Program under scrutiny, which might restrict or impair the reviewer’s ability to perform the external evaluation of the case objectively and independently;

- **A conflict of financial interest** occurs when an external reviewer is either employed or has been employed by the HEI for the last five years or has direct or indirect financial benefits from the HEI and program under scrutiny;

- **A conflict of competitor's interest** occurs when the external reviewer has an interest in producing a biased report that might question the objectivity and independence of the review;

- **A conflict of discipline-specific interests** occurs when the nature of the external reviewer’s discipline could cause situations that, while not implicating one of the conflicts listed above, could question the independence of the review.

Signature of the reviewer: ______________________________________________

Date: ______________________
v. ANNEX E: Application Cover Page for a New Program Authorization

Below is the Application Cover page, which should be duly filled in, signed and submitted to ADEC along with the complete application package. The self-assessment report – the main part of the application package – should be developed in line with the ADEC criteria and guidelines for new program authorization. This application cover page also serves as a receipt of acknowledgement and a copy of it duly signed by respective authorities will be returned to the HEI upon the receipt and registration of the case.

---

ADEC Application Cover Page for a New Program Authorization

1. Name of the applicant institution:

2. Name of School, College, Department or teaching unit offering the new program:

3. Type of program(s) to be offered (title, EQF level and type (applied/academic)):

4. Name and contact details of Head of School / Authorized Officer or Liaison of the Institution:

   Name: ____________________________
   Position: ____________________________
   Address: ____________________________

---

The ADEC Case Number Assigned
NP#: year-01(for federal HEI) - 001
5. Registration number of the HEI

________________________________________________________________________

6. Registered address of the institution ________________________________________

7. Data on the HEI status:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes/No/Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a)</td>
<td>Is your HEI a federal, public non-federal, or private institution?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b)</td>
<td>Does the HEI intend to offer the new program to the national or international students (or both)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c)</td>
<td>Does the HEI intend to offer the new program to male or female students (or co-educational)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d)</td>
<td>What type of qualification and degree is the program planning to offer?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8. The required documents (please, provide the list of all the documents in the application package, which support the self-assessment report submitted for the external review)

Submitted on (the date): _____________________________________________________________

Submitted by (title, name and signature of the person): _________________________________

Received by (position, name and signature of the ADEC representative): __________________
vi. ANNEX G: External Review Template and Guidelines

---

**External Evaluation of a New Program**

**External Reviewer’s Report**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title of the Applicant Institution:</th>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Title of the New Program:</th>
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</table>

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of program(s) to be offered (title, EQF level and type (applied/academic)):</th>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title and Name of the External Reviewer:</th>
</tr>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date on which ADEC Sent the Application Package to the External Reviewer:</th>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Date on which the External Reviewer Submitted the Report to ADEC:</th>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Signature of the External Reviewer:</th>
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</table>

---
A. Introduction & Summary

In Section A the external reviewers are asked to provide a one-page brief introduction to the case as well as the summary of the major findings in a narrative form.

B. Key Issues

In Section B the external reviewer is asked to provide the list of the key issues with respective short descriptions.

C. Criteria Based Assessment

In Section C the external reviewer is asked to provide assessment for each criterion and a short statement on whether the criterion is met or not. A one sentence clear and precise statement on the major reason for a particular outcome of assessment is required.

D. General Overview of the Assessment

In Section D the external reviewer is asked to provide the general overview of the assessment for each criterion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Assessment Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Fitness to socio-economic and cultural needs</td>
<td>Overall for Criterion 1 Met/Not Met/Partially Met</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1</td>
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<td>1.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Sustainable and Differentiated Provision</td>
<td>Overall for Criterion 2 Met/Not Met/Partially Met</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
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<td>2.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Programs</td>
<td>Overall for Criterion 3 Met/Not Met/Partially Met</td>
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<td>3.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Research and Innovation</td>
<td>Overall for Criterion 4 Met/Not Met/Partially Met</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>5 Resources</td>
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<td>5.1</td>
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<td>5.2</td>
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<td>5.3</td>
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<td>5.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Overall for Criterion 5</td>
<td>Met/Not</td>
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<td>------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>6 Quality Assurance</td>
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<td>6.1</td>
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<td>6.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall for Criterion 6</td>
<td>Met/Not</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

E. Recommendations

In Section E the external reviewers are asked to provide recommendations for each key issue outlined in Section B. This part of the external reviewer report is intended for the follow-up by the HEI and ADEC on the current procedure and will be referred to in the decision-making as well as follow-up procedures.

