The Commonwealth of Learning actively works towards universal access to quality education. One way to achieve this is through open and distance learning programmes. The number of open and distance learning programmes has grown significantly in past years, and as the numbers of programmes and learners have increased, so has the need to ensure the quality of the programmes on offer.

Learners will only truly benefit from programmes if they offer high-quality teaching and learning opportunities.

In 2009, the Commonwealth of Learning published its Quality Assurance Toolkit to help support Open Schools in their endeavours to develop quality assurance systems. In 2013, it conducted a baseline study that revealed a need to offer more support to some institutions in their efforts to develop and maintain quality assurance systems. This led to a collaborative project between the Commonwealth of Learning and several institutions from the Asia and Africa chapters of COMOSA to work on developing quality assurance processes that could be implemented in Open Schools.

Setting Standards, Maintaining Quality: Quality Assurance Policies for Open Schooling contains policies from ten of the institutions that participated in the quality assurance exercise. We hope that these policies will not only be used by the institutions to uphold quality assurance, but will also inspire other Open Schools to develop their own quality assurance systems.
SETTING STANDARDS, MAINTAINING QUALITY:

QUALITY ASSURANCE POLICIES FOR OPEN SCHOOLING

COMMONWEALTH OF LEARNING
The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) is an intergovernmental organisation created by Commonwealth Heads of Government to encourage the development and sharing of open learning and distance education knowledge, resources and technologies.

Commonwealth of Learning, 2015

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Preface

The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) seeks to promote universal access to quality education in Commonwealth countries, with a particular focus on open and distance learning (ODL). Through ODL, marginalised and isolated groups of society have an opportunity to enjoy the benefits of education, whether circumstances dictated their having to leave the traditional educational system at some stage or whether they have never had access to education.

For ODL to be successful and credible, and for learners to gain maximum benefit from it, it must be recognised as delivering consistently high-standard teaching and learning. That requires quality assurance (QA) and policies that lay out the standards to which an institution will adhere. COL’s Open Schooling initiative, in partnership with SAIDE and various open schools, developed the Quality Assurance Toolkit in 2009. The objective of the Toolkit was to encourage open schools and other institutions to use it as a foundation on which to build their own quality assurance policies.

In 2013, COL conducted a baseline study which revealed that some institutions, while very enthusiastic about implementing quality assurance, recognised that they would benefit from some support from COL in developing the policy. COL therefore collaborated with institutions from the Asia and Africa chapters of COMOSA to develop institutional QA policies. COMOSA, a community of practice, is an ideal platform for collaboration, motivation, and sharing of good practice. In this case, the collaboration took the form of workshops and online support. While the participants worked on their individual policies, they also supported each other and shared ideas as COMOSA members. The exercise went beyond the creation of QA policies, it also highlighted the need for QA policies and reinforced the benefits that such policies can bring to both learners and institutions. If those at the helm of open schools understand and appreciate the need for and benefits of having standards in place and documented, they will pave the way for a QA-focused culture within the various institutions. Recognition of the value of quality assurance is key to the success of this endeavour.

This current document, Setting Standards, Maintaining Quality: Quality Assurance Policies for Open Schooling, contains the results of collaborative efforts.
The Africa chapter, which comprised participants from Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania and Zambia, worked with Marcelle Martin and Haroldt Guiob. This document contains the QA policies developed for the Lesotho Distance Teaching Centre, Malawi College of Distance Education and Instituto de Educação Aberta e à Distância (IEADA).

The Asia chapter, comprising representatives from Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, worked with Dr Ephraim Mhlanga and prepared not only the template but also all the supporting documentation required for the smooth running of the workshop. His work was supported by Dr Sanjaya Mishra, Director, and Dr Manas Ranjan Panigrahi, Programme Officer of the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA). This document contains the QA policies developed for Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU), Pakistan; Andhra Pradesh State Open School, India; Assam State Open School, India; Bangladesh Open University, Bangladesh; Karnataka Open School, India; National Institute of Education, Sri Lanka; and National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS), India.

This volume reflects the passion and expertise of a diverse range of people from different contexts, each of whom brought a unique perspective to the project. It expands COL’s repertoire of QA publications by adding the Open Schooling dimension. We hope that it will contribute substantially to enriching the quality of teaching and learning for the hundreds of thousands of current and potential learners throughout the Commonwealth.
1. INTRODUCTION

The Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) was established in May 1974 with the main objective of providing educational opportunities to the general population, including those who cannot leave their homes and jobs. In the last 34 years, the University has more than met this objective. It has opened up educational opportunities for working people and has provided access to education for large numbers of girls and women. It has also done pioneering work in the field of mass education and is now breaking new ground in the fields of professional, science and technical education and making efforts to reach out to citizens in remote areas of Pakistan. In addition, it is trying to harness modern information technology to improve access to and the quality of education in Pakistan.

The idea of distance education assumed greater relevance and acceptance in Pakistan due to poverty and the relative deprivation of women. Literacy rates, retention rates and access to higher education are extremely low in the poorer sectors of Pakistan. At the same time, poverty is very high in the rural areas, where formal education is much less established. Literacy rates are much lower and education less accessible for females in Pakistan than for males, particularly in the rural areas. This is mainly due to poverty and conservative traditions. AIOU, through its system of distance education, has thus provided educational opportunities to housebound girls and women.

In light of Pakistan’s commitment to Education for All (EFA) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), it has been increasingly clear, both at a national level and within the university, that there is an urgent national need for AIOU
to unroll a large-scale programme of open schooling in order to cater for the out-of-school population. The target population derives maximum benefits from education that is offered in flexible ways. Experience has shown that in order to enhance access with success, flexible forms of provision need to be supported by robust quality assurance (QA) systems. In this regard, the need to develop a quality assurance policy for open schooling within AIOU cannot be overemphasised. Thus, the AIOU Open School, with the assistance of The Commonwealth of Learning (COL), developed an institutional quality assurance policy as a way of enhancing the quality of educational provision in the School.

2. INSTITUTIONAL VISION

AIOU is using its existing resources and taking up the national challenge of providing high-quality education and skills training through open schooling to out-of-school youth and adults under its Bureau for University Extension Special Programmes/Project (BUESP).

3. INSTITUTIONAL MISSION

AIOU has a mission to develop a wide range of needs-based courses for post-primary and secondary education that not only fulfil the academic needs of learners but also place learners in a stronger economic position. As part of its mission, AIOU established an open learning system to make these courses available to those who are currently not served by the formal school system.

4. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE QUALITY ASSURANCE POLICY

Aims of the Quality Assurance Policy

The aim of the AIOU quality assurance policy for open schooling is to provide high-quality education from pre-literacy level to secondary level that will be compatible with the formal school system of Pakistan.
Objectives of the Quality Assurance Policy

The objectives of the QA policy are:

- To provide guidance in developing a high-quality, appropriate and flexible curriculum for all levels of open schooling to cater for learners who need any level of secondary education.
- To provide benchmarks for the development of high-quality needs-based course materials that are suitable for the needs of local learners.
- To enhance the development and implementation of an efficient system for assessing the learning performance of learners.
- To provide AIOU stakeholders with guidance in instituting a culture of quality in the day-to-day operations of the Open School.

5. POLICY VALUES

The following are the values on which the quality assurance policy is based:

- The involvement of all AIOU stakeholders in developing the QA policy for open schooling.
- Continuous monitoring and evaluation of institutional performance according to set standards.
- Producing graduates who make a contribution to the social and economic development of the communities from which they come through the creative application of knowledge and skills gained in the School.
- The development and continuous revision of all components of open schooling will be based on action research.

6. POLICY ALIGNMENT

This quality assurance policy will be aligned with all the relevant policies and guidelines governing all the open learning activities of the School. These include policies and guidelines on student enrolment, learner support and assessment, staff recruitment, development and retention, and planning processes.
Compatibility of the curriculum of the Open School with that of formal school education will also be an important consideration of the QA policy.

The QA policy will also be informed by the need to prepare learners for lifelong education.

7. SCOPE OF THE POLICY

All the activities of the Open School shall be bound by the quality assurance policy of the School. The School will monitor and evaluate quality in the key service areas of teaching and learning, research and community engagement. The following areas will be monitored on a regular basis to ensure compliance with the set standards:

- Institutional management and governance
- Financial management
- Programme design and development
- Teaching and learning strategies
- Learner support services
- Learning materials, including open educational resources (OER)
- Learner assessment
- Admission process
- Physical infrastructure and resources
- Staffing
- Advocacy and information dissemination
- Research and community service/engagement
- Partnership and cooperation
- Integration of technology
- Affiliations with relevant and regional organisations
- Approaches to quality assurance
- Quality assurance structures
- Accountability
Institutional Management and Governance
The Open School will be directly under the governance and management of AIOU. The management structure is illustrated in the diagram below:

Financial Management
The Open School will be managed through the Finance Department of AIOU, which will ensure that the School’s objectives and targets are achieved through sound allocation and management of financial resources. The financial books of the School shall be audited on an annual basis.

Teaching and Learning Strategies
The School will ensure that learners are supported through learning strategies that are learner-centred, appropriate to the needs of the wide range of learners enrolled in the School’s programmes, and take into account the economic, religious, age and gender backgrounds of the learners.

The teaching strategy will ensure that most of the learning is community-based and that learners acquire knowledge, attitudes and skills that empower them to address the challenges faced by the community on a day-to-day basis. A programme of training and induction of tutors/teachers to acquaint themselves with such a community-oriented teaching and learning strategy will be put in place.
**Learner Support Services**

Local community-based support will be provided through teachers/facilitators, master trainers and village education committees. A wide range of learner support services will be used in order to cater for the needs of the wide range of learners in the School.

**Learning Materials**

Learning materials include OER and will comprise packages consisting of books, modules and manuals, with integrated multimedia like audio and video materials. The School will make use of the appropriate technology where necessary.

**Learner Assessment**

Learners will be assessed through different methods that include both continuous and end-of-semester/term examinations. Continuous assessment will consist mainly of tutor-marked assignments (TMAs) while summative assessment will be based on end-of-year examinations. Both formative and summative assessment marks will contribute to the final mark.

**Admission Process**

Considering the requirements and profile of out-of-school learners, special admission will be adopted to suit the varied needs of the Open School learners. The admission process is unconventional; it depends on the launch date of a project. The academic year in the formal school system starts in April and September each year in Pakistan, while Open School admission can be started at any time during the year, whenever a project is launched.

All learners will be assessed upon admission in order to establish their entry level. This will help the institution customise support for the learners.

**Physical Infrastructure and Resources**

Government-provided facilities for formal education will be used for open schooling. Teachers from conventional schools will also be hired as part-time tutors and resource persons. The School will enter into formal agreements with
conventional public schools to ensure that open school learners can access the resources they need.

**Staffing**

Staff will be recruited on a regular basis in accordance with the requirements of programmes offered. The School shall have a well-planned staff development plan to ensure that all new staff are inducted into open learning principles and methodologies and to keep staff up to date with new developments in ODL.

**Advocacy and Information Dissemination**

Occasional public exhibitions will be held to ensure that there is sufficient publicity about the School and its programmes. Information will be disseminated through pamphlets, brochures, prospectuses, newspapers and other media. The School shall also hold open days where programmes and planning can be shared with the public.

**Research and Community Service/Engagement**

The School will encourage and support staff to engage in research in order to improve programmes and engagement in community services. Research shall inform the teaching and learning improvement strategies of the School.

**Partnerships and Cooperation**

The School will form collaborative working relationships with other organisations (non-governmental/educational organisations) in order to enhance its teaching and learning activities. Formal agreements shall be signed with collaborative partners to ensure that learners’ needs are not compromised.

**Integration of Technology**

The School shall embrace the latest educational technologies as a way of improving its teaching and learning activities. It shall invest in equipping both learners and staff with the skills and expertise that will enable them to make effective use of educational technology.
Affiliations with Relevant and Regional Organisations

The Open School shall affiliate itself with relevant national, regional and international organisations in order to keep abreast of the latest trends and developments in open and distance learning.

8. APPROACHES TO QUALITY ASSURANCE

Regular internal reviews shall form an important aspect of the quality improvement strategies of the School. Occasional external evaluations shall take place in order to enhance the quality of the School’s processes and services. Thus, internal and external evaluation systems will be integral parts of the quality enhancement strategy of the open schooling programme.

9. QUALITY ASSURANCE STRUCTURES

The School shall have a dedicated quality assurance unit consisting of skilled and trained members whose responsibility it will be to coordinate the quality assurance activities of the School. This unit shall ensure that there is efficient monitoring of the activities of the School and take responsibility for planning and implementing systematic capacity-building and training programmes.

10. ACCOUNTABILITY

The School’s management team shall be directly answerable for all the quality assurance activities and programmes of the School. They will take responsibility for the effective implementation of the policy and ensure that the open schooling quality assurance policy is reviewed periodically.
1. INTRODUCTION

Quality assurance (QA) is a process through which an education institution guarantees to itself and its stakeholders that its teaching, learning and other services consistently reach a level of excellence. The government of the State of Andhra Pradesh (AP) started the Andhra Pradesh State Open School (APSOS) in 1991 with the objective of helping school dropouts and providing opportunities for high-quality education through the open and distance learning (ODL) mode. APSOS has so far offered secondary and senior secondary courses. In 2013–2014, it started to offer Open Basic Education (OBE) programmes equivalent to classes III, V and VIII to neo-literates as part of the Continuing Education (CE) Programme.

At APSOS there is no exclusive QA policy in place to guide all the activities of the Open School in a holistic manner. The government reviews the implementation of programmes through periodic reports generated by the School. The Executive Board also monitors the School’s programmes as part of the QA process. The Director constantly reviews the performance of all functionalities with reference to job charts and performance targets. The systematic monitoring of activities could not be ascertained in the absence of a QA policy. The QA policy for APSOS was therefore developed in order to provide guidance for the quality monitoring of the School’s operations.
2. INSTITUTIONAL VISION

The mission of APSOS is to:

- Identify the educational needs of out-of-school children/persons and to provide opportunities for education through a flexible distance mode.
- Design and develop suitable courses and self-instructional materials (SIM) to encourage and promote standards of learning among learners.
- Maintain standards of equivalence with the formal system and collaborate with other agencies in delivering vocational- and professional-oriented courses for their life enrichment.

3. INSTITUTIONAL MISSION

APSOS shall provide ample access to sustainable learner-centric quality school education and skills training to learners by using innovative technologies and methodologies through ODL.

APSOS will provide opportunities for continuing education to those who have missed the opportunity to complete their school education. It offers a second chance to learn through ODL methodologies, including general education, life enrichment and vocational education up to pre-degree level.

To achieve this mission, APSOS endeavours to excel in:

- Designing and developing educational programmes that are relevant to its client groups.
- Adopting delivery methods that are suitable and appropriate for the diverse student base it serves.
- Preparing students to function in a fast-changing society.
- Instilling, through its educational activities, values of peace, tolerance and human integrity.
4. AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE QUALITY ASSURANCE POLICY

The by-laws of APSOS explicitly mention the aims, objectives and responsibilities of its functionalities from top to bottom with respect to achieving the defined goals. The Executive Board periodically reviews the implementation of the programmes.

**Aim of the Quality Assurance Policy**

The quality assurance policy aims to provide comprehensive guidelines for monitoring and maintaining quality in all the activities of the Open School. The ultimate goal is to provide educational and training services that are equivalent to those offered in conventional face-to-face institutions. This policy will enhance the common understanding of the quality goals, methodologies and QA terms among all the stakeholders of the institution.

**Objectives of the Quality Assurance Policy**

- To promote standards of learning in open and distance education through both research and the regular and systematic review of programmes.
- To undertake studies and surveys from time to time and to obtain feedback on the quality of the materials developed, of facilities/support offered to learners and of the effectiveness of all the support structures and procedures used by the institution in pursuance of its mission.

5. POLICY VALUES

This quality assurance policy is based on the following values:

- All the stakeholders are involved in the QA process of the school.
- School services are based on thorough planning, management, monitoring, delivery and adequate resourcing.
- Quality services are delivered to staff members, or functionaries — the monitoring staff at the Directorate, the District Education Officers, the District Coordinators, the 1800+ study centre coordinators, the subject counsellors and learners.
- There is universalisation of education, greater equity and justice in society and evolution of a learning society.
6. POLICY ALIGNMENT

Quality assurance shall be aligned with the vision and mission of the Open School. A prospectus shall be provided to learners describing the programmes offered, admission criteria, registration procedures, learner support services and assessment procedures. A handbook is provided to functionaries on procedures regarding the conduct of public examinations. An institutional Quality Assurance Handbook covering all aspects of QA shall be developed.

7. SCOPE OF POLICY

The following areas are to be monitored on a regular and systematic basis to ensure compliance with defined standards:

- Institutional governance and management
- Financial management
- Programme design and development
- Teaching and learning strategy
- Learner support services
- Learning materials (including OER)
- Learner assessment
- Admission processes
- Physical infrastructure and resources
- Staffing
- Advocacy and information dissemination
- Research and community service/engagement
- Partnerships and collaboration
- Integration of technology
- Affiliations with relevant international, national and regional organisations
Institutional Governance and Management

APSOS is governed and managed by the government of Andhra Pradesh. The Executive Board, comprising members who represent and are appointed by the State government, monitors various activities of the institution from time to time. The Director and functionaries of the institution are responsible for the implementation of activities as per performance targets. The organisational structures and workflow of the institution are illustrated below.

**Financial Management**

The government approves the budget based on the year’s physical targets and oversees whether the financial targets (expenditure flow) reflect enrolment figures. The Accounts Department in the institution is responsible for the proper maintenance of accounts and the Audit of Expenditure at district level. The government’s Audit Department conducts audits every year. Regarding finance, there is also a third-party audit of receipts and expenditure by a Statutory Auditor. The Executive Board approves the audited statements every year and gives advice for improvement where necessary.
Programme Design and Development

A needs analysis is made before the programme design and development plan are conceived. The target group, course design processes and planning for learner support, including ICT support, are all informed by the needs of the learners. Human resource capacity building, monitoring, feedback, budget and affiliations with other institutions are considered in the programme design and development plan.

Teaching and Learning Strategy

A 30-day compulsory face-to-face personal contact programme (PCP) is carried out in Accredited Institutes (AIs) to provide adequate support to learners. Information on the PCP schedule is given in the prospectus so that learners will be able to go through the self-learning materials and attend counselling sessions for personal, academic and other forms of support. A separate 12-day support programme is provided in programmes with a practical component. District resource persons are provided with orientation on distance learning methodologies and how to support distance education learners. They in turn conduct orientation programmes for subject counsellors and centre coordinators.

Virtual open schooling and live lesson telecast programmes will be developed and implemented to improve the support given to learners.

Learner Support Services

- The QA policy will cover key aspects of the School, including guidance and counselling, timely delivery of learning materials, and services made available at the accredited institutes, district centres and headquarters. The policy will provide a framework for teacher counsellors to provide support services for learners to assist them in learning how to complete exercises given at the end of each lesson in the tutor-marked assignments (TMAs) (every learner has to submit three TMAs for each subject) and preparing for summative examinations; and encouraging them to act on the feedback and advice they receive by way of counsellors’ comments on the TMAs.

- Timely publication of results, error-free and fair evaluation procedures, and timely delivery of certificates are part of quality learner support services. Learners can call a helpline about the above issues during office hours. The queries raised by learners through email/post are also answered.
• Learner support services through a satellite network are to be developed and implemented as part of an improvement plan.

Learning Materials
APSOS provides self-learning materials, question and answer banks, manuals for practical assignments and model question papers in print form and online. The self-learning materials are prepared in accordance with the latest national and state policies. All materials will be developed by qualified and experienced staff with expertise in distance education pedagogy. The development of such materials will be a team effort to ensure high-quality products. APSOS will release its materials as open educational resources (OER). The Open School will also make use of OER in order to enrich its learning resources. The School will develop an appropriate OER policy in order to create an environment conducive to the implementation of OER. In developing this policy, the School will make use of UNESCO OER guidelines.

Learner Assessment
• The policy of continuous and comprehensive evaluation is pursued in Learner Assessment. The self-check/in-text questions that accompany every topic will be used to check the learners’ progress/achievement in the subjects they are studying. The final exercises, projects and tutor-marked assignments constitute formative assessment of learners.

• The public examination will be in the form of summative assessment and will be conducted twice a year, in April/May and September/October. To bring transparency to the assessment process, learners are given access to copies of answer scripts and answer scripts go through a thorough moderation process.

• In order to continuously improve its assessment processes, the Open School will provide regular training to staff.

Admission Processes
• The School’s admission process is learner-friendly and learners are provided with relevant information before registration. They are provided with free prospectuses that contain information on the fee structure, subjects offered, scheme of studies, assessment processes and the roles of the student and the School.
• The online admission and registration process will continue unchanged as it has proven to be user-friendly and error-free.

Physical Infrastructure and Resources
AIs are identified where there is sufficient infrastructure, laboratory facilities and qualified staff.

With regard to infrastructure at Headquarters, the necessary state-of-the-art infrastructure will be developed. The infrastructure and resources will also be developed in the model study centres in each district. These model centres will act as e-learning centres at a district level.

Staffing
• All AIs will be staffed by qualified and committed staff. Similarly, all staff recruited at the institution will be well-qualified and capable of dealing with ODL programmes. The number of both academic and non-academic staff shall be sufficient to handle both the number of students enrolled at any one time and the number of programmes offered by the School.
• The School shall provide staff development programmes on a regular basis in order to keep staff up to date with new developments in open and distance education.

Advocacy and Information Dissemination
The School shall develop an effective advocacy and information dissemination strategy in order to make its services known to all potential clients. The Minister of Education will release the admission schedule and publicity material like posters, brochures and pamphlets to raise awareness among the potential targeted groups about open school programmes. Posters will be put up in all villages, secondary schools, libraries and other public places.

Research and Community Service/Engagement
Research on open schooling shall be encouraged and supported by the School. The teaching and learning functions of the School shall be supported by information based on research. Staff shall be encouraged to conduct research, attend and present at national and international conferences and publish in local and
internationally refereed journals. Research shall also inform the development of programmes that address the needs of the community.

**Partnership and Collaboration**

The School shall have smart partnerships with relevant stakeholders in order to enhance its educational services. Partnerships with the State Council of Education Research Training (SCERT), for developing curriculum and study material, shall be strengthened. The partnership with the Department of Adult Education in the implementation of the Open Basic Education programme to neo-literates of Grade III level is successful and now the Grade V programme is under the Continuing Education programme.

**Integration of Technology**

Where appropriate, the School shall invest in relevant information and communication technology (ICT). The use of ICT to allow online admission and examination registration of learners through a network of 6,600 electronic service delivery (ESD) centres spread all over the state shall be prioritised. Study materials are uploaded onto the official website of the School for the benefit of learners. The citizen charter services provided are also on the website.

**Affiliations with Relevant National and Regional Organisations**

APSOS is a member of the Council of Boards of School Education (COBSE) in New Delhi, the National Confederation of Open Schools (NCOS) and the Commonwealth Open Schooling Association (COMOSA). The School will continue to look for more affiliations with relevant organisations as a way of strengthening its foothold on ODL.

**Approach to Quality Assurance**

- The coordinators of APSOS make periodic visits to study centres and collect feedback from learners, counsellors and study centre coordinators. The feedback provided by learners and counsellors will be used for improving the delivery of programmes.
• The Director conducts periodic review meetings with district-level functionaries, and suggestions made are used for improving the quality of services.

• The Executive Board conducts its meetings at least twice a year. The performance of functionaries from all departments are reviewed and recommendations are made for more effective implementation of programmes.

• At a government level, the Ministry of Education also reviews the overall functioning of the School by reviewing the reports furnished by the Department. The operations of the School and its QA arrangements are in keeping with national norms and requirements. The structure of APSOS is illustrated below.

All the Heads of Departments shown in the figure above are responsible for their departments in terms of QA. The Director is responsible for overall QA policy implementation. The Joint Director and the Examination Branches (both Secondary and Senior Secondary) are responsible for examinations and certification issues. The Accounts Officer is responsible for QA regarding the budget, accounts, audits and other financial matters. The Assistant Director and Academic departments are responsible for administration, monitoring, materials supply and academic issues.
8. THE QUALITY ASSURANCE STRUCTURES

The members of the Quality Assurance Committee will be approved by the Executive Board.

9. ACCOUNTABILITY

The Executive Board is the monitoring agency for the implementation of the quality assurance policy. The Director and staff at both state and district levels are accountable for the implementation of various programmes.

The programmes offered are:

- Senior secondary course: enrolment 102,000+ in 2014-15
- Open Basic Education programme for Grades III (enrolment: 33,000), V and VIII to the neo-literate using ODL mode; plans to start skill development programmes based on the inputs provided by COL in the RPL (Recognition of Prior Learning) training programme. We await government orders for the commencement of the programme.
1. INTRODUCTION

Assam State Open School (ASOS) plays a pivotal role in the promotion and development of open and distant learning (ODL) in the state of Assam. It was established in 2009 as a wing of the Assam Higher Secondary Education Council (the apex body that regulates, supervises and develops the +2 stage of education in the state of Assam in accordance with the Assam Higher Secondary Education Act, 1984 [Assam Act No. XVII of 1984]) to cater for the needs of the learners who have either dropped out from schools/colleges at the +2 stage or could not continue their education due to various socio-economic reasons but desire to continue their education with the aim of improving their life chances. ASOS has been constantly striving to impart quality education as one of its core commitments to learners. Here the Council is the statutory body. It approves the policies in its meetings, held twice a year, after consultation with the board members.

Though the open schooling system is recognised worldwide as an alternative system of continuing education, in Assam State it has not been accorded the same acceptability in terms of quality as that of the formal schooling system. The contribution of the Open School towards the universalisation of education cannot be overemphasised. Therefore, quality assurance (QA) in open schooling must address quality in the design and delivery mechanisms of course materials, management of the educational activities and capacity-building initiatives. Otherwise, the introduction of open schooling could become counterproductive as some learners who go through the system risk remaining too illiterate to make meaningful contributions to the development process of the country.

ASOS believes that to ensure quality in open schooling it needs a policy framework and a strong QA structure to plan, execute, monitor and oversee the QA-related aspects of the school.
2. INSTITUTIONAL VISION

The vision of Assam State Open School is to:

- Provide an alternative system of education in a flexible manner in order to cater for the needs of learners who want to pursue the +2 stage of education.
- Equip youth with sustainable inclusive learning and universal and flexible access to quality school education and skill development.

3. INSTITUTIONAL MISSION

The mission of Assam State Open School is to:

- Provide competent skills-based, value-oriented education that is inclusive, equitable, sustainable and of high quality for +2 stage students.
- Design and develop suitable educational programmes for the +2 stage in the ODL mode.
- Prepare learners adequately to function competently in a fast-changing society.
- Provide academic activities that instil values of peace and human integrity.

4. AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE QUALITY ASSURANCE POLICY

Aim of the Policy

The aim of the quality assurance policy is to create an environment for continuous improvement in the key service areas of the Assam State Open School.

Policy Objectives

The objectives of the quality assurance policy of Assam State Open School are to:

- Provide guidance in developing and implementing quality assurance practices.
- Provide a framework for defining quality standards for implementing academic programmes and teaching learning processes.
• Justify the appropriateness and relevance of programmes offered by the School at any one time.
• Provide guidance in the continuous monitoring and evaluation of the system to ensure that it meets the set local, regional and international standards.

**Policy Values**

The QA policy is framed around the following values:

• Involvement of stakeholders in the QA policy process.
• Continuous monitoring and evaluation to ensure compliance with local, regional and international set standards.
• Excellence in the provision of comprehensive and sustainable education through research.
• Excellence in the management, planning, resource allocation and teaching and learning processes to ensure quality services and quality education.
• Collaborative partnership with the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) and other ODL institutions in the country to develop an organised and credible ODL system in the state.

**Policy Alignment**

The QA policy will be aligned with relevant existing policies and guidelines of the Assam State Open School. These policies and guidelines include:

• The aim and objectives of Assam Higher Secondary Education Council
• Admission by-laws
• Registration and recognition by-laws
• Examination by-laws
• Institutional copyright policy
• Recruitment rules and guidelines
• Scope of policy
5. SCOPE OF POLICY

Each and every functionary and stakeholder of ASOS will be bound by this policy. The school will monitor and evaluate quality in the key mission areas of programme design and development, teaching and learning, research and community engagement. Accordingly, the following will be monitored on a regular and systematic basis to ensure compliance with defined standards:

- Institutional governance and management
- Financial management
- Programme design and development
- Teaching and learning strategy
- Learner support services
- Learning materials (including OER)
- Learner assessment
- Admission processes
- Physical infrastructure and resources
- Staffing
- Advocacy and information dissemination
- Research and community service/engagement
- Partnerships and collaboration
- Integration of technology
- Affiliations with relevant national and regional organisations

Institutional Governance and Management

The Council will be the main governing body of ASOS and will decide on the organisational structure of the School. It will also be responsible for designing the guidelines for the school, including broad guidelines for implementing the quality assurance policy. Among other things:

- The General Body (Council) will decide on the organisational structure of the Assam State Open School and direct the activities and annual plans of ASOS.
• The General Body will ensure public accountability by directing ASOS to exercise its powers and functions in consonance with the vision and mission of ASOS.

• ASOS will also ensure that the study centres are accountable for managing their resources for the benefit of ASOS learners.

Financial Management
To ensure the smooth functioning of ASOS, management of School finances will include:

• Budget provision to cover the institution’s total operational costs, in line with the programmes offered, learner enrolment levels, staffing and any improvements needed in the School.

• A well-designed and systematically developed plan indicating the current and projected learner intakes, recurrent expenditure and details of how the programmes are financed.

• An external audit of the institution’s finances annually in order to enhance institutional trustworthiness.

• Maintaining financial transparency by having the annual financial statement audited by external government auditors.

Programme Design and Development
• ASOS will design and develop programmes based on the needs and demand of local society, taking into account the socio-economic values of the society while adhering to the national and international standards.

• ASOS will use qualified and experienced staff with appropriate expertise in ODL to design and develop academic programmes in line with national standards.

• The design of assessment strategies shall be an integral part of the programme design process.

• Feedback from peers, external agencies and learners will be analysed regularly and used as a basis for reviewing programmes.

• Programmes will be reviewed on a five-year cycle to ensure they remain relevant. Programme review will be done in a systematic manner using defined quality standards.
Teaching and Learning Strategy

• ASOS will provide education through the ODL mode only. No face-to-face traditional classes will take place.

• ODL students have the privilege of a blended approach to learning, which means they also have face-to-face sessions. Therefore, a compulsory Personal Contact Programme (both theory and practical) will be arranged at the Accredited Study Centre (ASC) level to guide the open schooling learners.

• ASOS shall provide paper-based self-contained materials to cater for the needs of the wide range of learners enrolled in the School.

• The self-learning materials shall be designed in such a manner that they are a teacher-in-print enabling the learners to learn by themselves with only occasional support (personal contact sessions) from subject teachers at designated study centres.

Learner Support Services

• ASOS is committed to providing a positive learning environment for its learners at study centres established in accredited schools/institutions selected according to the set norms.

• ASOS shall support its learners at all ASCs through appropriate strategies.

• A wide range of support services shall be provided to ASOS learners in order to cater for the needs of the wide range of learners enrolled in the School.

• ASOS shall make provision for the formative assessment of learners through appropriate activities, including assignments and practical work where appropriate.

Learning Materials (including OER)

• The programme design team shall ensure use of appropriate instructional design for the preparation of quality learning materials.

• ASOS shall endeavour to make use of and develop online educational resources (OER) in new programmes and courses.
**Learner Assessment**

- Syllabus and Curriculum Committees in every subject shall develop objective-based and competency-based evaluation and assessment strategies.
- Evaluation of learners shall be formative and summative: formative through in-built exercises in the self-learning materials and through ongoing internal assessments such as tutor-marked assessments (TMAs); summative through two term-end examinations in a year at examination centres determined as per established guidelines.

**Admission Processes**

- ASOS will develop and issue prospectuses to learners indicating the admission guidelines, eligibility criteria, fee structure, etc.
- All the admission procedures will be conducted by the ASCs only.
- Admission will be conducted in person only.
- Provision will be made available for registration year-round with counselling facilities at the study centres.
- ASOS shall ensure that each learner receives the required learning materials immediately after confirmation of registration.

**Physical Infrastructure and Resources**

- ASOS shall ensure that sufficient and appropriate infrastructure and resources are available at each study centre to create a barrier-free environment for learners.
- ASOS will provide guiding norms to be met by any institution that wishes to serve as an ASC. These guidelines shall be in the form of Recognition by-laws.
- All institutions serving as ASCs shall ensure that a barrier-free environment prevails so as to avoid putting any learners at a disadvantage.
- Appropriate and sufficient resources shall be provided to all learners without any form of discrimination or bias.
Staffing

- ASOS shall appoint qualified staff on a permanent, contract or temporary basis as per the Recruitment and Service Rules approved by the Council.
- The School shall have programmes for the systematic development of staff, especially in ODL matters.
- Promotion of staff shall be based purely on merit and shall be done in a transparent manner.
- Measures to retain qualified staff shall be put in place to ensure a reasonable degree of staff stability in the School.

Advocacy and Information Dissemination

- ASOS shall utilise suitable means of advocacy to raise awareness of the value of open schooling through print and electronic media for effective dissemination of information regarding programmes and courses offered by the School.

Research and Community Service/Engagement

- Research and innovation in the area of open schooling shall be prioritised. The Research Advisory Committee shall be responsible for coordinating and overseeing such research.
- Research findings shall be used to guide the planning of open schooling programmes in particular and the rolling out of ODL services generally in the School.

Partnership and Collaboration

- ASOS shall enter into collaborative arrangements with international agencies such as The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) and Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA) and national agencies such as NIOS for material development, policy formulation and capacity building.
- ASOS shall enter into partnership with national agencies as needed.

Integration of Technology

- ASOS shall embrace appropriate technology in order to enhance the quality of learning by students.
• The use of educational technology shall be guided by appropriate ODL pedagogy.

**Affiliations with Relevant National and Regional Organisations**

• ASOS shall be affiliated with relevant national, regional and international organisations in order to keep abreast of developments in ODL.

**Capacity Building and Training**

• ASOS is committed to training both new staff and existing personnel in good practices for ODL.
• ASOS shall also carry out intensive capacity building of other functionaries and stakeholders associated with the School.

### 6. APPROACHES TO QUALITY ASSURANCE

The quality assurance approach of ASOS will be:

• Self-review: ASOS will conduct self-reviews on a regular basis in order to ensure systematic achievement of set standards.
• Internal reviews will also form an integral aspect of the School’s quality enhancement strategy.

Thus, a combination of internal and external quality reviews will form the hallmark of the School’s quality enhancement approach.

### 7. QUALITY ASSURANCE STRUCTURE

An appropriate quality assurance structure shall be established at ASOS to ensure effective implementation of institutional quality assurance arrangements. All units in the institution shall be represented in the QA structure. Senior management shall form an integral part of the structure and shall be answerable to matters relating to quality assurance in the institution. The organogram on the following page shows the ASOS quality assurance structure:
8. ACCOUNTABILITY

- The Chairman of the Assam Higher Secondary Education Council will be the ultimate authority on matters pertaining to quality assurance in the organisation.

- The QA committee, headed by the Secretary, shall comprise the Heads of all departments who shall work through the officers in all departments/units.

- The QA policy document shall be held by the QA committee, and any revisions/changes would need to be approved by the Council. It shall be reviewed on a regular basis.

- Each and every programme initiator/developer will be accountable for the quality of the programme developed.

Measures discussed and taken by analysing feedback as received from learners, ASCs and needs & demands of the target group society.
1. INTRODUCTION

Established in 1992 through the Bangladesh Open University Act, 1992, Bangladesh Open University (BOU) has been dedicated to fostering education for citizens all over the country who have either dropped out of traditional school or college at some stage or could not continue their education due to socio-economic reasons — early marriage, earning a living, etc. — but are seeking an education for better opportunities. In addition to managing a large number of students, BOU constantly strives to provide quality education, and the Open School — one of the main components of the university — is deeply committed to providing access to high-quality education.

Open schooling is vital for the competence development of a very large number of citizens to help Bangladesh meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the goals of Digital Bangladesh and Vision 2021. Therefore, quality assurance (QA) in open schooling must address quality in the design, delivery and management of the educational and capacity building initiatives. Otherwise, the introduction of open schooling could become counterproductive as the millions of citizens who go through the system risk remaining too illiterate to make meaningful contributions to the development process of the country.

BOU and the Open School believe that a policy framework and a strong QA structure to plan, execute, monitor and oversee the QA-related aspects of the university are needed to ensure quality in open schooling.
2. INSTITUTIONAL VISION

BOU’s vision is to become a leading and top-class Bangladesh university that responds to national development needs by imparting high-quality knowledge and skills through open and distance learning (ODL) methods.

3. INSTITUTIONAL MISSION

BOU’s mission is to create a pool of skilled citizens by offering access to education to the public and by developing the general standard of education through the adoption of multidimensional and multilevel educational initiatives in the arts and science fields, using all available communication technologies.

4. AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE QUALITY ASSURANCE POLICY

Aim of the Quality Assurance Policy

The overriding aim of this quality assurance policy is to develop a culture of continuous quality improvement in order to achieve excellence in the delivery of quality education by the university.

Objectives of the Quality Assurance Policy

The objectives of this QA policy are to:

- Provide guidance in the development and implementation of QA procedures and practices in line with local, regional and international standards.
- Assist in meeting defined quality standards for academic programmes, teaching and learning processes, research and community engagement.
- Monitor and evaluate QA systems to ensure they meet set local, regional and international standards.
5. POLICY VALUES

The quality assurance policy will be built around the following:

- Adherence to a user-friendly process to pursue the values and purposes of the policy.
- Ownership of the processes to develop user-friendly policies that define the core values and purposes of open schooling.
- The involvement of all stakeholders in the QA process.
- Excellence in the planning, management, resource allocation and teaching and learning processes to ensure quality services and quality graduates.
- Stringent monitoring and evaluation in line with set standards locally, regionally and internationally.
- Development of learners who are critical thinkers and demonstrate the fundamental human values of honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility. From these values flow principles of behaviour that enable academic communities to translate ideals into action.
- Use of research to advance excellence in the provision of comprehensive and sustainable education based on research.
- Collaborative partnerships with other ODL institutions at home and abroad to develop an organised and credible ODL system.
- Adherence to the concept of gender equality, which should be all-encompassing to protect the rights and privileges of the huge number of female students at BOU.