F. Additional Comments

In Section F the external reviewers are asked to provide any other additional comments they found necessary but were somehow left out.
### External Evaluation of a New Program

**Summary Report**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title of the Applicant Institution:</th>
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<tr>
<th>Title of the New Program:</th>
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<td>Type of program(s) to be offered (title, EQF level and type (applied/academic)):</td>
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<tr>
<th>Titles and Names of the External Reviewers:</th>
<th>Reviewer 1:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Titles and Names of the External Reviewers:</td>
<td>Reviewer 2:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Titles and Names of the External Reviewers:</td>
<td>Reviewer 3:</td>
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<th>Date on which ADEC Sent the Application Package to the External Reviewers:</th>
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<tr>
<th>Date on which the External Reviewers Submitted the Report to ADEC:</th>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date on which the summary report is submitted to the AQAC:</th>
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</thead>
</table>
I. Executive Summary

Overview of the applicant Institution and the new program

II. Comments on the New Program Authorization Application
   i. Major findings/observations
   ii. Recommendations
   iii. Summary assessment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>R1</th>
<th>R2</th>
<th>R3</th>
<th>Overall per sub-criterion</th>
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<td>Overall for criterion 1</td>
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<td>2 Sustainable and differentiated Provision</td>
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<tr>
<td>Overall for criterion 5</td>
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<td>6 Quality assurance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Overall for criterion 6</td>
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</table>