6. POLICY ALIGNMENT

This policy will support the achievement of BOU’s vision through the accomplishment of its objectives. It will thus serve as the core of all other policies related to the service provision of the School. The policy will be aligned with the BOU Act, and the rules, regulations and other policies of BOU. A Quality Assurance Handbook will be developed in order to provide sufficient guidance for policy realignment in the University.
7. SCOPE OF THE POLICY

Every member and every facet of BOU shall be bound by this policy. The University will monitor and evaluate quality in the key areas of programme design and development, teaching and learning, resource provision, provision of infrastructure and facilities, and research. The following areas will be monitored on a regular and systematic basis to ensure compliance with defined standards:

- Institutional governance and management
- Programme planning, design and development
- Financial management
- Teaching strategy and process
- Learner information and accessibility
- Admission process
- Advocacy and information dissemination
- Learning materials (including OER)
- Support services
- Learner assessment
- Resources and facilities
- Integration of technology
- Staffing
- Research
- Programme review process
- Partnerships and collaboration
- Affiliations with relevant national, regional and international organisations

Institutional Governance and Management

As outlined in the BOU Act, 1992, the following authorities will be responsible for various educational matters:

- Board of Governors (BoG)
- Academic Council
- School Committee
• Curriculum Committee
• Finance Committee
• Academic Planning Committee

Board of Governors (BoG)

Formation
• Vice-Chancellor (VC), also the Chairman of BoG
• One Pro-VC, nominated by the Chancellor
• Treasurer
• Secretary, Ministry of Education, Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh (PRB)
• Secretary, Ministry of Information, Government of the PRB
• One renowned academic (preferably with knowledge of and experience with ODL) from outside BOU, nominated by the Chancellor
• One renowned businessman from the business community, nominated by the Chancellor
• Two renowned professional representatives from other professions, nominated by the Chancellor
• Any two Deans of the Schools and two teachers of BOU, recommended by the VC and approved by the BoG

Responsibility
• The BoG will be the highest authority to govern and manage all matters of the University.
• The BoG will give strategic guidance on all QA matters and must approve all major decisions.

Academic Council

Formation
• VC, also the Chairman of the Academic Council
• Pro-VC
• Deans of the Schools
• All professors of BOU
• Librarian
• Controller of Examination
• Ten members (preferably with knowledge and experience of ODL), as recommended by the VC and approved by the Chancellor, who can represent BOU's educational and professional interests within national policy parameters
• Ten members from BOU, as nominated by the BoG, who hold positions not below the position of Associate Professor, including a maximum of three Regional Directors, who may not hold any teaching posts

**Responsibility**
- The Academic Council will be the principal authority for all educational matters of the University.
- The Academic Council will control and supervise all education and the method of imparting education at BOU.

**School Committee**

**Formation**
- Dean of the School, also the Chairman of the School Committee
- All professors of the School
- One-third of the remaining teachers of the School, excluding the above, in rotation as nominated by the Academic Council
- Teaching members of the faculty as nominated by the Academic Council, those who don't teach the subject of the respective school but are otherwise related. (For example, a faculty member from the School of Education may teach in the School of Law.)

**Responsibility**
- The School Committee will plan, organise and supervise all academic matters of the School.
- It will administer the smooth functioning of academic programmes by ensuring academic and non-academic posts are filled appropriately.
- It will recommend the awarding of degrees and certificates as per the rules and standards of the University.
Curriculum Committee

There will be one Curriculum Committee for each subject, or a group of related subjects, as required by the School.

Formation

- Chairman/Convener of the Committee, as nominated by VC
- Subject teachers of the School
- Experts(s) from the media, nominated by VC
- Distance learning expert(s), nominated by VC

Responsibility

The Curriculum Committee will make recommendations on the following to the School Committee:

- Subjects for study
- Methods of teaching
- Curriculum with reference materials
- Ways of integrating and connecting interrelated subjects or lessons
- List of examiners for different subjects
- Means of communication among the Study Centres

Finance Committee

Formation

- VC, also the Chairperson of Finance Committee
- One Pro-VC, as nominated by VC
- Four members from outside of BOU, nominated by the BoG, including a minimum of two members with expertise in administration and finance
- One Dean, nominated by the Academic Council
- Two members from BOU, nominated by the BoG, who must be experts on administration and finance
- Treasurer, who will work as Secretary of the Committee
Responsibility

- The Committee will plan, maintain and supervise all income and expenditures of BOU.
- It will ensure that there is appropriate funding for the smooth running of all academic programmes.

Academic Planning Committee

Formation

- VC as Chairman of the Committee or any person nominated by the VC from below
- One Pro-VC, nominated by the BoG
- Two Deans of Schools, nominated by the BoG
- Two members from the Academic Council, nominated by the VC
- Two specialist members from outside of BOU (preferably with knowledge and experience of ODL), nominated by the BoG

Responsibility

- The Academic Planning Committee will advise the Academic Council and VC on educational matters.

Programme Planning, Design and Development

Curriculum Development Procedure

The University needs to produce a manual to guide schools in curriculum development, and the following procedure is recommended. Every programme will have a programme design document. The School Committee will ensure that the programme is developed in accordance with the University guidelines. The proposed curriculum should include:

- Title
- Objectives/outcomes
- Justification
- Level of the programme
- Entry requirements/target group
- **Course categorisation**
  - Core
  - Elective
  - Optional
- **Duration**
- Requirements for qualifying, including the grading system which must be in keeping with national standards approved by the University
- Balance between theory, practical skills and internship, if necessary
- Students’ performance assessment strategy
- The proposed programme must have a coordinator who is qualified in the major courses making up the programme

**The Curriculum Committee will be responsible for developing the academic part of the programme and will recommend it to the School Committee. The School Committee will send this proposal to the Academic Planning Committee through the registrar.**

The Academic Planning Committee:

- Examines programme content relevance/justification
- Ensures that the programme is in harmony with the University’s policies and mission
- Oversees quality of delivery
- Ensures that the programme allows ample time for assessments of the curriculum and preparation for implementation

The proposed academic programme will be submitted to the Quality Assurance Committee.

- The proposal shall include:
  - Name of the academic programme
  - Objectives of the programme
  - Justification for introduction of the programme
  - Physical facilities for the programme
  - Human resources for the programme
  - Evidence to show that there is demand for the programme
The Quality Assurance Committee will consider the proposal and will establish:

- Whether the department proposing the programme has the mandate to run the programme.
- Whether the proposed curriculum meets the required standards. The Academic Council approves the proposed programme and sends it to the BoG for approval. Once the programme has been approved by the BoG, all the information and paperwork regarding the curriculum and its implementation will be sent again to the respective school for launching.

Curriculum Design

A curriculum should be able to facilitate a balanced learning process and ensure that students are able to acquire such cognitive and psychomotor skills as are consistent with the educational goals and aspirations of the National Education Policy.

The design of every curriculum should ensure that the programme:

- is broad-based or integrated,
- has a practical aspect,
- is diversified,
- does not compromise the standards of excellence set by the National Education Policy, and
- contributes to the overall national human resource development requirements.

Every curriculum shall clearly specify:

- Pass mark or grade for each course
- Minimum number of courses that a student must successfully undertake to qualify for an academic award
- Condition for progression
- Assessment requirements (coursework and written examinations)
- Distribution of marks between coursework and written examinations
- Duration
- Classification of the awards
• External review by a professional association or the prospective employer
• Resources include staffing (full-time, part-time, technicians), equipment, general operating costs/fees structure, as well as relevant library materials, ICT, space/accommodation (lecture rooms, labs, workshops, studios, land, internship facilities, etc.) and even photocopying
• Balance between theory and practical skills: There is a need to balance theory, practical skills and internship
• The proposed programme must have a coordinator whose qualifications are in the major courses to be conducted in the programme

Details of each course should include:
• Description of course team
• Course description
• Objective statements referring to some intended change/effect in or with regard to the target group (learners)
• Course outlines referring to the topics to be covered in the course
• Learning outcomes based on change: New knowledge or skills, changed attitudes or values
• Method of teaching/delivery
• Mode of assessment
• Reading/reference materials

Curriculum Content
A curriculum or programme of study shall:
• Clearly indicate the core courses
• Clearly indicate the elective courses
• Provide common courses
• Provide a full content description in a form readily accessible to every student of every course in the syllabus that the programme is proposing
• State whether the programme being proposed is specialised or general, or some other variant of the programme
• Indicate whether all courses in the syllabus are expected to be taught by staff drawn wholly from within the faculty or department concerned or partly by staff from elsewhere

• Specify in terms of lecture hours the minimum load for each course offered in every academic year or section of the year

Every curriculum shall clearly specify the following:

• Pass mark or grade for each course
• Minimum number of courses that a student must undertake to qualify for an academic award (minimum graduation load)
• Conditions for progression
• Assessment requirements (coursework and written examinations)
• The distribution of marks between coursework and written examinations

**Financial Management**

• BOU will ensure judicious use of its financial resources to provide services at a minimum cost to its learners.

• The Finance and Accounts Division will prepare a detailed plan of expenditure based on the learner intake vs the expected costs with frequent periodic reviews with the cooperation of the schools.

• BOU will maintain financial transparency by having its annual financial statement audited by external governmental auditors.

**Teaching Strategy and Process**

• **Teaching strategy:** It is University policy to promote distance learning as a mode of increasing access to education.

• **Teaching process:** The teaching process will be regulated by the Statute of the University. The multidimensional teaching and training process will include the following:
  • Correspondance packages
  • Films
  • Audio cassettes
  • Television programmes
  • Radio programmes
• Lectures
• Tutorials
• Discussions
• Seminars
• Visits
• Demonstration and laboratory works
• Workshops
• Practical teaching on agricultural grounds
• Any other means of practical learning and training

**Learner Information and Accessibility**

• The University collects information about the standards and quality of its programmes, and publishes this information for the benefit of current and prospective students as well as the general public. This information should be consistent and reliable.

• University policy shall be that every student should receive a Student Handbook, a Programme Guide and a Course Guide for every course for which they are registered in order to provide them with comprehensive information.

• Accurate and accessible information for students will assist them to:
  • Understand what is required to achieve the standards for the award for which they are enrolled.
  • Understand their responsibilities, both to maintain their enrolment and in respect of their own learning.
  • Understand their responsibilities as members of the University community and, where appropriate, their responsibilities in respect of professional conduct.
  • Know how to derive maximum benefit from the learning opportunities available to them.
  • Know how, and in what circumstances, to access support services.
  • Understand the regulatory framework that governs decisions about progression and awards.
  • Know how to use the system that exists for students to express their views or to make complaints.
Admission Process
The Admission process will be in accordance with programme regulations. All learners will be assessed upon admission in order to establish their entry level. All learners shall be admitted on the basis of merit and through a transparent system.

Advocacy and Information Dissemination
Advocacy of the Open Schooling programme will be undertaken through suitable means for effective dissemination of information about BOU’s programmes and courses.

Learning Materials (including OER)
General principles
• In distance education (DE), it is important that the learning materials be self-contained and easy for students to understand, since they are the prime medium of teaching.
• Learning materials shall:
  • include both print and electronic media,
  • allow independent learning, and
  • be developed by qualified staff with expertise in ODL pedagogy.

OER
• For ease of access by the students, all learning materials shall be published as open educational resources (OER).
• Creation, publication and updating of OER will be regulated by a separate OER policy of the University.

Support Services
• Assessment of quality in the academic support services provided to faculties/schools/institutes and departments including record keeping and attention to process as it relates to academic excellence, and shall be an integral aspect of the quality assurance framework.
• BOU shall ensure that its learner support services are easily accessed by learners and enhance throughput rates. The University will ensure that students can easily access study centres, tutorial staff and ICT facilities.

• BOU will ensure that there is a barrier-free environment for learners in all the study centres and a friendly learning environment for people with disabilities.

• The QA Committee will conduct impromptu visits to study centres and other student support facilities. It will also periodically check/take stock of the student support services/facilities to ensure quality.

**Learner Assessment**

Quality assurance mechanisms for determining the quality of learner assessments, both continuous and summative, shall be developed. There shall be provision for employing external members/examiners for learner assessment of all courses. If no external examiners are available, departments shall develop assessment systems that are consistent with the QA framework approved by the Academic Council. These shall include a minimum of internal moderation procedures that ensure the accuracy of student assessment and reliability of marking.

**Resources and Facilities**

Assessment of the quality of resources and facilities shall include measures for assessing the availability and appropriateness of lecture rooms, libraries, book banks, ICTs, laboratory or practical facilities and equipment.

**Integration of Technology**

Appropriate educational technology will be used to enhance the quality of teaching and learning. The University’s media division will constantly endeavour to adopt new technologies that are easily accessible by all students. The use of such educational technologies shall be underpinned by appropriate pedagogy.

**Staffing**

• BOU shall recruit qualified staff to ensure provision of high-quality services to its learners. The institution will implement staff development programmes for both academic and non-academic staff on a continuous basis.
to keep staff abreast of new developments in ODL. Appropriate measures will be taken in order to retain qualified staff and minimise staff turnover rates.

- Assessment of the quality of academic staff shall include expectations with regard to qualifications, scholarly work and continuing professional development. Benchmarks for minimum qualifications, scholarly work and involvement in continuing professional development activities shall be determined by academic units. Guidelines and procedures from the performance management and appointments and promotions procedures shall be considered when developing these academic staff expectations.

- Training in appropriate ODL methodology shall be provided, both initially and on an ongoing basis, to all staff involved in DE delivery. Such staff training will be reflected in the budget. Training will include:
  - ODL materials development and writing
  - ODL assignment and examination marking
  - Use of ICTs in ODL
  - ODL facilitation methods
  - Support for, and communication with, ODL learners
  - Record keeping, monitoring and evaluation in ODL
  - Other areas as appropriate

- Where appropriate and relevant, staff should be provided with staff development opportunities to undertake further, supported programmes of study that will strengthen both the individual and the institutional skills-base.

**Research**

In order for BOU to keep an outstanding international reputation in research, it shall be committed to maintaining and expanding its research capacity to conduct research and research training of international distinction. Quality of research shall be judged on the basis of assessment of:

- Capacity to perform research at the individual and faculty/school/institute level
- Research relevance to the discipline and BOU, both locally and globally
- External research and internal funding
• Research management
• Research findings and dissemination
• Research and research training strategies to see if they reflect international best practices

Programme Review Process
• A programme will normally be reviewed once every three years. In consultation with the Deans and Senior Administrators, the University’s Academic Council will select the programmes to be reviewed and recommend the order of their review.

• Programme reviews shall comprise both internal and external review components. The internal analysis shall consist of gathering and analysing numerical data related to the programme by internal staff. These data are reported in the self-study report. The external analysis shall comprise examination of the self-study report compiled after the internal review and an external review by an external review team that validates the self-study.

• With a balance between the internal and external analyses, the programme review process will ensure accountability and fairness.

• The primary purpose of a programme review is to evaluate six aspects of a programme:
  • Quality/relevance
  • Resource use/level of support resources
  • Contribution to the mission and vision of the institution
  • Adaptability to/articulation with other programmes
  • Transferability and recognition of qualifications
  • Assessment strategy

Partnership and Collaboration
The institution will form collaborative working relationships with other national and international organisations in order to enhance the quality of its teaching and learning processes. Agreements will be signed with collaborative partners to ensure learners’ needs are fully and fairly met.
Affiliations with Relevant National, Regional and International Organisations

The Open School shall be affiliated with relevant national, regional and international organisations in order to keep abreast of the latest trends and developments in ODL. Participation in meetings, workshops, seminars and conferences with the affiliated organisations will be encouraged by the institution.

8. APPROACH TO QUALITY ASSURANCE

Quality Assurance Strategy

- The University has adopted quality assurance as “Qualify in Quality, Qualify by Quality,” a strategy that stresses the need to first meet or conform to generally accepted standards such as those defined by the University or quality assurance body, and then focus on the efficiency of the processes at work in the institution or programme in fulfilling the stated objectives and mission. Goals and objectives are the key drivers of a “Qualify in Quality, Qualify by Quality” model of quality assurance. They set the framework for planning, monitoring and measuring outcomes. They also facilitate communication with the stakeholders.

- The QA approach to addressing quality of education matters incorporates three core quality assurance functions: defining quality, measuring quality and improving quality. The QA triangle effectively illustrates the synergy between these.

![Diagram showing the QA triangle with the following nodes: Defining Quality, Measuring Quality, Improving Quality, and the node QUALITY ASSURANCE at the center, connecting all three nodes.]
• Each core function actually represents a constellation of activities, as explained below. The triangle shape indicates that rather than being a unique sequence of steps that initiate QA activities, all core functions need to take place in a balanced manner for the QA strategy to be effective. The greatest impact on the quality of education results only when all three functions are implemented in a coordinated fashion.

**Defining quality** means developing expectations or standards to be attained. Standards state the expected level of performance for a student, a faculty or an entire teaching system of the University. A good standard is reliable, realistic, valid, clear and measurable. The definition of quality standards also includes stakeholder perceptions and expectations of the institution (including students and community). If standards do not exist, practitioners must design them or adapt them from international standards. Although standards are context-specific, universally accepted standards are often a good starting point for developing local standards. Sometimes, even when national standards exist, they must be refined or made operational for local use.

**Improving quality** means using quality improvement methods (problem solving, process re/design or re-engineering) to close the gap between the current level and expected level of quality (as defined by the standards). This means using quality management tools and principles to:

• identify/determine what one wants to improve;
• analyse the system of teaching/problem solving;
• develop a hypothesis on which changes (solutions) might improve quality;
• test/implement the changes to see if they really yield improvement; and,
• based on the results of testing, decide whether to abandon, modify or implement the solutions.

**Measuring quality** consists of quantifying the current level of performance or compliance with expected standards. This process requires identifying indicators of performance, collecting data and analysing information. Measuring quality is inextricably linked with defining quality because the indicators for measuring quality are related to the specific definition or standard of quality under study. When standards define quality, measuring quality involves assessing the level of compliance
with those standards. Hence, measuring quality is easier with a clear definition or standard, because the indicators are directly derived from the expression of the standards. Likewise, measuring quality leads directly to identifying areas for improvement or enhancement — the first step in quality improvement. In so far as this policy is concerned, a few key points in the measurement deserve highlighting:

- If one starts the QA approach with measuring quality, the scope of measurement should be limited to what the system is able/willing to improve (i.e. a quality improvement objective must be defined).
- The QA team must be realistic about what data the team can readily collect at the facility level or across the system. A simple performance monitoring system with a limited number of indicators related to the improvement goal is usually very effective.
- Measurement strategies, such as special surveys, self-assessment, audits and supervision visits, must be carefully designed so that the stakeholders ultimately controlling the quality of education (usually the providers) take full ownership of the quality improvement process. The team in charge of making improvements should fully participate in defining standards, identifying indicators and developing a measurement strategy.

**Conceptual Approach to Quality Assurance Process**

- The conceptual approach of a QA process will involve the following three aspects:
  - **Three-dimensional review**, which means self-, peer- and external review to ensure that the interests and concerns of all stakeholders are addressed.
  - **Holistic approach**, so that all aspects of teaching and learning are addressed.
  - **Continuous review and improvement**, which means periodic review processes even after a programme is launched.
- In brief, BOU’s operational catchwords are “accountability” and “improvement” through “self-, peer and external reviews” against objectives achieved by good “planning” and “processes,” but “holistically viewed” and “periodically measured.” It is shown diagrammatically on the following page.
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9. QUALITY ASSURANCE STRUCTURE

Quality Assurance Committee

University QA Committee

School QA Committee
Quality Assurance Process

QA Process during Programme Planning, Design and Development

QA Process for Periodic Review
10. ACCOUNTABILITY

• The accountability of programmes will be ensured through periodic programme review processes. Programmes will be reviewed on a three-year cycle.

• Programme initiators/developers will be accountable to the School authority for the quality of the programme developed.

• The School QA Committee will be accountable to the University QA Committee for checking and reviewing the quality of the programmes.
1. INTRODUCTION

The policy for quality assurance (QA) at the Instituto de Educação Aberta e à Distância (IEDA) (Institute of Open and Distance Learning) will ensure that the quality management of all quality processes in open and distance learning (ODL) is treated as a matter of major importance. IEDA designs ODL courses and study materials, trains implementers (tutors, managers), and monitors and supervises the implementation of courses.

This policy document is a further development from the Quality Assurance Toolkit, an initiative of The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) and recommended as guideline to be utilised by ODL institutions. IEDA reports to the Ministry of Education and Human Development of Mozambique (MINEDH), which provides excellent open and distance education programmes for in-service teacher training and secondary education.

This policy will assume an understanding of “quality” as a set of standards or rules that stipulate a degree of excellence. This policy promotes the orderly development of distance education as well as the development of technology use, infrastructure and staff.

For this policy we agree with the importance of quality assurance in distance education for effective operations as stated in the QA Toolkit:

Quality assurance refers to all those attitudes, objects, actions and procedures that, through their existence and use, and together with the quality control activities, ensure that appropriate
academic standards are maintained and enhanced in and by each programme. Quality assurance extends to making the process and standards known to the educational community and the public at large. (QA Toolkit, 2010)

This policy will direct that all implementation of ODL and relationships between the institution and the stakeholders and related organisations should be executed with excellence in mind.

This policy will share the vision, mission, objectives and values of IEDA. A quality commitment strategy, quality assurance operational functions and the scope of the policy will guide the implementation process.

2. DEFINITIONS

The following definitions reflect procedures and operations at IEDA.

- **Open and distance learning**: A flexible education system that allows learners to learn where and when they want, physically away from a school and teacher. It uses several teaching methods to support learning and has no age restrictions.

- **Quality assurance**: All those attitudes, objects, actions and procedures that, through their existence and use, and together with the quality control activities, ensure that appropriate academic standards are maintained and enhanced in and by every programme.

- **Quality criteria**: A way of putting into practice an institution’s quality assurance policy. An agreed description of the quality benchmarks to be achieved that also serves as a checklist of what needs to be done to meet them.

3. PURPOSE

IEDA will strive to allow broad access to the National Education System for all learners. With excellent capacity-building initiatives and high-quality instruction, IEDA will strengthen the ODL purpose in Mozambique. The board will be engaged in exceptional governance, and IEDA will demonstrate outstanding
management practices, develop and produce high-quality learning material and provide excellent learner support. The overall implementation of ODL strategies is closely supervised and monitored. IEDA provides quality infrastructure and physical facilities to meet the demands of the vision, mission, objectives and values.

4. OBJECTIVES

This policy will act as a framework for an efficient quality assurance system. It endeavours not only to apply quality assurance measures throughout IEDA but also to:

• Provide quality distance education programmes for in-service teachers, and for all citizens whose needs are not met by the conventional education system or who have other, specific needs.

• Provide short-term professional training in order to prepare youth and adults for work.

• Develop and spread research about new education and information communication and technologies.

• Support the development of quality learning materials for all ODL programmes and their production and despatching to all learning centres countrywide.

• Provide regular learner support sessions to learners in all the learning centres and to offer a diversity of learner support options, including face-to-face and multimedia sessions.

• Review, monitor and supervise ODL programmes regularly to ensure quality and to fulfil the institution’s QA responsibility within the education sector.

• Establish ODL resource centres all over the country to help learners to improve the quality of their learning efforts.
5. **SCOPE**

Everybody involved in and every facet of IEDA shall be bound by this quality assurance policy.

- IEDA will monitor and evaluate quality in the key mission areas of policy and planning, programme design and development, material design, monitoring and evaluation, human resources, learner support, research, and management and administration.
- The scope of this policy will guide all internal staff members in all departments of IEDA.
- The structure of IEDA is functional at both central and provincial levels.
- All processes should be mapped, recorded and implemented for quality output.

**Structure of IEDA**

6. **POLICY STATEMENT**

IEDA commits to realising its vision, mission, objectives and values as stated below; to delivering quality service and products to all clients; and to regularly monitoring and evaluating the implementation of all its activities to ensure continuous quality improvement. IEDA also guarantees that all governance and management processes will be in line with standard best practices for quality assurance and will assign the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) to undertake systematic monitoring and evaluation.
**Vision**
To be an institution of recognised merit in quality open and distance education and new ODL research methods, in both a national and an international context.

**Mission**
To promote training courses for in-service teachers and for all citizens outside of the conventional education system, including the promotion of professional short courses, using ODL methodologies.

**Objectives**
- To train in-service primary school teachers via ODL
- To train out-of-school citizens via ODL
- To promote short-term entrepreneur courses via ODL

**Values**
- Proactivity
- Accessibility
- Teamwork
- Social justice
- Impartiality
- Continuity
- Uniqueness
- Accountability
- Equity
- Transparency
- Professionalism
- Competence

**Quality Accountability**
Based on IEDA's vision, mission, objectives and values, the policy will be implemented appropriately and constantly monitored; it will carefully evaluate
the implementation of all authorised activities to confirm continuous quality improvement and ensure that all governance and management processes are in line with standard QA best practices. The QAC will safeguard QA implementation by regular reviews of existing policies, regulations and procedures; where such guiding instruments are lacking, the QAC will develop appropriate documents to guarantee in general that all processes are in line with strategic drivers. Therefore, the QAC will meet twice annually to review elements and criteria for performance standards and a Quality Assurance Manual for IEDA.

7. COMMITMENT TO A QUALITY APPROACH

- Quality version control will be applied to the policy document, indicating amendments as well as the approved date and the name of the body that approved each version.
- A quality approach will be applied to all documentation as well as human resources.
- A quality focus will embrace policies, procedures and processes for IEDA to ensure that quality standards in education are maintained.
- Every policy procedure and process will have continuous revision and monitoring activities.
- The quality assurance system of IEDA is fundamentally based on the principle of continuous improvement. IEDA is committed to constantly striving to make the organisation and the QA system more effective. Continuous improvement is the core management strategy and covers all aspects of operations. All continuous improvement activities are recorded and tracked with regard to the procedures and processes they affect.

8. QUALITY ASSURANCE OF OPERATIONAL FUNCTIONS

IEDA consists of four departments (Pedagogical Department, Planning and Statistics Department, Control and Evaluation Department and ITC Department). There are two autonomous sectors, the Human Resource Sector and the Financial and Administration Sector, which should be constantly quality-assured.
**Pedagogical Department**

- This department will quality-ensure all seminars, symposiums and other events related to ODL pedagogic issues.
- This department will quality-ensure all procedures and standards of material development, learner support, research and curriculum development.
- This department will be responsible for training tutors, staff members and managers of learning centres and will seek and commit to continuous improvement to offer the highest standards of service.
- This quality assurance policy will ensure quality in the areas of learning, tutoring, learner support and research at IEDA with continuous improvement activities to help IEDA meet the highest standards in learning, tutoring, learner support and research.
- Continuous quality assurance and improvement of the quality of teaching and learning in programmes at IEDA happen on a cyclic basis through the application of self-evaluation processes and procedures.
- Curriculum development — course development, reviews/modifications and approvals — must occur in accordance with the prescribed policy in the Estatuto Orgânico do IEDA by the Pedagogical Department.
- Research and needs analysis in teacher training will be conducted by this department and this QA policy prescribes that both internal self-evaluation of units and sections and external peer group evaluation should be conducted on a five-year cycle.
- The IEDA programmes (Junior Secondary Education (JSE), Senior Secondary Education (SSE), Teacher Training and Entrepreneurship) will be evaluated on the basis of internal and external audits.

**Planning and Statistics Department**

- This department will:
  - seek to involve all other departments in the development of the annual IEDA plan;
  - ensure that the plan is smart and accurate and that accountability is secured;
  - seek to develop the criteria and indicators of good practices to implement IEDA programmes;
• gather and record statistical data;
• hold regular and extraordinary management meetings to ensure best implementation of IEDA work plans; and
• develop and monitor the routines, activities, projects and programmes developed by IEDA.
• This QA policy prescribes that internal self-evaluations of monthly and annual IEDA reports are provided.

**Control and Evaluation Department**

- This department is responsible for:
  - the quality assurance of monitoring and supervision of programmes, and
  - quality analysis and reporting of assessment and examination results and effective implementation of recommendations.
- This department will:
  - mobilise and recruit learners in accordance with all institutional guidelines, and
  - conduct research related to certification and equivalences of courses/training proved by IEDA.
- Registration, recording and termination of IEDA’s formal programmes will take place in accordance with the national policy.
- Quality management of enrolment should be implemented.

**ITC Department**

This department is responsible for:

- the quality assurance of IEDA’s computers, telephone system, Internet access, Wi-Fi, email and video-conferencing;
- regular backups of IEDA information on the server;
- producing multimedia lessons for learners;
- operating a control system to monitor all media equipment by signing in and out such equipment as well as checking its condition when it is returned;
- safeguarding IEDA laptops in adherence with proper procedures;
- providing training in ICT and ICT-related tasks; and
• coordinating and producing communications for publicity and broadcasting.

Financial and Administration Sector

Financial and Administration activities will be quality-assured via proper systems and operations.

• Financial and administration issues: All such issues at IEDA are executed according to the rules established for public institutions. IEDA must guarantee their correct implementation and report regularly to the Ministry of Education and Human Development (MINEDH) Financial and Administration Directorate (DAF).

• Printing and despatch of materials: The printing and despatch of materials will be done according to the procurement policy in place for public institutions. IEDA is responsible for determining the material specifications and the quality of printed material as well as ensuring that such material is kept in the correct place.

• Recruitment of employees: As with all national directorates within the MINEDH, the process of staff recruitment at IEDA is executed by the Human Resource National Directorate. This QA policy directs all legal and human resources operational matters at IEDA, such as staff orientation sessions for new staff members and staff development sessions, to be in line with the Staff Development Policy of the Public Service. All staff members should receive continuous development according to the MINEDH Staff Development Policy.

• A quality records filing system for IEDA is in place and is based on the relevant national guidelines.

• Transport and travel: IEDA should have enough vehicles to meet its daily functions and operational requirements. These vehicles are for official purposes only. Drivers are obliged to take into account the speed limit and should not consume alcohol while using the vehicles (passengers should not consume alcohol either). Vehicles will be operated in line with documented guidelines and regulations.

• Building, renovation and maintenance: Regular maintenance and renovation schedules are in place in accordance with identified needs and will be approved by IEDA’s director, within the limits of his mandate.
• **Other matters:**
  
  • Proper cash management and petty cash procedures should guide the QA management of cash.
  
  • A building safety and security emergency evacuation programme should be implemented.
  
  • Staff and students should be environmentally conscious and save water, electricity and paper where possible.

### 9. QUALITY ASSURANCE OF ROLE FUNCTIONS

IEDA should be governed and managed in a quality way that covers all aspects of operations within the institution, such as governance, strategic planning, human resource planning, administration, financial management, ICT planning, pedagogical planning, statistical planning, support services planning and evaluation planning. Greater transparency is achieved by using Internet and intranet facilities to publish institutional development and course information, policy documents and procedures.

**Senior Management**

Senior Management is responsible for the sound management of the institution. They should be guided by a governing body to which they are accountable. Proper management and accountability of IEDA should be based on its mission and mandate. The institution should be evaluated internally and externally to ensure quality output.

**Middle Management, Departmental Heads and Supervisors**

All four departments of IEDA should be accountable for their actions and decisions and work collaboratively both in their departments and also with others, within the parameters of their job descriptions. All middle management and supervisors should strive for sound communication and efficient execution of the policy guidelines and willingly subject their departments to regular internal and external audits.
Administration, Academic and Graduation Committees

These committees will select members with close connections to their core purpose. All members will adhere to policy matters via prompt communication and execute their duties collaboratively using all available resources.

Staff Members and Tutors

From staff recruitment to execution of duties, all aspects of employment should be in line with the employment policy and MINEDH procedures.

- All staff members and tutors should operate effectively according to their terms of reference and should evaluate their performance at regular intervals, taking corrective action where required. They should adhere to all IEDA policies and execute their job efficiently.
- Staff will develop modules in line with stipulated and current curricula and with IEDA instructional material development.
- IEDA should encourage staff members and tutors to engage in continuous development activities.
- The process of teaching and learning and the relationship between tutors and learners are the essence of IEDA. Innovative teaching methods that recognise and promulgate best teaching practices with strong communication between administrative staff, management staff and tutors, as well as the provision of the necessary resources for effective teaching and learning, must then be available to provide academic support to students of varied abilities and backgrounds.

Stakeholders and Suppliers

IEDA commits itself to making relevant information accessible to all stakeholders and suppliers. All suppliers should be engaged with valid contracts and bound to deliver goods and services as stipulated in those contracts. Failure to deliver within the specified terms should nullify the contract agreement with a supplier. IEDA staff and management should interact effectively with suppliers.
Learners

All learners should be registered in accordance with requirements.

- Registered learners should believe in and practise the quality ethos of IEDA, which will engage with all learners via an embedded culture of openness and transparency.
- All relevant programme information — for example, syllabi, class notes, schedules and assessment requirements — will be made available in electronic and hard copy to all learners. Registered learners can access all the course materials and download all lecture notes.
- IEDA will strive to develop and administer systematic methods for gathering learner feedback on education programmes and support services.
- Fair and transparent processes for processing complaints and appeals and a commitment to speedily and adequately addressing perceived weaknesses are prerequisites in guaranteeing learners’ rights.
- IEDA will endeavour to create an environment in which learners take responsibility for their own learning.

The Quality Assurance Committee (QAC)

Experienced staff may be nominated by the head of IEDA for membership and approved by IEDA management. The QAC meets once every two months, and its main terms of reference are:

- To report to IEDA management and advise on the effectiveness of IEDA’s quality control procedures.
- To audit the effectiveness with which departments adhere to the institution’s quality assurance procedures.
- To review the plan for an internal audit, approve the annual plan and monitor the results as presented in the internal audit’s annual report.
- To monitor and evaluate resources so that quality assurance procedures are satisfactorily implemented.
- To monitor and evaluate programme approval.
- To monitor and review all procedures for annual monitoring.
- To oversee periodic programme review and coordinate any actions arising from it.
• The QAC comprises:
  • Head of Pedagogical Department
  • Head of Planning and Statistics Department
  • Head of Control and Evaluation Department
  • Head of ITC Department
  • Head of Financial and Administration Sector
  • IEDA-appointed external QA official (to a maximum of two staff member nominations)

10. QUALITY ELEMENTS AND CRITERIA

IEDA will communicate this first set of quality standards for the operations of the Institute and it will become a benchmark for quality assurance. These standards will serve as comprehensive parameters and provide a framework that will assist the Institute in improving the quality of its teaching and learning.

Finance

Element:
The institution's financial resources and reporting systems enable it to fulfil its vision and mission.

Criteria:
  • IEDA uses a secure, computerised financial accounting system that ensures financial controls and monitoring.
  • Financial statements are prepared annually by the government and an external accountant with a valid professional accounting designation.
  • Pre-authorised spending should be allowed by recognised bodies, departments or units, and all prescribed procedures should be followed.
  • Revenue should be recorded by type, source, client and student.
  • Expenses are recorded so that reports can show the amount and percentage of expenses spent on direct instructional purposes, general administration and other purposes.
• A system of checks and balances should be implemented to provide oversight and separate the functions of receipt, recording, acknowledging and depositing of revenue.

• Back-ups for the computerised accounting system are conducted on-site daily and weekly back-ups are stored both on-site and off-site.

**Administration**

**Element:**

The institution has an administrative system that facilitates the accomplishment of its vision and mission. It further ensures institutional effectiveness and supports student learning.

**Criteria:**

• Policies and procedures for each area of responsibility are documented in sufficient detail to enable employees and substitute employees to perform the tasks they are assigned to perform.

• IEDA undertakes regular system and programme reviews to ensure consistency with the institution's guiding documents.

• Managers and supervisors are empowered to perform leadership tasks in a timely fashion and commit to adhering to the institution's policies and procedures.

• The activities of IEDA are consistent with its mission, implementing clear and fair policies for staff and students.

• The institution's ownership and administration deal fairly with its stakeholders.

• IEDA's owners and administration present themselves accurately and honestly in all communications.

• The institution will offer accredited courses that make students employable by organisations in Mozambique, allowing them to recoup the money invested in their learning.

• The administration unit will ensure that IEDA offers programmes that reflect demands in the job market.

• IEDA has a sound policy and practice regarding content of, access to and storage of student files. Student files are confidential and maintained in
accordance with privacy regulations. Such files are comprehensive and include current student contact information, contact information for next of kin, academic information (e.g. completed application, results and subjects). All correspondence with the student and documentation about any disciplinary actions are also kept in a student’s file.

Guiding Documents

Element:
The institution’s guiding documents clearly articulate its long-term purpose and demonstrate its commitment to student learning and development. They contain a description of the institution — including its unique profile — the students and other stakeholders it seeks to serve and how it contributes to the broader community’s well-being in Mozambique. IEDA complies with all occupational/industrial standards relevant to the programme being offered.

Criteria:

- Guiding documents of IEDA should communicate a brief history of the Institute, including statements of its vision, mission, values, goals and organisational priorities. Students and staff understand and support the institution’s mission.

- The guiding documents express a clear commitment to teaching excellence and student success. Student success may be defined as the achievement of learning outcomes or programme completion.

- The guiding documents reflect the context in which the institution operates, including the diversity of student learning needs, community and Mozambican society. At IEDA, every person is recognised as having equal value and equal rights.

- The institution’s strategic decisions are consistent with the information in its guiding documents.

- The strategic plans and processes are reviewed annually.

- Budget priorities are driven by an understanding of and commitment to the guiding documents.

- The institution’s policies and procedures are consistent with information in the guiding documents and are reviewed annually and revised as required.
Facilities, Materials, ICT and Technical Resources

Element:

The institution’s facilities (e.g. buildings, classrooms, instructional facilities, furniture, computers and other equipment) meet the requirements specified in the guiding documents and support learning outcomes for each course of study. IEDA provides facilities and materials that contribute to an effective learning environment.

Criteria:

• IEDA complies with relevant legislative and regulatory requirements regarding fire, health and safety for an organisation of its size and type. Current licences and inspection certificates are displayed in prominent places.

• The institution complies with relevant legislative and regulatory requirements regarding access for persons with disabilities.

• Fire notices and evacuation procedures are posted. Staff are aware of emergency fire exits and evacuation plans. Fire drills are held and documented every three months, or more frequently where required by municipal regulations.

• The institution allocates adequate resources, including physical facilities and specialised equipment needed to achieve the learning outcomes specified for programmes and courses.