Hereby, the expert panel declares that the assessment has been carried out independently and the findings will not be disclosed by any other party but the ADEC.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Signatures of the External Reviewers:</th>
<th>Reviewer 1:</th>
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<td>Reviewer 2:</td>
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<td>Reviewer 3:</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Signatures of ADEC staff responsible for the summary report:</th>
<th>QI Division Manager:</th>
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<td>QI Section Manager:</td>
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<tr>
<td>QID Expert:</td>
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</table>
ANNEX I: Glossary of Terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic Quality Assurance Committee</td>
<td>Is a decision-taking body established within the ADEC Higher Education Sector to take decisions related to authorization of new HEIs, programs, substantive changes, and re-authorization of existing HEIs. It is comprised of the key stakeholders of the AD higher education system.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic/study program</td>
<td>An academic/study program is a combination of courses and/or requirements leading to a degree.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appeal</td>
<td>A procedure in which cases are reviewed in case parties involved in a procedure request a formal change to an official decision. Appeals function both as a process for error correction as well as a process of clarifying and interpreting the decision. Appeal procedures are ADEC internal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authorization</td>
<td>Authorization is a process whereby a new institution or a new academic/study programs is granted a “no objection” to function in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi. It is a pre-requisite step for new HEIs and new programs prior to their submission to the CAA for initial licensure and initial accreditation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criteria</td>
<td>Checkpoints or benchmarks determining the attainment of certain objectives and/or standards. Criteria describe to a certain degree of detail the characteristics of the requirements and conditions to be met and therefore provide the (quantitative and qualitative) basis on which an evaluative conclusion is drawn.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External review</td>
<td>The process whereby ADEC HE Sector Quality Improvement Division collects data, information, and evidence about an institution, a particular unit or program of a given institution, or a core activity of an institution, in order to make a statement about its quality. The external review is usually based on a self-evaluation report provided by the institution and can be used as a basis for indicators or as a method of judgment for (external) evaluation in higher education. ADEC provides training programs/induction prior to the evaluation to ensure their mutual understanding and the fair, consistent, appropriate and smooth implementation of the process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External reviewers</td>
<td>External evaluation is carried out by a team of external experts, peers, or professionals in the field. The external reviewers have strong background in respective fields of study and professional experience, therefore, they come from academia for institutional authorization cases, and from academia and labor market for external review of study/academic programs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External review panel</td>
<td>The external review panel consists of up to 3 faculty members in case of institutional evaluation and up to 3 faculty members and professionals in respective fields in case of study/academic programs. For each procedure ADEC sets a panel by matching the qualifications of the peers and professionals with the submitted initiatives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Evidence-based evaluation</strong></td>
<td>Evidence-based evaluation is the cornerstone of the culture of evidence. The latter is a mindset acquired in a higher education institution and based on clear ethical values, principles, and rules, which consists of the self-evaluation of its learning outcomes, engaging the teaching staff and the academic administration in a thoughtful, regular collection, selection, and use of relevant institutional performance indicators, in order to inform and prove, whenever (and to whomever) necessary, that it is doing well in specific areas (e.g. institutional planning, decision-making, quality, etc.) and for the purpose of improving its learning and teaching outcomes. The culture of evidence requested from a higher education institution implies that the institution is encouraged to be able to provide empirical data proving the consistency of its own mission.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fitness of purpose</strong></td>
<td><em>Fitness of purpose</em> is a definition of quality in higher education, which guides the principle of evaluation of the extent to which the quality-related intentions of an organization are adequate and are aligned with the priorities set in the country.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fitness for purpose</strong></td>
<td><em>Fitness for purpose</em> is a definition of quality in higher education, which judges the quality of a product or service in terms of the extent to which its stated purpose—defined either as meeting customer specifications or conformity with the institutional mission—is met.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Follow up</strong></td>
<td>Follow up is shorthand for procedures to ensure that outcomes of review processes have been, or are being, addressed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Higher Education Institutions</strong></td>
<td>An educational body which carries out higher education activities based on legally approved study programs leading to a bachelor degree and above. Any higher education institution must follow an external evaluation procedure in order to assess its quality and to acquire the provisional functioning authorization, followed by its official licensure, as well as the accreditation of its study programs. Higher education institutions may differ in size, quality, resources, number of teaching staff and students, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Procedure</strong></td>
<td>A predefined, fixed, step-by-step sequence of activities or course of action (with definite start and end points) that must be followed in the same order to correctly perform an external evaluation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Re-authorization</strong></td>
<td>Re-authorization is a process whereby an existing institution is granted a “no objection” to function in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi. It is a cyclical procedure and is conducted every five years prior to the HEI submission to the CAA for re-licensure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-evaluation</strong></td>
<td>The process of self-evaluation consists of the systematic collection of administrative data, the questioning of students and graduates, and the holding of moderated interviews with lecturers and students, resulting in a self-study report. Self-evaluation is a collective institutional reflection and an opportunity for quality enhancement. The resulting report further serves to provide information for the review team in charge of the external evaluation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Substantive change</strong></td>
<td>A procedure through which ADEC authorizes the changes undertaken by the HEI within the five-year cycle (in between two cycles of institutional authorization). Each substantive change undertaken by</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
the HEI in between the two cycles of authorization have to be authorized by ADEC.

**Technical compliance**

The first step in external evaluation by the authorization body whereby the quality assurance experts evaluate the submission for compliance against ADEC criteria. The technical check ensures all the criteria are addressed in a due manner and all the required evidences to support the statements are in place prior to sending the application to the external reviewers. The application is not sent to the external reviewers if it fails to comply with ADEC criteria.

**QFEmirates**

The single description, at national level or level of an education system, which is internationally understood and through which all qualifications and other learning achievements in higher education may be described and related to each other in a coherent way and which defines the relationship between higher education qualifications. The QFEmirates Handbook sets out the policies, structures, standards, systems and procedures for the national qualifications framework for the UAE, known as the QFEmirates. It enables a coherent, consistent and robust approach to be taken to the design of qualifications for higher education, general education and technical, vocational and professional education and training. It sets out criteria for both the accreditation of qualifications and for those organizations in the public and private sectors which are to deliver them. It provides guidance and a reference tool for accreditation and awarding bodies and qualifications designers and developers.