• The institution maintains clean, climate-controlled and appropriately ventilated facilities, keeping them in good repair.

• The institution’s equipment and software used for instruction and administration are well maintained and sufficient for current demands.

• Equipment such as computers, copiers, printers and fax machines are current, well maintained and dependable.

• Instructional and practice equipment and software are up to date and consistent with equipment and software being used in workplaces.

• All software installed on computers is licensed and/or registered with the software provider as required.

• Sufficient equipment and/or learning stations are provided to allow each student adequate time for practice with computers, software and programs.
• All materials produced — soft copies, hard copies, radio and video materials, etc. — are of high quality and accessible by students and available for use by many other students.

• The institution's technical infrastructure provides privacy, security of information and ease of access for users.

Staffing

Element:

The institution's instructional and non-instructional staff members possess the appropriate combination of education, training and experience to enable the institution to deliver on its mission and commitments to student learning and skills development. The institution has a written job description for each staff position.

Criteria:

• There is a written job description for all staff positions: filled and vacant, instructional and non-instructional.

• Job descriptions are comprehensive and include a description of the position and duties; education/training and experience requirements; reporting relationships; terms, duration and location of employment; hours per week; rate of pay and other remuneration details.

• Job descriptions are reviewed at least every two years to ensure they meet current requirements.

• Members of staff have all the required qualifications and experience.

• Instructional staff, including tutors, have formal training/education in the field of study that they are teaching. IEDA offers tutoring to candidates who require extra training.

• Instructors who are required to use technology in the delivery and/or development of their programmes have appropriate technological skills and the appropriate level of computer literacy to deliver the programme.

• Instructional staff, including tutors, have at least one year of work experience in the field of study that they are teaching or tutoring.

• Non-instructional staff have formal training/education and/or experience in the field in which they are working.
Quality Audits

Audit teams will be appointed by the QAC and be directly responsible to the Head of the Institute. The QAC will determine the Audit teams. It is of the utmost importance that at least some team members should possess direct knowledge and practice in coordinating quality assurance strategies.

Terms of reference for the audit team are:

- To independently check and verify that a department is fully discharging its responsibility for quality and standards.
- To ensure that self-evaluation at all levels is systematic and rigorous, and supported with reliable evidence.
- To identify areas for improvement by stimulating self-critical reflection.
- To present written reports to the QA Committee on its findings and recommendations.

Internal audits (self-evaluation) should be conducted annually to determine the growth and prosperity of IEDA. The internal audits should focus on the overall service and engagements with all stakeholders. The results of such audits should alert the management of IEDA to how well strategies are working and to the underlying causes of problems so that they can take corrective action. Training should be conducted for the internal audit team. The internal audit team will consist of members of IEDA from various departments and sections.

- Before the on-site quality audit at IEDA starts, the team should formulate an audit plan that functions as a road map for conducting an on-site audit. This plan should include the timeline, audit scope (with boundaries/limitations) and audit location. The team should collect and review written documentation, including the QA policy of the institution, against all standard operating procedures and manuals, and decide on and develop a list of key employees to be interviewed during the on-site audit.
- Each team member should have an audit checklist as well as forms or a tape recorder for recording information during personal interviews. Each member should also have all the reference documents, such as copies of standard operating procedures. The checklist should be appropriate for all departments and sections of IEDA, and should include evaluation items within each section, a rating system and space for comments.
• Suggested aspects/elements to consider:
  • Organisation of departments
  • Physical work environment
  • Planning and policy
  • Course materials and design
  • Learners and learner support
  • Tutoring and assessment
  • Human resource strategy, management and administration
  • Collaborative relationships
  • Quality assurance
  • Advocacy and information dissemination
  • Results

External audits at IEDA will be conducted in the same way as internal audits, including auditing training and documentation, but by a team from a different institution that operates in a more or less similar fashion, normally a benchmarked institution.

QA reporting should be conducted formally and in line with an agreed format with appropriate IEDA member involvement and recorded appropriately. The QAC will decide on the acceptance of the report and record it accordingly.

11. AMENDMENTS AND REVIEW

IEDA will effect changes in any of the following circumstances:
• There are outdated or unclear statements in the policy.
• Technology, hardware or software needs to be modernised.
• There are changes in the environment of the institution.
• Bodies, units and functions become outdated.

The QAC will:
• process all reviews according to the policy review date,
• determine the implementation of amendments, and
• design an interim process with Board approval, if the need arises for immediate policy changes before the scheduled review date.
1. INTRODUCTION

The educational organisation JSS Mahavidyapeetha (MVP), in Mysore, took up Karnataka State Open School activities in this state from the academic year 2000–2001. JSS Mahavidyapeetha is a sociocultural institution that has pioneered the concept of education as a tool for social change. While its main focus has been on providing opportunities for formal education, there is a strong parallel focus on values, ethics and the meeting of societal obligations. The institution adopts a multi-pronged approach to ensure a better quality of life for citizens. Through its 350 institutions it not only provides a learning environment to about 50,000 students but also touches the lives of millions more through a cascading effect. From its humble beginnings, less than six decades ago, JSS Mahavidyapeetha has grown into a social force that transcends boundaries and cultures. Institutions in its fold include crèches, old-age homes, cooperatives, rural development initiatives, orphanages and vocational training centres; and its reach goes beyond education to include publications of religious and cultural events, and even cultural revival and the protection of our heritage. Every activity that the JSS Mahavidyapeetha undertakes is aimed at furthering its objective of a brighter, more fruitful future for society at large.

Karnataka State Open School is proud to be a part of this mighty organisation. State Open Schools in India are run by their respective State governments, but Karnataka State Open School is an exception: it is run by JSS Mahavidyapeetha.
2. INSTITUTIONAL VISION

To be the best Open School imparting high-quality needs-based education through open learning to learners who, for various reasons, cannot be enrolled in the formal school system.

3. INSTITUTIONAL MISSION

The mission of JSS Karnataka State Open School (KOS) is to create a literate human resource base by extending educational access to underprivileged learners through open and distance learning (ODL). JSS KOS will work under the guidance of the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) to design and develop educational programmes that are relevant to stakeholders. By so doing, JSS KOS prepares students to participate in the development process of local society.

4. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE QUALITY ASSURANCE POLICY

The aim of the quality assurance (QA) policy is to develop a culture of continuous quality improvement at JSS KOS.

The objectives of the QA policy are to:

- Provide guidance in the implementation of quality assurance in the School.
- Promote the quality of educational provision at JSS KOS.
- Monitor and evaluate QA systems to ensure that set standards are consistently achieved.

5. POLICY VALUES

The JSS KOS quality assurance policy is based on the following values:

- Involving all stakeholders in the quality assurance process.
• Developing learners who demonstrate human values like equity, honesty and respect.
• Efficient planning and allocation and management of resources to ensure high-quality teaching and learning processes.
• Improving the literacy rates of the rural populace, who constitute the greater part of the State’s population.

6. POLICY ALIGNMENT

The quality assurance policy of JSS KOS will support the vision of MVP in the accomplishment of its objectives. Accordingly, the QA policy will be the core of all other related policies and guidelines in the School, like enrolment and registration, materials development, learner assessment and staff development. To provide proper guidance in policy alignment with JSS MVP, a QA manual will be developed. The JSS KOS QA policy will also be aligned with the education policy of the Government of Karnataka and NIOS guidelines.

The QA policy of JSS KOS shall, in all respects, meet the requirements of the national quality assurance agency.

7. SCOPE OF THE POLICY

JSS MVP and JSS KOS shall be bound by this policy. JSS MVP will monitor and evaluate quality on a systematic basis in the following areas of open schooling:

• Institutional governance and management
• Financial management
• Programme design and development
• Teaching and learning strategy
• Learner support Services
• Learning materials, including open educational resources (OER)
• Learner assessment
• Admission processes
• Physical infrastructure and resources
• Staffing
• Advocacy and information dissemination
• Research and community service/engagement
• Partnerships and collaboration
• Integration of technology
• Affiliations with relevant national and regional organisations

Institutional Governance and Management
JSS MVP has a separate division of Primary and Secondary Education, which will be responsible for all educational matters.

Composition of the Council
A Governing Council will meet once every six months to monitor and guide progress. The composition of the Governing Council shall be as follows:

• President of JSS MVP, Chairman of Governing Council
• Executive Secretary, JSS Mahavidyapeetha, Mysore
• Secretary, JSS Mahavidyapeetha, Mysore
• Director of Technical Education, JSS Mahavidyapeetha, Mysore
• Administrative officer, JSS Mahavidyapeetha, Mysore
• Director of General Education, JSS Mahavidyapeetha, Mysore
• Joint Director (Projects), JSS Mahavidyapeetha, Mysore
• Director, JSS Karnataka Open School, Mysore
• Deputy Director, JSS Karnataka Open School, Mysore

Responsibility
• The Governing Council will be the highest authority to govern and manage all matters of the JSS Karnataka Open School.
• It gives guidance in all matters relating to quality assurance and gives approval for major decisions.
JSS Mahavidyapeetha has a separate department, the General Education Division, to look after the overall educational process at secondary and senior secondary levels. The Director of General Education will guide the Director of the JSS Karnataka Open School in implementing the decisions taken by the Governing Council.

- JSS Karnataka Open School will implement all decisions taken by the Governing Council.
- It will manage and supervise the Study Centres.
- Support from the Department of Administration and the Department of Education will be provided as required.

**Financial Management**

JSS Mahavidyapeetha will plan, maintain and supervise all income and expenditure of JSS Karnataka Open School. JSS Mahavidyapeetha will ensure the prudent allocation and management of finances in order to provide sufficient support to all educational programmes and activities of the School. The accounts will be subject to periodical auditing by the Audit Division.

**Programme Planning, Design and Development**

Programmes shall be designed on the basis of needs analysis. The design and development of programmes shall be the responsibility of qualified staff and will be a team effort. All programmes shall be approved by the Governing Council before they are implemented in the School in order to ensure they are in line with the School's mission and are of acceptable quality. Programmes shall be reviewed on a five-year cycle to ensure their relevance to changing times and the changing needs of learners.

**Teaching and Learning Strategy**

JSS Karnataka Open School policy promotes distance education as a method and mode of teaching and learning in order to promote access for the majority of disadvantaged learners in the State of Karnataka. Thus, more than 80% of student learning consists of independent learning.

Teaching shall be done through study centres, using well-designed self-learning materials. The learning materials are designed to be easy for learners to understand.
and to encourage reflection during learning. Care is taken to ensure that materials are dispatched to learners in a timely fashion.

**Learning Materials (including OER)**

JSS Karnataka Open School makes use of study materials produced by NIOS. The translation of study materials supplied by NIOS is being done by qualified staff. There are plans for the JSS Karnataka Open School to develop their own learning materials under the guidance of NIOS and the government of Karnataka in the near future.

The School will enrich learners’ experiences through the use of OER and plans are afoot for all learning materials produced by the School to be released as OER.

**Learner Support Services**

JSS Karnataka Open School will strive to make use of the relevant technology in order to enhance learner support. Assessment of quality in the provision of learner support services at study centres, including record keeping, will take place on a regular basis. JSS Karnataka Open School will continuously review the functioning of study centres.

**Learner Assessment**

The School shall put in place mechanisms for the quality assurance of both formative and summative assessment of learner performance. Formative assessment includes tests and tutor-marked assignments while summative assessment shall consist of end-of-year examinations.

**Admission Process: Eligibility**

Accredited Study Centres will admit eligible students for courses. Students who are over 15 years old and/or have passed/failed level VII standard examinations are eligible for admission to the JSS KOS courses. Admission of students to courses of study shall be fair and transparent. Admission to the School's programmes of study shall not be discriminatory in any way.
Physical Infrastructure and Resources

JSS Karnataka Open School has its own infrastructure, provided by JSS Mahavidyapeetha. JSS KOS shall ensure that all students have access to enough resources and facilities to support their learning. The enrolments of the School shall be in line with the available resources and infrastructure. JSS KOS also makes use of the available resources at study centres.

Staffing

JSS KOS shall have fair and transparent staff recruitment processes to ensure that the best staff are recruited. The staffing position of the school shall be reviewed on a regular basis to ensure sufficient and relevant staff are in place at all times. Assessment of the quality of academic staff shall include expectations with regard to qualifications. The minimum qualification for teaching staff shall be a Bachelor of Education. The School will provide regular staff development programmes on a continuous basis in order to keep staff abreast of the latest developments in ODL.

Advocacy and Information Dissemination

JSS Karnataka Open School gives information regarding the activities of the JSS Karnataka Open School to learners in the study centres. Every January there will be a community Jaathra Mahothsava at Suttur, Mysore district. As part of Jaathra Mahothsava, the Committee will organise an exhibition. JSS Karnataka Open School has a separate stall in the exhibition from which it informs potential students and the public of its activities. JSS KOS will be committed to giving accurate and true information to the public in its advocacy and publicity campaigns.

Research and Community Engagement

JSS KOS conducts research on distance education with a view to improving its services to learners. In this regard, staff shall be encouraged to conduct research and to publish in local and international journals. The School will have a systematic programme for capacity building in research and publishing. The School shall also conduct community-based research that will inform programme development and other community support programmes.
**Partnership and Collaboration**

JSS KOS works in collaboration with NIOS, NOIDA and the government of Karnataka. Formal agreements shall be signed with collaborative partners to ensure that learner access to services and facilities is not compromised.

**Integration of Technology**

JSS KOS shall embrace appropriate teaching and learning technologies in order to improve the quality of teaching and learning. The School shall strive to ensure that any technology used will be informed first and foremost by appropriate pedagogy. All study centres scattered throughout the rural areas shall be equipped with the appropriate technological infrastructure.

**Affiliations with Relevant National and Regional Organisations**

JSS KOS shall be affiliated with relevant national, regional and international organisations in order to keep abreast of developments in ODL. Participation in meetings, workshops, seminars and conferences with the affiliated organisations will be promoted.

**8. APPROACH TO QUALITY ASSURANCE**

This quality assurance policy will be implemented as a strategy to meet the general accepted standards as defined by NIOS and the government of Karnataka. The primary goal of JSS KOS is to provide quality education to underprivileged people. The QA approach of the School shall consist of systematic internal monitoring processes that include defining, measuring and improving quality. Defining quality means developing expectations or setting standards to be achieved at any one time. Regular external evaluations will also augment internal self-evaluation processes. As part of the School’s QA approach, regular staff development programmes aimed at building capacity in QA shall be implemented.
9. QUALITY ASSURANCE STRUCTURE

To facilitate policy implementation, JSS Mahavidyapeetha shall entrust the quality assurance responsibilities to the Governing Council, which is headed by the Chairperson of the Governing Council. The Chairperson of the Governing Council shall work with experienced persons in the field of education to enhance the quality of educational provision in the School. The Council shall delegate the day-to-day QA activities of the School to the QA Committee.

10. ACCOUNTABILITY

JSS Karnataka Open School will be accountable to the study centres and the study centres will be accountable to learners. JSS Karnataka Open School provides the learning materials to the study centres; the study centres will provide feedback to JSS Karnataka Open School regarding the quality of the learning materials. The Director of the School shall be responsible for the overall implementation of the quality assurance policy.
1. INTRODUCTION

This quality assurance (QA) policy has been compiled for the purpose of ensuring quality assurance at the Lesotho Distance Teaching Centre (LDTC). It serves as a guarantee that all open and distance learning (ODL) processes will be managed with quality in mind and all activities of LDTC will be executed with excellence in mind.

LDTC was established in 1974 by the International Extension College (IEC) at the request of the Ministry of Education and Training to perform the following core functions:

- Provide learning materials for illiterate, semi-literate and neo-literate persons.
- Provide assistance to students who want to improve their educational qualifications by taking courses at Junior Certificate (JC) and Lesotho General Certificate of Secondary Education (LGSCE/COSC) levels.
- Assist other organisations that want to use non-formal education techniques to improve personnel training and to teach skills in group functioning.

This policy document has been made possible through financial and technical support from The Commonwealth of Learning (COL). It was developed from the Quality Assurance Toolkit, which is an initiative of COL and recommended as a guideline for Open Schools.
This policy will treat the notion of quality as

“the state of being free from defects [or] the fitness for purpose of a product or service according to a set of required standards.”
(SADC Regional Open and Distance Learning Quality Assurance Guidelines, 2014)

“all those attitudes, objects, actions and procedures that, through their existence and use, and together with the quality control activities, ensure that appropriate academic standards are maintained and enhanced in and by each programme. Quality assurance extends to making the process and standards known to the educational community and the public at large.”
(Quality Assurance Toolkit)

This policy document will lay down measures for LDTC to operate in accordance with the following: the purpose of the QA policy, the objectives of the policy, the scope of this policy document, policy statement, commitment to a quality approach, quality assurance of operational functions, quality assurance standards, amendments and review to provide clarity on concepts for mutual understanding and operation.

2. DEFINITIONS

The following definitions reflect procedures and operations at the Lesotho Distance Teaching Centre.

**Continual improvement**: A continual improvement process observes the performance of individual processes to identify potential changes that could reduce costs and improve output quality. This can be achieved through the use of the quality policy, quality objectives, audit results, analysis of data, corrective and preventive action, and management review.

**Continuous improvement**: Continual examination of processes to discover and eliminate problems. It normally involves making small changes rather than implementing large-scale alterations.

**Open and distance learning**: A way of providing learning opportunities that is characterised by the separation of teacher and learner in time or place, or both
time and place; the use of a variety of media, including print and electronic; two-way communications that allow learners and tutors to interact; the possibility of occasional face-to-face meetings; and a specialised division of labour in the production and delivery of courses. Such learning is certified in some way by an institution or agency.

**Quality assurance**: An ongoing, continuous process of evaluating (assessing, monitoring, guaranteeing, maintaining and improving) the quality of an education system, institution or programme. It is an approach to organising work that ensures the institution’s mission and aims are clear and known to all; ensures the systems through which work will be done are well thought-out and communicated to everyone; ensures everyone’s responsibilities are clear and understood; defines and documents the institution’s interpretation of quality; sets in place systems to check that everything is working to plan and processes for dealing with problems or challenges.

**Quality criteria**: The characteristics that must be in place for a service to be regarded as meeting the expressed and implied requirements of its customers.

**Quality elements**: The various components that combine to provide optimal quality operations within each identified element of an institution.

### 3. PURPOSE

LDTC will strive for excellence in the implementation of ODL in all aspects of adult literacy and provision of secondary education. It will offer opportunities for out-of-school youth and adults to develop functional literacy and numeracy skills, and provide courses for private candidates — that is, LDTC learners who are planning to sit examinations — at the JC and LGCSE/COSC levels.

Service delivery at LDTC should be ultimately reliable, exceptional and brilliant in management, academic and support services so that learners can progress at their own pace and in accordance with their own schedule.
4. OBJECTIVES

This quality assurance policy will act as a framework for an efficient quality assurance system (QAS). It endeavours to apply quality assurance measures throughout LDTC. Its objectives are:

- To develop a clear vision, mission, policy and value system for the organisation’s future, steering all operational functions towards being executed with exemplary ethics to complement all drivers of operational functions (i.e., both teaching and non-teaching staff).
- To inspire all staff members to execute and implement learning with QA systems, processes and mechanisms.
- To develop strategies based on facts and information through consistently involving employees in decision-making processes and in the realisation of LDTC’s goals, and to determine LDTC’s QA responsibility within the parameters of the Ministry’s vision, mission and policy.
- To fully promote QA and continuous improvement actions at LDTC by designing effective monitoring and evaluation systems for all quality assurance actions within the operative units of LDTC.
- To ensure the quality of feedback opportunities between LDTC, stakeholders and/or development partners.
- To constantly review programmes and services, with an emphasis on continuous quality improvement.

5. SCOPE

This quality assurance policy provides a general guideline for quality assurance at LDTC.

- LDTC is a department of the Lesotho Ministry of Education and Training. It was established in 1974 by the International Extension College with the aim of offering JC and LGCSE courses for learners who could not be admitted to formal schools. This work is done by the Continuing Education Unit. A few years later, close interaction with local communities revealed that there were youth and adults who were illiterate. LDTC
started offering basic literacy programmes to those groups in 1977. This is now the work of the Basic Education Unit.

- The scope of this policy will guide all internal staff members, part-time writers and tutors within all sections of LDTC; collaborative relationships with other ODL institutions will be encouraged for cost-effective provision of quality education and training.

- This policy drives all interaction with the Ministry of Education and Training, schools, community leaders, Examinations Council of Lesotho (ECOL), National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC), teachers from schools and development partners.

- QA standards will apply to all staff members who are permanent, temporary or part-time and who are involved in activities/tasks of LDTC, including writing, editing, printing, tutoring, counselling, assessing, research and any other core functions of LDTC.

- There will be provision for a wide range of opportunities for tutoring at a distance through adult learning methods and various forms of technology, and QA will be effective at all Learning Posts and Study Centres where education and training are delivered.

- This policy includes a description of its scope, mission and vision and a policy statement that guides the interaction of the educational and support services of LDTC. It will demand responsibility and authority within a clearly defined organisational structure for all actors.

- This policy determines the management of infrastructure, learning resources, governance or departmental set-ups, and information dissemination structures belonging to LDTC. All processes should be mapped, recorded, implemented and then annually reviewed.

6. POLICY STATEMENT

In order to have a clear sense of purpose and direction, which is informed by national priorities as well as by the quality demands of efficient and cost-effective education provision, LDTC has a vision, mission, objectives and values.
Vision

- Basotho shall be a functionally literate society with well-grounded moral and ethical values, and adequate social, scientific and technical knowledge and skills by the year 2020.
- To be a champion and a leading institution in excellent provision of open and distance learning worldwide.

Mission

- To promote non-formal education (NFE) in Lesotho by applying distance education methods.
- To open access to lifelong learning and be the best provider of education using open and distance learning methods and strategies.

Objectives

- To offer opportunities for out-of-school youth and adults to develop functional literacy and numeracy skills.
- To provide JC and LGCSE courses for out-of-school youth and adults.
- To act as a service agency for other organisations requesting the use of non-formal education techniques in their programmes.

Values

Building on the vision that education serves as a keystone in improving society and building better futures for all, we commit to our core values of:

- **Excellence**: We strive for excellence in all activities. We value quality. We are committed to innovation in all our endeavours. We commit to continuous self-improvement to achieve excellence.
- **Ethics and dignity**: We are committed to the highest standards of honesty, fairness, respect and professional and scholarly ethics. We demonstrate the value we place on the dignity and worth of all people. We expect all conduct to be based on integrity, mutual respect and civility. We value responsiveness.
- **Creation of a community**: Learning is not only an individual affair; it includes learning from others by understanding the importance of
interdependence and the emotional well-being of individuals making up the community.

- **Collaboration**: Solving problems requires individuals to work with each other in a manner whereby all contribute according to their strengths.

We strive for excellence in all activities by committing to the following core values:

- **Innovation and creativity**: Innovation and creativity allow for adoption of best practices all the time.
- **Professionalism**: We are committed to the highest standards of honesty, fairness, respect and professional and scholarly ethics.
- **Responsiveness**: We react in time to the needs of others to show care and support.
- **Networking and partnerships**: Learning is not only an individual affair, but includes learning from others to highlight the importance of interdependence for sharing best practices.
- **Technology**: We are committed to the use of information and communication technology to advance efficiency in teaching and learning as well as ensuring wider access to course materials and learner support activities.

**Quality Declaration**

LDTC commits to applying a quality approach throughout the institution. Its vision, mission, objectives and values will guide all operations. The QA policy will be implemented appropriately and constantly monitored, and LDTC will carefully evaluate the implementation of all authorised activities to confirm continuous quality improvement and ensure that all governance and management processes are in line with standard QA best practices. The Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) will safeguard QA standards by regularly reviewing existing policies, regulations and procedures. Where such guiding instruments are lacking, the QAC will develop appropriate documentation to provide guidance and drive conformity to standards. The QAC will therefore annually review criteria for performance standards and will develop a Quality Manual for LDTC as part of that review process.
7. COMMITMENT TO A QUALITY APPROACH

- A quality version control system will be used on the policy document, indicating amendments as well as the date of approval and the name of the body that approved each version.
- A quality approach will be applied to all documentation as well as to human resources.
- A quality focus will embrace policies, procedures and mechanisms for LDTC to uphold that specific unit or function, confirming that specified quality specifications and standards are maintained.
- Every policy procedure and mechanism will include ongoing revision and monitoring activities to evaluate various aspects such as suitability, efficiency and applicability and address any non-conformance.

8. QUALITY ASSURANCE OF OPERATIONAL FUNCTIONS

General Management at LDTC

- This quality assurance policy will cover all aspects of governance, access to programmes, strategic planning, human resource planning and administration and finance management.
- To ensure successful implementation, all the above-mentioned are subject to annual reporting according to the directives/formats already in use.

Administration at LDTC

Human Resources

- This QA policy directs that all selection, recruitment and employment should be conducted in a quality way to guarantee that quality staff are employed in accordance with the Public Service Act of 2005, taking into account equity (as described in the Employment Equity Plan) and gender sensitivity (as per Constitutional guidelines).
• This QA policy instructs each appointed staff member of LDTC to evaluate their performance continuously by means of self-reflection and to take the necessary steps to ensure improvement.

• This QA policy directs the development and implementation of staff orientation sessions for new staff members and staff development sessions in line with needs assessment processes, personal development plans (PDP) or according to the Staff Development Policy of the Public Service (government policy).

• The QA policy determines that all staff should have attitudinal development and skills development knowledge or academic development training, conducted in conjunction with the Staff Development Policy of the Public Service.

• This QA policy directs that all vacant positions are to be advertised and filled as soon as possible in line with our value of responsiveness.

• In the interest of the welfare of all employees:
  • Staff members should be free to have a right of association.
  • An Entertainment and Obituary Committee will oversee activities regarding bereavement and recreation and design a wellness programme.

• This QA policy mandates that promotions and/or demotions of staff be conducted according to the Performance Management System of the Public Service.

• The criteria in this QA policy apply to the design and implementation of a coaching and mentoring programme.

• This QA policy prescribes that the following health and safety points be adhered to:
  • Save water, electricity/energy and paper as much as possible
  • Use environmentally friendly cleaning products, cleaning utensils and chemicals
  • Apply safety measures during cleaning processes
  • Use environmentally friendly disposal methods for chemicals and paper
  • Have evacuation policies and procedures in place
• LDTC should make use of the Legal Unit of the Ministry of Education and Training in relation to matters pertaining to:
  • Contract formulation
  • Forged documentation
  • Corrupt exam procedures
  • Disciplinary matters

Registry Office
LDTC will ensure that the QA policy is adhered to in the following areas:
  • Procedures relating to the recording of all incoming and outgoing mail and transfers to archives after seven years, at which point they are considered obsolete.
  • Securing all records.
  • Introduction of electronic record-keeping system.

Facilities, Space Management and Maintenance
LDTC will ensure that the QA policy is adhered to in the following areas:
  • Posting of notices and information bulletins
  • Changes in telephone listings
  • Procedures relating to the review of the adequacy of premises, equipment and facilities
  • Parking facilities
  • Entrances/exits, alarms, security, locks, keys
  • Round-the-clock security
  • Emergency plans and fire extinguishers

Transport
LDTC will ensure that the QA policy is adhered to in the following areas:
  • Maintaining a fleet of vehicles to meet its daily administrative and operational requirements.
  • Requesting the use of privately hired vehicles when the fleet is insufficient, or whenever the need arises.
• Restricting the use of its fleet for official business only and managing/controlling its fleet to avoid abuse.

Telecommunications Management
LDTC will ensure that the QA policy is adhered to in the following areas:

• Use of telephones for long-distance and international telephone calls.
• Use of wireless communications, video and teleconferencing by both staff and learners.
• Sharing of telecommunications resources.
• Use of controlled mailing lists for electronic distribution of employee notices.

Basic Education Unit

Materials Development Section
This QA policy will ensure quality in the area of materials development at LDTC through:

• ongoing training of writers and editors to help them continuously improve and to meet the highest standards; and
• course development, reviews/modifications and approvals in accordance with the prescribed policy and procedures of LDTC.

Training Section

• LDTC will apply quality assurance standards to the recruitment of learners in accordance with all institutional guidelines.
• LDTC will commit to the continuous improvement of Learning Post Administrators (LPAs), Monitors, Non Formal Education Officers (NFEOs) and Non Formal Education Trainers (NFETs) to meet the highest standards of service.
• Registration, recording and termination of formal programmes of LDTC will take place in accordance with the national policy.
• Continuous monitoring and improvement of the quality of teaching and learning in programmes at LDTC shall take place on a cyclic basis through the application of institutional self-evaluation mechanisms and procedures.
• This QA policy prescribes that final assessment of learners should be conducted in a systematic, transparent and credible way. Final assessments will be subject to internal moderation after every examination. A further external moderation of examination papers will take place according to the institutional regulations.

**Continuing Education Unit**

**Materials Development**
This QA policy will ensure quality in the areas of materials development at LDTC through:

• continuous improvement of writers and editors to help them perform at the highest standards; and

• course development, reviews/modifications and approvals according to the prescribed policy and procedure of LDTC.

**Student Advising**
LDTC is committed to providing high-quality services to learners.

• LDTC will commit to the continuous improvement of tutors to help them perform at the highest standards.

• Registration, recording and termination of formal programmes of LDTC will take place in accordance with national policy.

• Continuous monitoring and improvement of the quality of teaching and learning in programmes at LDTC take place on a cyclic basis through the application of self-evaluation mechanisms and procedures at LDTC.

• Continuing Education Unit learners will be evaluated on the basis of worksheets and mock examinations.

• This quality assurance policy prescribes that final assessment of the Continuing Education Unit learners — that is, JC and LGCSE learners — should be through examinations conducted by the Examinations Council of Lesotho.
Printing

This QA policy will ensure that all printing meets quality standards.

- The production supervisor will use the printing request form to advise the editors on colour, binding, paper type and number of copies required.
- Editors will use a sample copy to guide them in checking for errors before any and all books are printed.

Educational Broadcasting

- This QA policy will ensure that:
  - all radio programmes meet quality standards as defined in the draft manual of standards in order to motivate LDTC learners, and
  - radio lessons meant to supplement learning materials conform to the highest standards.
- The educational broadcasting section will ensure that awareness campaigns are of a high standard.

Research and Evaluation

- Research should be carried out as needed.
- This QA policy prescribes that:
  - internal evaluations of units and sections should be conducted annually,
  - external peer group evaluation shall be conducted on a three-year cycle, and
  - there will be reports on all evaluations, which should be used to develop action plans.
- This QA policy will ensure that:
  - all LDTC activities are evaluated on a regular basis, and
  - there is an annual report including a financial report.
- This QA policy directs that there be:
  - a register for all materials, including electronically stored information, master copies of all teaching and learning materials, radio lessons, research and evaluation reports;
  - a records management policy to document departing employees, contractors, volunteers and political appointees; and
  - library services for both staff and learners.
Public Affairs

The Lesotho Constitution Section 14 and Communications Act, 2012 should be followed in the execution of the duties of LDTC when it comes to matters concerning communication at large.

Accounts

The Accounts section of LDTC shall adhere to the Finance Regulations of the Government of Lesotho in the process of:

- Facilitating the budgeting process
- Properly maintaining and protecting the financial records
- Facilitating proper planning and budgeting of the Special Fund — funds generated through services rendered by LDTC, such as photocopying or printing — and funds from Development Partners
- Collecting revenue from registration fees, book fees and service agency activities
- Collecting Continuing Education Unit (CEU) learners’ examination fees, which are subsequently paid to the Examination Council of Lesotho
- Accurate and timely payment of suppliers, tutors, writers and LPAs to maintain a good client-supplier relationship
- Managing cash
- Compiling financial reports for recurring, capital and special fund budgets

9. QUALITY ASSESSMENT ROLES AND FUNCTIONS

Quality assurance roles and functions are as follows:

- The Chief Education Officer will hold the Director accountable for sound quality assurance practices at LDTC. This QA document determines that the Director of LDTC will be accountable and responsible for all QA at LDTC.
• **The Deputy Director – Basic Education** will be accountable and responsible for all QA issues in the Basic Education Unit.

• **The Deputy Director – Continuing Education** will be accountable and responsible for all QA issues in the Continuing Education Unit.

• **Section Heads** will be accountable and responsible for all QA issues in the smooth and effective running of their sections.

• **Staff members of LDTC at all levels** have a professional responsibility to ensure QA implementation in their areas of jurisdiction and are accountable to their supervisors.

• **Suppliers** will ensure the supply of goods and services in the right quantity and quality, at the right price and time.

• **Part-time writers** will ensure that QA standards are adhered to when developing learning materials and will submit on time the right quantity and quality of materials.

• **Part-time editors** will ensure that QA standards are adhered to when editing learning materials and will submit on time the right quantity and quality of materials.

• **Part-time tutors/LPAs** will ensure that all tutoring services are of the right quality and provided at the right place and on time.

• **Learners** registered at LDTC have a responsibility for quality assurance in their academic activities. They will participate in quality assurance through embracing and adhering to all LDTC and ECOL policies and regulations and shall express their quality-related concerns through the Student Advice Section/Training Section.

**Quality Assurance Standards**

Below are elements and criteria of the institution that provide a framework for achievement. This framework is recommended for the purposes of audits.

**Management**

**Element:**

LDTC management should be accountable for proper communication and information control. The curriculum and resources should be used for the overall benefit of the institution, staff and students.
Criteria:

- Accountability and governance: There are clear lines of accountability and governance within the institution and its governing structures, and between the governing structures and the community.
- Management of communication: There are effective systems for communication with stakeholders.
- Management of the curriculum: The enrolment and registration guidelines include provision of accurate, helpful information to prospective learners.
- Management of information: Learners’ records (e.g., contact details and assessment results) are detailed, up to date and accessible to tutors and academic and administrative staff.
- Management of resources: Human, financial, material, physical.

Planning and Policy

Element:
LDTC should engage in proper planning with clear policies and procedures that could be executed to the benefit of the institution in helping to achieve all planned outcomes.

Criteria:

- LDTC policies align with national policies, including appropriate registration, accreditation and articulation policies.
- LDTC has at least annual planning and three- to five-year review cycles that align with the Ministry’s strategic planning process.
- NFE Learning Centres and ODL Study Centres to be registered in accordance with the Education Act, 2010.

Collaborative Relationships

Element:
All collaborative relationships should provide mutual benefit to both LDTC and all stakeholders.
Criteria:

- Open schooling requires collaborative relationships with key stakeholders like parents and other community caregivers, governmental and non-governmental education providers within and outside the country, and the corporate world.
- Affiliate and non-affiliate membership of relevant associations and fora is encouraged.
- There are collaborative relationships with other ODL institutions with similar mandates.

Programme Development

Element:

All programme development efforts should be in line with ODL standards and serve the demand for ODL in the country. New programmes should consider gender issues, HIV/AIDS or any other emerging issues as part of curriculum development.

Criteria:

- Programme development shall start by establishing an average learner profile to meet both the needs of the learners and the requirements of the national curriculum that leads to the relevant national qualification.
- Programme development takes account of the resources available (e.g. technology, human resources, infrastructure).
- Programme development is a team exercise that involves appropriate stakeholders in order to integrate content/subject expertise, pedagogic expertise and technical expertise.
- Due to the openness of entry, care is taken to provide sufficient academic support to academically challenged learners as identified upon enrolment.
- Programme evaluation takes place on a regular basis.

Course Design

Element:

The course should be structured to support independent learning and meet the requirements of the programme.
Criteria:
- Course design attains a balance of content, pedagogy and technology.
- The institution has a standing policy to review the effectiveness of systems and procedures for the design, approval and accreditation of courses.

Course Materials

Element:
The development and timely provision of high-quality learning materials should be the uncompromised focus.

Criteria:
- Clear procedures are in place for the development and timely provision of high-quality learning materials.
- Course materials have a balance of knowledge, skills and values that are taught appropriately using relevant media.
- A detailed outline of a materials development process is in the draft standards document.
- Course materials are designed to be accessible both in terms of the content being presented in a way that it will be readily understood by self-guided learners and in terms of availability and affordability.
- In designing course materials, LDTC will take into account any special needs of learners, for example, disabilities, gender issues, cultural or religious differences, or environmental issues.
- Course material will be periodically reviewed in order to keep it up to date with changes in knowledge and learners’ needs.
- Materials will be developed by people with expertise in ODL and subject to rigorous quality reviews before being used by learners.
- Part-time writers and editors will have a contract (covering, for example, role, deliverables and payment).
- There will be a clear house style, which must be followed.
- The copyright holder of material is LDTC.
Learner Support

Element:
LDTC shall ensure that high quality is maintained in the learner support services and that all learners can achieve learning outcomes with ease.

Criteria:
LDTC shall ensure high-quality learner support services and meet the following criteria:

- Learners with special needs are adequately catered for in the learner support services of the provider.
- Particularly for younger learners, the learning environment helps them develop good work habits and the necessary discipline for increasingly independent learning; for older learners, peer support and collaborative learning is in place.
- Administrative support is available before and during the course of study.
- Guidance and counselling are provided at all levels and at all centres.
- Academic support is provided by subject-specific tutors who are trained in techniques to mediate the course material, rather than re-teach the content of the curriculum. This is particularly important if teachers in conventional schools are employed as Open School tutors.
- A contract (covering, for example, role, deliverables and payment) is entered into with tutors, and attendance and performance are monitored with appropriate sanctions and rewards.
- Different kinds of tutorials are provided for different students, for both remedial and enrichment purposes. Tutorials are not just for remedial purposes, they are also for the fast learners who need enrichment in various areas of learning. In this way, the potential of learners who go through an institution’s programmes is maximised.
- Technology is used to enhance the quality of learning and learners are sufficiently supported to make maximum use of the available technology.
- Student Information Management Systems (SIMS) of LDTC must be updated and maintained and made available to planners and decision-makers, including course coordinators.
• Guidelines for the development and implementation of an e-learning strategy are in place.
• Learner support strategies are reviewed regularly.

Procurement

**Element:**

Good practices in the procurement of goods and services are followed in accordance with Procurement regulations.

**Criteria:**

• The Procurement Office should consult individual sections/offices for relevant specifications of items to be bought.

Assessment

**Element:**

Properly planned assessment measures are implemented. Feedback from tutors informs ongoing improvement of the programme, materials, assessment and learner support.

**Criteria:**

• Assignment turnaround time needs to be as short as possible to be a useful learning tool for learners.
• There is carefully scaffolded continuous formative assessment. This is a key motivator to learning, and with timely constructive feedback it contributes to an environment that supports learners throughout their course of study.
• Formative assessment prepares learners to meet the demands of the final summative assessment.
• The final summative assessment is validly and reliably conducted as per Examinations Council of Lesotho regulations.
Human Resource Strategy

Element:
A clear recruitment strategy should ensure the appointment of suitably qualified candidates to each position.

Criteria:
- An effective performance management system is in place and works to the benefit of every member of staff in the organisation.
- There is a staff structure that includes all the key personnel to ensure that the institution carries out its services efficiently.
- There are sufficient tutors/mentors, usually employed on a part-time basis, to provide for the individual needs of learners.
- Staff are trained for, mentored in and supported in the specialised roles and tasks they perform in the organisation.
- There is a clear induction policy for new staff who join the organisation in order to acquaint them with work processes and procedures in the Open School.

Quality Assurance

Element:
A QA Committee that oversees the development, implementation and review of clear QA action plans.

Criteria:
- The institution ensures that day-to-day activities are aligned with its mission, goals, principles and policies in relation to national, regional and global priorities.
- Internal quality assurance processes are articulated with external processes as indicated by the relevant national quality assurance bodies.
- There are clear routines, procedures and systems for quality assurance, and staff and learners are familiar with those.
- There is a clear cycle of planning, development, documentation, reporting, action and review of policies and procedures within the institution.
Advocacy and Information Dissemination

**Element:**
An advocacy strategy should be in place to positively influence the public’s perception of ODL.

**Criteria:**
- There is accurate and sufficient publicity about programmes to enable potential applicants to make informed choices.
- Institutional advertisements are truthful and professional.

Results

**Element:**
Sufficient numbers of learners complete the programmes they enrolled for within reasonable time periods to justify the cost in time and person power for the design of the programmes, courses and learner support systems.

**Criteria:**
- Pass, throughput and retention rates are monitored, and mechanisms are put in place for continuous improvement of these rates.
- Feedback and results of the programme review/evaluation are used to effect improvements in the programme’s design and delivery and to develop further educational expertise of academic staff.

Research

**Element:**
Institutional research and analysis should be conducted on a regular basis to contribute to the harvesting of meaningful data on which institutional decision-making can be based.

**Criteria:**
- LDTC will engage in research on a regular basis.
- Analysis and findings of research will be shared with all members of the institution. Research will include activities of collecting, organising and analysing information to allow staff and faculty to better understand the LDTC community and the environment in which they work.
10. QUALITY AUDITS

Internal Audit or Self-evaluation

- Internal quality assurance will be conducted once a year to assess LDTC’s progress and performance in relation to the implementation of institutional quality action plans.
- Internal audits will take the form of a sectional self-evaluation exercise, based on the quality criteria, and cross-evaluation in which the different sections audit each other.
- Section Heads and their QA teams will conduct the audits.
- To enhance the effectiveness of such audits, a detailed programme that clearly sets out timelines as well as roles and responsibilities should be prepared by the QA team while the Audit teams will be required to:
  - read all documentation prior to the audit,
  - develop a set of questions of enquiry to facilitate in-depth discussion during the audit, and
  - prepare and submit detailed self-evaluation and cross-evaluation reports on the basis of the predetermined template.
- Evidence should be presented by sections as part of this process to substantiate claims about progress or achievements and supporting documents should be attached to the report.

External Audits

Audits with a clear scope will be done at regular intervals by outside individuals in order to provide unbiased opinions. The QAC of the institution will invite credible outsiders to be part of the platform that conducts these evaluations. The QAC will also determine the QA standards by approving the QA elements and criteria that will be considered during such audits.

Quality Assurance Reporting

The QA reports, internal or external, will be significant tools for evaluating whether LDTC is meeting the quality standards. These reports will be available to all stakeholders and should contain the analytical and systematic reviews, assessments and recommendations.
11. **AMENDMENTS AND REVIEW**

LDTC will effect changes in any of the following circumstances:

- If there are outdated or unclear statements in the policy.
- When technology, hardware or software needs to be modernised.
- When there are changes in the environment of the institution.
- When bodies, units or functions become outdated.
- After a quality audit, in accordance with recommendations, the QAC will process all reviews as per the policy review date and determine the implementation of amendments. It will also be responsible for interim changes, with the Ministry’s approval, if they are needed before the official review date.
1. INTRODUCTION

Since the establishment of the Malawi College of Distance Education (MCDE) in 1965, issues of quality assurance (QA) have not been emphasised, leading to a lower quality of education in open and distance learning (ODL). An institution is rated as high quality if it fulfils its mission and meets the expectations of its stakeholders. This QA policy will therefore be used to ensure proper management of teaching and learning processes in primary, secondary and teacher-training subsectors for effective and quality learning.

This policy document is based on the MCDE quality management framework and other national and international policies in the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MOEST), such as the National Education Policy, National Education Sector Plan (NESP), National Education Act (NEA) and Education for All (EFA). It also draws on the education standards of the Department of Inspectorate and Advisory Service (DIAS) and the Quality Assurance Toolkit of The Commonwealth of Learning (COL). This policy has been developed with support from COL.

This QA policy will promote, encourage and support the orderly development of open and distance learning as well as associated technologies, approaches, infrastructure and staff development.

It will outline the basic interpretation of the notion of quality assurance for open and distance learning, act as a basis for developing quality assurance standards for ODL and ensure that:
• our programmes are relevant to the needs of ODL learners and society as a whole,
• transparency and accountability are promoted,
• professional ethics are adhered to, and
• there is continuous improvement in learners’ achievements.

In this report, quality assurance refers to an ongoing process of assessing, maintaining and improving the achievement of academic standards through the right attitudes, resources, procedures and actions.

This policy will spell out its mission, vision, core functions, links with stakeholders and interconnection with demographic, sociopolitical, economic and public service issues, among others.

2. DEFINITIONS

The following definitions reflect procedures and operations at the MCDE.

**Continuous improvement**: Professional dynamism that brings about the much-needed progress in an institution or system.

**Open and distance learning (ODL)**: The most viable means for broadening educational access while improving the quality of education and giving the learners a greater sense of autonomy and responsibility for learning.

**Quality assurance**: At MCDE, this is an ongoing process of assessing, maintaining and improving the achievement of academic standards through the right attitudes, resources, procedures and actions.

**Quality criteria**: Benchmarks used as a basis for determining how successfully MCDE has performed.

3. PURPOSE

The quality assurance policy is behind continuous achievement of excellence in instruction; learning; acquisition of knowledge, skills, values and attitudes; behaviour; support services; student welfare; governance; and community service. Service
delivery in all ODL institutions should be outstanding and inspiring, especially in the area of academic and administrative support services. MCDE shall strive to provide the much-needed resources and services to achieve the sound accomplishment of the vision, mission, strategic objectives and values of the institution.

4. OBJECTIVES

This policy will act as a framework for an efficient and effective quality management system (QMS). The objectives of this policy are to:

- construct a purposeful QMS with monitoring and evaluation functions for MCDE;
- develop and review teaching and learning materials and resources according to needs and with particular concentration on quality improvement in ODL;
- guide all operational functions and staffing so that they are executed with great determination and adherence to high-quality ethics;
- raise awareness among stakeholders about their roles and responsibilities and get feedback, with specific reference to the academic and local community and service sector; and
- determine institutional QA guidelines in line with national and international educational statutes, rules and guidelines.

5. SCOPE

- The scope of this policy will guide all members of staff within all departments and sections of MCDE in their quality assurance roles and responsibilities and provide a clear description of the institution's structure and functions relating to the core function of delivery of education and training.
- This policy will:
  - guide all interactions among all ODL stakeholders within MCDE and determine the current and intended delivery of education and training;
  - guide all members of staff who are involved in activities of the institution — teaching, assessing, research, marketing or any other core
functions of MCDE — to operate in accordance with required needs and ODL standards; and

• ensure that all students are registered at MCDE as per registration requirements.

• This policy includes a scope, mission, and vision and policy statement. It covers interaction of the educational and support services of MCDE and outlines management of the infrastructure, learning resources, governance, departmental set-ups and information dissemination structures belonging to MCDE.

• For quality scope, all processes should be mapped, recorded and filed in a quality manual of the institution to guide consistent implementation of quality standards throughout the institution.

6. POLICY STATEMENT

The policy will endeavour to achieve quality based on the vision, mission, objectives and values of the institution.

Vision

To be a champion of open and distance learning in Malawi and beyond.

Mission

To provide quality, relevant, accessible and equitable education and training at all levels through open and distance learning for socio-economic development of the country.

Objectives

• To improve Distance Education Centres (DECs) management.
• To improve learning in Open Secondary Schools (OSS) and for home-study students.
• To recruit and train tutors/producers for the courses the College offers.
• To revise courses in line with the new curriculum.
• To improve distribution of teaching and learning materials.
• To procure equipment such as computers and printers.

Values
• Professionalism
• Morality
• Transparency
• Accountability

Quality Declaration
Based on MCDE’s vision, mission, objectives and values, the policy will be implemented appropriately and constantly monitored, and will carefully evaluate the implementation of all authorised activities to ensure that there is continuous quality improvement and that all governance and management processes are in line with standard QA best practices. The Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) will safeguard QA implementation by regular reviews of existing policies, regulations and procedures, and where such guiding instruments are lacking, develop appropriate documents to generally guarantee that all processes are in line with strategic drivers. Therefore, the QAC will meet annually to review criteria for performance standards and a Quality Manual for MCDE.

Commitment to a Quality Approach
• A quality version control process will be applied to the policy document, indicating amendments, as well as the date of approval and the name of the body that approved a particular version.
• A quality approach will be applied to all document resources, so that all documentation will have to meet predetermined standards of quality.
• A quality focus will be applied to MCDE’s policies, procedures and processes to enforce quality operations.
• Policy procedures and processes will include continuous revision and monitoring of activities to evaluate aspects such as suitability, efficiency and applicability.
7. QUALITY ASSURANCE OF OPERATIONAL UNITS

Institutional Management and Governance Bodies

- This quality assurance policy will cover all aspects of governance, access and equity, relevance, strategic planning, finance management, human resource planning and administration of MCDE.

- This QA policy will direct the functioning of all institutional bodies, such as the Procurement, Welfare and Training committees. The Advisory Body is subject to the same QA principles that apply to the administrative and academic support and other service delivery units at MCDE.

- To ensure successful implementation, all the above-mentioned are subject to annual reporting according to the directives.

Human Resource Department

- This QA policy directs that all recruited members of MCDE should be registered and given roles according to job descriptions as per the Human Capital Accountability System (which applies to all government institutions).

- This QA policy instructs each appointed staff member of MCDE to evaluate their performance continuously by means of self-evaluation and to take the necessary steps to make any required improvements.

- A QA approach should be implemented with orientation sessions for new members of staff and staff professional development courses in line with MCDE’s needs assessment processes.

- The QA policy prescribes continuous development for all staff members in terms of attitude, skills and academic ability.

- The QA policy will ensure that health and sanitation rules and regulations, effective safety and security measures and transparent transport and transportation procedures are followed and maintained.

- The QA policy will ensure the availability of the necessary resources, quality ICT resource management with regular backup systems and proper resource records management through various forms (directives, forms, files, inventory, records disposition, mail and correspondence management) and distribution and posting of notices and information bulletins.
• For the smooth operation of MCDE, and to quality-assure all interaction between management officials and supervisors, effective collaboration is required.

• The QA policy will ensure that issues of welfare management, performance management, labour relations, and employee responsibilities and conduct are addressed in a quality manner by the appropriate parties.

• The QA policy will also ensure that Leave Administration procedures are followed in accordance with the prescribed guidelines.

**Tutorial, Printing and Student Services**

• The QA policy ensures that all learning, tutoring, printing and learning support is in accordance with the established institutional guidelines.

• The implementation of this QA policy will ensure quality in the areas of printing, learning, tutoring and learner support. MCDE will commit to continuous improvement activities to meet the highest standards in these areas.

• External approval, registration, recording and termination of formal programmes of ODL will take place in accordance with the national policy.

• Continuous assurance and improvement of the quality of teaching and learning in programmes will take place through the application of institutional self-evaluation mechanisms and procedures.

• This QA policy prescribes that final assessment of learners should be conducted in a systematic, transparent and accountable way followed by an analysis of the assessments, which will become a basis for future improvements in learning.

• QA printing procedures should be followed, monitored and evaluated with recommendations implemented for continuous quality improvement.

• The QA policy ensures that Interactive Radio Instructions (IRI) should be followed and reviewed where necessary.

**Accounts Department**

The QA policy will ensure that financial management systems that include activities like cash management, pay and allowances, petty cash, enrolment fees and debt collection are handled in a transparent and accountable manner based on internal controls, principles and financial management standards.
8. QUALITY ASSURANCE AND KEY ROLES

- **The Board** will ensure that:
  - the policy is approved,
  - there is proper management and accountability of the institution based on its mission and mandate,
  - the institution is evaluated from time to time to ensure quality output, and
  - financial and human resources are mobilised for policy implementation.

- **The Director and Deputy Director** will ensure that:
  - the policy is embraced and implemented by institution staff,
  - a quality culture at the institution is established,
  - there is collaboration among departments so that all work towards the success of the institution,
  - departmental/sectional self-evaluations are done regularly and feedback is given to ensure quality operations, and
  - proper guidance on procedures is provided to all departments/sections.

- **Departmental Heads/Chief Tutors** will ensure that:
  - the policy is communicated to all staff and that they understand it,
  - the policy is implemented at all levels,
  - resources in the department are available to all who need them,
  - there is collaboration in the department, and
  - departmental matters related to the policy are communicated to management.

- **Tutors** will ensure that:
  - they understand and implement the policy,
  - they develop modules in line with the current education national curriculum,
  - they develop modules by following every stage of MCDE’s instructional material development process,
  - they develop instructional materials according to MCDE’s in-house style of writing, and
  - IRI scripts undergo formative evaluation.
• **Members of Staff** will:
  - ensure that they understand and implement the policy,
  - have a professional responsibility to ensure quality implementation in their areas of jurisdiction, regardless of their level, and
  - be accountable to their line managers.

• **Supervisors** will ensure that:
  - all learners have modules for the subjects they are studying, and
  - all learners are assessed to evaluate their performance.

• **The Procurement Committee** will ensure that:
  - there is transparency and accountability in the procurement process,
  - quality resources are purchased, and
  - procurement procedures follow Office of the Director of Public Procurement (ODPP) rules and regulations.

9. ENSURING QUALITY AT MCDE

**Quality Elements and Criteria**

The quality assurance policy requires that the institution ensure quality by evaluating itself on the following elements and criteria:

**Policy and Planning**

**Element:**

The educational provider has a clear sense of purpose and direction, which is informed by national priorities as well as by the quality demands of cost-effective education provision. There should be both relevant systems and a rationale for the use of distance education methods to achieve the purpose of the programme for the target learners as specified in institutional policies and guidelines.

**Criteria:**

- Institutional policies are in line with national policy, including appropriate registration processes.
- MCDE establishes guidelines for all quality criteria.
Before offering courses through open and distance learning:

- MCDE specifically designs systems for administering all the processes to the best advantage of learners.
- Student services have support mechanisms in place in order to meet MCDE’s stated aims in terms of academic quality.
- Since education systems are not static, at least annual planning and three- to five-year review cycles are in place.
- MCDE involves all stakeholders in the planning process.

## Learners

**Element:**

There are up-to-date records about past, present and potential learners. This informs policy and planning of course design and materials development, learner support and other relevant aspects of educational provision.

**Criteria:**

- Educational Management Information Systems (EMIS) of the institution must be updated and maintained and made available to planners and decision-makers, including course coordinators.
- The EMIS of the institution must correspond with the EMIS of the national government.
- Learner profiles should include, at a minimum, demographic information, records of learners from formal schooling, records of learners with special needs, access to learning infrastructure, prior learning experiences and achievements, language profile and work experience (for older learners). This information should be updated regularly.

## Programme Development

**Element:**

Subject to national prescriptions, programmes are flexible and designed with national needs as well as the needs of prospective learners and employers in mind; their form and structure should encourage access and be responsive to changing environments; learning and assessment methods are appropriate to the purpose and prescribed outcomes of the programmes.
**Criteria:**
- Programme development always starts with a typical learner profile.
- Programme development at MCDE integrates course design, material development, learner support and assessment, as well as subject, pedagogical and technical expertise.

**Course Design**

**Element:**

The course is appropriate to the level of study; the content, teaching, learning and assessment methods facilitate the achievement of the aims and learning outcomes with an identified process of development and evaluation of courses.

**Criteria:**
- The course is well structured to support independent learning and meets the requirements to produce the expected outcomes.
- The course is designed with a balance of content, pedagogy and resources to be used for delivery.
- The institution has guidelines on reviewing the effectiveness of systems and procedures for design, approval and accreditation of courses.

**Course Materials**

**Element:**

The content, assessment and teaching and learning approaches in the course materials support the aims and learning outcomes; the materials follow MCDE’s in-house style of writing and engage the learners; there is an identified process of development and evaluation of course materials.

**Criteria:**
- Print-based course materials
  - Clear procedures are in place for the development of high-quality learning materials.
  - Course materials are periodically reviewed to keep them up to date with changes in knowledge and learners’ needs.
• Materials are developed with input from both subject and ODL experts to ensure quality.

• Multimedia course materials

• Where Web-based resources are used, they must be credible.

• As much as possible, materials use multimedia resources to allow ease of adaptation and make them user-friendly.

Assessment

Element:

Assessment is integrated into the course design with formative assessment being part of the teaching and learning process. Assessment is well managed with sufficient external moderation to meet the requirements of accreditation bodies.

Criteria:

• Assessment is considered to be the key motivator to learning and an integral part of the teaching and learning process.

• Weighting of examinations and continuous assessment (course work) is well regulated by clear policy that takes into account the rigour of each of these assessment processes.

• Policies and systems make provision for learners with special needs.

Learner Support

Element:

Learners are provided with a range of opportunities for real two-way communication through contact tutoring, assessment tutoring, mentoring where appropriate, counselling and peer-support structures. The need for learners to access physical facilities and study resources and to participate in decision-making is also taken into account.

Criteria:

• Learner support is regarded as part of the implementation process, with methods selected to suit the activities and outcomes.

• For younger learners, the learning environment helps them develop the necessary discipline for increasingly independent learning and good
work habits; for older learners, support and collaborative learning options are in place.

- The level of support is dependent on the age and entry-level competence of learners.
- To provide an adequately supportive learning environment, the existing structures and resources of the education system and the community are used as much as possible.
- Subject-specific tutors are trained in techniques to mediate the course material. This is particularly important if teachers in conventional schools are employed as Open School tutors.

Human Resource Strategy, Management and Administration

**Element:**

There is effective, transparent and democratic management of communication and information as well as human and material resources and efficient administrative systems that support the activities of the education provider in order to offer sound education.

**Criteria:**

- Proper accountability mechanisms and guidelines are in place to ensure proper governance systems.
- There are effective systems for communication with stakeholders, including dealing with enquiries, complaints and general correspondence quickly and clearly within a structured administration system.
- There are systems to organise decentralised support for remote groups of learners, allocation of tutors and location of suitable sites of learning.
- Learners’ records are detailed, up to date and accessible to tutors and academic and administrative staff.
- Proper budgetary processes are in place to ensure that the allocation and monitoring of resources reflect the goals, values and principles of MCDE.
- Financial procedures (like handling fees, orders, accounts, receipt of external funds) are known and adhered to.
- Fees for learners from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds are pegged at levels that allow them to access the institution’s educational services.
Collaborative Relationships

Element:
In the interests of cost-effective provision of education and training, collaborative relationships are formed and collaborative projects undertaken wherever possible.

Criteria:
- ODL requires collaborative relationships with key stakeholders like parents, public and private education providers and the corporate world for:
  - sharing existing facilities such as learning centres and material resources, and
  - facilitating workplace learning.

Quality Assurance

Element:
There is a QA framework that integrates policy and practice, and informs a clear cycle of planning, implementing, monitoring, reflection and action to ensure that learners’ and staff’s needs, as well as the needs of other stakeholders, are met.

Criteria:
- There is a documented QA framework supported by clear QA action plans.
- The institution ensures that day-to-day activities are aligned with its mission, goals, principles and policies in relation to national, regional and global priorities.
- There are documented procedures and systems for quality assurance, and staff and learners are familiar with these.
- A culture of quality is nurtured within the institution.

Advocacy and Information Dissemination

Element:
Education services provided by the institution are effectively and accurately promoted in a variety of ways.
Criteria:

- An advocacy strategy is in place to positively influence ODL perception by the public.
- There is accurate and sufficient publicity for programmes to enable potential applicants to make informed choices through institutional advertisements.
- Information dissemination strategies form part of the institution’s management information system and are subject to institutional cyclical reviews.

Results

Element:
The educational provider fulfils its mission and achieves valid teaching and learning goals in a cost-effective manner for the benefit of both learners and society.

Criteria:

- MCDE is fulfilling its mission and meeting the expectations of clients and the nation.
- Learners are achieving the intended outcomes as laid down by MCDE.
- Pass and retention rates are monitored and mechanisms put in place for continuous improvement of these rates.
- The administrative systems are informed on relevant changes pertaining to their office so that they have the necessary information to meet the needs of learners and staff.

10. QUALITY AUDITS

Internal Audit (Self-evaluation Framework)

- Internal audits should be conducted annually to determine the growth and prosperity of the institution. They should focus on the overall service and the engagement with stakeholders. The results of such audits should alert the management of MCDE to how well strategies are working and to the underlying causes of any problems so that they can take corrective
action. The internal audit team will consist of members of MCDE from various departments and sections, and they should receive training.

• Before the on-site quality audit at MCDE starts, the team should formulate an audit plan that functions as a road map for conducting an on-site audit. This plan should include the timeline, audit scope (with boundaries/limitations) and audit location. The team should collect and review written documentation, including the institution’s QA policy, against all standard operating procedures and manuals, and decide on and develop a list of key employees to be interviewed during the on-site audit.

• Each team member should have an audit checklist as well as forms or a tape recorder for recording information during personal interviews. Each member should also have all the reference documents, such as copies of standard operating procedures. The checklist should be appropriate for all departments and sections of MCDE, and should include evaluation items within each section, a rating system and space for comments.

• Suggested aspects/sections to consider:
  • Organisation of departments
  • Physical work environment
  • Planning and policy
  • Course materials and design
  • Learners and learner support
  • Tutoring and assessment
  • Human resource strategy, management and administration
  • Collaborative relationships
  • Quality assurance
  • Advocacy and information dissemination
  • Results

**External Audits**

External audits at MCDE will be conducted in the same way as internal audits, including audits of training and documentation, but with a team from a different institution that operates in a more or less similar fashion, normally a benchmarked institution.
Quality Assurance Reporting

QA reporting should be conducted formally and in line with an agreed format with relevant MCDE member involvement and recorded appropriately. The QAC will decide on the acceptance of the report and record it accordingly.

11. AMENDMENTS AND REVIEW

Changes will be made if any of the following circumstances arise:

- Outdated or unclear statements in the policy are identified.
- Modernisation of technology, hardware or software is required.
- Changes in the environment of the institution.
- Departments, sections, bodies, units, or functions become outdated.

The QAC will process all reviews in accordance with the policy review date, once every five years, and design interim processes with Board approval, if the need arises for immediate policy changes before the scheduled review date.
1. INTRODUCTION

The National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) is a national resource organisation in the field of open schooling and the largest open schooling system in the world. Catering to the needs of a heterogeneous group of learners up to pre-degree level, it started as a project with in-built flexibilities by the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) in 1979. In July 2002, the Ministry of Human Resource Development amended the name of the organisation from the National Open School (NOS) to the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS). Its mission is to provide relevant continuing education up to pre-degree level through an open learning system to prioritised client groups. NIOS operates through a network of departments, regional centres and accredited institutions (study centres) in India and abroad.

NIOS not only offers a wide spectrum of courses of study up to pre-degree level for all categories of learners, but also works as a nodal institute for carrying forward the open school movement in the country in order to achieve the objective of developing an inclusive learning society. The success of the open and distance learning (ODL) system largely depends on learner satisfaction, not only in terms of the quality of academic support learners receive but also the extent to which they are empowered during the learning process. The endeavour is to make each student a good human being and a useful member of society.

Despite its best academic inputs, the open schooling system has not been accorded the same acceptability in terms of quality as that of the formal schooling system. Although NIOS has developed numerous documented processes that
ensure quality in all spheres of its work, it has become imperative to formalise a quality assurance (QA) policy for maintaining quality in its programmes. This is particularly important given the expansion of the institution in terms of student enrolment, staffing and geography.

It is in this context that the QA policy at NIOS was conceived and the quality management system was instituted.

2. INSTITUTIONAL VISION

The vision of NIOS is to be a sustainable inclusive learning institution providing flexible access to quality education and skills through ODL.

3. INSTITUTIONAL MISSION

To realise its vision, the institution has the following mission:

- Providing relevant, continuing and holistic education up to pre-degree level through an Open and Distance Learning System.
- Contributing to the Universalisation of School Education.
- Catering to the educational needs of the prioritised target groups for equity and social justice.
- In order to achieve this mission NIOS shall endeavour to excel in:
  - Designing and developing educational programmes that are relevant to its client groups.
  - Adopting delivery methods that are suitable and appropriate for its diverse learners.
  - Preparing learners to function in a fast-changing knowledge economy.
  - Instilling values of peace, tolerance and human integrity through its educational activities.
4. AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE QUALITY ASSURANCE POLICY

Aim of the Quality Assurance Policy
The aim of the quality assurance policy of NIOS is to facilitate the provision of excellent, sustainable, inclusive and flexible education up to pre-degree level through ODL. In doing so, NIOS complies with the requirement to ensure learner satisfaction by continually improving its quality management system.

Objectives of the Quality Assurance Policy
The objectives of this QA policy are to:

- develop and implement quality assurance procedures in providing open schooling up to pre-degree level to prioritised groups, keeping in view the local, national and international educational concerns;
- define quality standards for academic and vocational skill-building programmes, training and research;
- identify and promote standards of learning in the open and distance learning system in different parts of the country through research and evaluation and to maintain standards of equivalence with the formal system, while retaining ODL’s own distinct character; and
- monitor and evaluate quality assurance systems to ensure they meet set local, regional and national standards.

5. POLICY VALUES
The NIOS quality assurance policy is framed around the following values:

- Ownership of the processes to develop user-friendly policies that define the core values and purposes of open schooling.
- Participation of stakeholders in the policy process in order to take into account their different needs.
- Excellence in the management, planning, resource allocation and teaching and learning processes to ensure quality services and quality graduates.
• Stringent monitoring and evaluation in line with local, regional and international set standards.
• Excellence in the provision of comprehensive and sustainable education based on research.
• Collaborative partnerships with other ODL institutions in the country to develop a national organised and credible ODL system.

6. POLICY ALIGNMENT

The NIOS quality assurance policy shall be aligned with and be consistent with the following:

• The aim and objectives of the National Open School Society
• The admission by-laws
• The examination by-laws
• Accreditation norms
• Institutional copyright policy
• Recruitment rules

7. SCOPE OF POLICY

Everybody involved with NIOS and every facet of NIOS activities shall be bound by this policy. NIOS will monitor and evaluate quality in the key mission areas of programme design and development, teaching and learning, and research. The following areas will be monitored on a regular and systematic basis to ensure compliance with defined standards:

• Institutional governance and management
• Financial management
• Programme design and development
• Teaching and learning strategy
• Learner support services
• Learning materials (including OER)
• Learner assessment
• Admission processes
• Physical infrastructure and resources
• Staffing
• Advocacy and information dissemination
• Research and community service/engagement
• Partnerships and collaboration
• Integration of technology
• Affiliations with relevant national and regional organisations
• Capacity building and training

Institutional Governance and Management
NIOS shall ensure quality in the governance and management of the programmes with the help of the General Body (GB) and Executive Board (EB), which shall decide on the organisational structure of the Institute and direct its activities and annual plans. In addition, the General Body will ensure public accountability by directing NIOS to exercise its powers and functions in consonance with the vision and mission of NIOS.

NIOS will also ensure that the study centres are accountable for managing their resources for the benefit of NIOS learners.

Financial Management
• NIOS shall ensure judicious use of its financial resources to provide services in cost-effective ways to its learners.
• The Accounts Section shall prepare a detailed plan of expenditure based on learner intake versus the expected costs with frequent periodic reviews.
• NIOS shall maintain financial transparency by having its annual financial statement audited by external government auditors.
**Programme Design and Development**

- The objective of programme design and development at NIOS shall be to prepare self-learning and support materials that are relevant to the learners’ needs.

- Programme development shall be based on the appropriate pedagogical designs and shall ensure the imparting of knowledge and skills that are relevant for society and the economy.

- Programme initiation shall be based on needs analysis arising from government directives or reports or needs assessment surveys.

- Every programme shall have a programme design document/concept note that includes a rationale, target group, entry requirement, tentative course structure and evaluation strategy. A template with these guidelines shall be used in designing programmes.

- The programme approval authority is the Academic Council, which shall approve and monitor all academic and vocational programmes of NIOS.

- NIOS is committed to using feedback from learners/tutors/peers to review courses on a regular basis.

**Teaching and Learning Strategy**

- NIOS shall provide self-contained materials for its learners with diverse needs.

- Self-learning materials shall be designed in such a manner that they are user-friendly and the teacher’s presence is built into them.

- NIOS shall also ensure the provision of appropriate supplementary materials such as audio-video programmes, live radio talks, etc.

**Learner Support Services**

- NIOS is committed to providing a positive learning environment for its learners at study centres established in reputable schools/institutions/agencies selected according to the established norms for accreditation.

- NIOS shall support its learners at all levels — headquarters, regional centres and study centres — through appropriate strategies.

- NIOS shall make provision for formative assessment of learners through activities, practical work, assignments, etc.
• NIOS shall maintain a state-of-the-art learner support centre, with support staff and an interactive voice response system (IVRS), to provide information about programmes, admission status, examination information, result declaration, etc., throughout the day, seven days per week.

Learning Materials (including OER)
• The programme design team shall ensure use of appropriate instructional design for the development of quality learning materials.
• NIOS shall endeavour to develop OERs in new programmes and courses.

Learner Assessment
• Curriculum committees in every subject shall develop objective-based and competency-based evaluation and assessment strategies.
• Evaluation of learners shall be formative and summative: formative through in-built exercises in the self-learning materials and through constant internal assessments such as tutor-marked assignments (TMAs); summative through two term-end examinations in a year at examination centres determined by the established guidelines.
• NIOS shall evaluate all learners willing to undergo an evaluation and who fulfil the eligibility criteria as laid down in the examination by-laws.
• NIOS shall maintain and regularly update a question bank of items to be used to generate parallel question papers of equal level of difficulty, to be administered through on-demand examinations, as additional support for evaluation.

Admission Processes
• NIOS shall make available a year-round online student registration facility with counselling facilities at the study centres and regional offices.
• NIOS shall ensure that each learner is issued with an identity card and learning materials immediately after confirmation of admission.
Physical Infrastructure and Resources

- NIOS shall ensure that sufficient and appropriate infrastructure and resources are available at each study centre to create a barrier-free environment for learners.
- Each study centre shall be selected in accordance with guidelines for accreditation of NIOS centres.

Staffing

- NIOS shall appoint qualified staff selected as per the Recruitment and Service Rules for the proper management of its various functions.
- Appropriate measures will be taken to try to retain qualified staff.
- The Student Support Services Department of NIOS shall ensure that all personnel engaged in providing learner support at the study centres are appropriately qualified and trained.
- There shall be a systematic programme for continuous staff development in order to keep staff abreast of the latest developments in ODL.

Advocacy and Information Dissemination

- NIOS shall utilise suitable means of advocacy through print and electronic media for effective dissemination of information regarding programmes and courses offered.
- NIOS shall also ensure information dissemination to its learners (present and potential) through the call centre, which is open 24 hours per day throughout the week.

Research and Community Service/Engagement

- Research/innovation/experimentation in the area of open schooling in the prioritised areas as guided by the Research Advisory Committee shall be undertaken.
- The research findings shall be used to guide the planning of open schooling programmes.
- The tested knowledge of innovative practices shall be periodically disseminated to the State Open Schools.
Partnerships and Collaboration

• NIOS shall enter into collaborative arrangements with international agencies such as The Commonwealth of Learning (COL), UNESCO and UNFPA for material development, policy formulation, capacity building and general development in ODL.

• NIOS shall enter into partnership with national agencies as needed for course development, placement services, etc.

Integration of Technology

• NIOS shall create and offer the Virtual Open School (VOS) and develop OER for this platform.

• NIOS shall utilise appropriate technology to provide webcasts of live radio talks (Mukta Vidya Vani) on various subjects for its learners.

• NIOS shall embrace any appropriate technology in order to enhance the quality of learning by students.

Affiliations with Relevant National and Regional Organisations

• NIOS shall host the Secretariat for the National Consortium of Open Schools in India to provide consultancy services and engage in model building in close collaboration with the states and other agencies/institutions.

• NIOS shall affiliate itself with relevant organisations at regional, national and international levels in order to promote its standing as an open education institution.

Capacity Building and Training

• NIOS is committed to imparting regular training for new personnel and refresher courses for existing personnel through a dedicated unit for capacity building.

• NIOS shall also carry out intensive capacity building of other functionaries and stakeholders associated with the School by exploring the potential of ICTs.
8. APPROACH TO QUALITY ASSURANCE

The quality assurance approach at NIOS shall be internal self-regulation through well-defined processes and systems to satisfy the quality parameters in all aspects of its functioning.

9. QUALITY ASSURANCE STRUCTURES

An appropriate quality assurance structure shall be established at NIOS to ensure effective implementation of institutional QA arrangements. All academic units in the institution shall be represented in the QA structure. Senior management shall form an integral part of the structure and be answerable to matters relating to quality assurance in the institution. The organogram below shows the NIOS QA structure:
10. ACCOUNTABILITY

- The Chairman of NIOS shall be the ultimate authority on matters pertaining to quality assurance in the organisation. The QA committee, headed by a Director (Academic), shall comprise heads of all departments who shall work through the nodal officers in all departments/units. The QA policy document shall be held by the QA committee and any revisions/changes shall be approved by the Chairman.

- NIOS functions through five departments responsible for various activities and the designated nodal officer in each department shall be accountable for implementation of the quality assurance policy.

- The QA policy shall be taken up for review on a regular basis.
1. INTRODUCTION

Despite the fact that education has been a priority since independence, it appears that Sri Lanka has failed to ensure equal access to education for all children in the process of completing their formal education. This is vividly evident in the rapid increase in the number of school dropouts. These dropouts risk becoming the most disadvantaged and marginalised groups of society. The rigid nature of the formal school system at present has also failed to transform this group into creative and productive members of society.

Open and distance learning (ODL) could be an alternative path for resolving the problem of limited access to education for those who are out of the formal school system. Because of its two key features, namely expanding access and providing greater flexibility, ODL provides an educational system that offers not only greater opportunities but also choice and freedom to learn. It offers flexibility in its structures and creates opportunities to take education to the doorsteps of the learner. By making use of modern communication technologies and multi-channel-learning with high-grade instructional materials, ODL can offer high-quality education that is comparable to what is offered in the formal system.

In this context, we believe that the Open School system is a new strategy for catering to the educational needs of everyone, irrespective of age, sex or geographical location. In other words, in parallel with the formal education system, there should be an Open School system that incorporates all other non-formal programmes, including at primary, secondary and tertiary levels. Therefore, the National Institute of Education (NIE) took steps to introduce open schooling in the
country with the purpose of expanding educational opportunities to achieve the set targets of the practices of Education for All (EFA).

A quality assurance (QA) policy is much needed in order to guide the implementation of Open School programmes in an effective and efficient manner. A QA policy framework is an essential ingredient for attaining the goals and objectives of the programme.

2. INSTITUTIONAL VISION

The NIE’s vision is to be a centre of excellence in providing leadership for quality education in a pluralistic and dynamic society. The Open School will contribute to this vision by providing wider access to sustainable and learner-centric quality education and skills development through open and distance learning, resulting in an inclusive learning society.

3. INSTITUTIONAL MISSION

The Open School’s mission is to provide an alternative path to learning in addition to the formal school system, especially to those who have not completed their school education in grades 6–7, 8–9 and 10–11, and to provide through the Open School Level 1 (6–7), Level 2 (8–9) and Level 3 (10–11) continuing education through its regional and sub-regional study centres, which are located throughout the island.

4. AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE QUALITY ASSURANCE POLICY

Aim of the Quality Assurance Policy

The aim of the quality assurance policy for the Open School Unit is to develop continuous and sustainable progress in the delivery of quality education by the unit.
Objectives of the Quality Assurance Policy

- Provide guidance in the development and implementation of quality assurance procedures and practices in line with local, regional and international standards.
- Assist in meeting defined quality standards for academic programmes, teaching and learning processes, research and community engagement.
- Monitor and evaluate QA systems to ensure they meet set local, regional and international standards.
- Develop appropriate strategies for quality service delivery at regional centres.
- Develop appropriate processes for assessing learners and the performance of tutors.

Policy Values

The QA policy is framed around the following values:

- The involvement of all stakeholders in the QA process.
- Excellence in the management, planning, resource allocation and teaching and learning processes to ensure quality services and quality graduates.
- Stringent monitoring and evaluation in line with set standards locally, regionally and internationally.
- Developing learners who are critical thinkers and demonstrate the fundamental human values of honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility.
- Excellence in the provision of comprehensive and sustainable education based on research.

5. POLICY ALIGNMENT

This policy will be aligned with all the relevant policies and guidelines in the School, such as policies/guidelines on learner registration, learner support, assessment systems, staff development, research and community engagement.
6. SCOPE OF THE POLICY

Everybody involved in the School and every facet of School business shall be bound by this policy. The Sri Lanka Open School (SLOS) will monitor and evaluate quality in the key mission areas of programme design and development, teaching and learning, research and community engagement. The following areas will be monitored on a regular and systematic basis to ensure compliance with defined standards:

- Institutional governance and management
- Financial management
- Programme design and development
- Teaching and learning strategy
- Learner support services
- Learning materials (including OER)
- Learner assessment
- Admission processes
- Physical infrastructure and resources
- Staffing
- Advocacy and information dissemination
- Research and community service/engagement
- Partnerships and collaboration
- Integration of technology
- Affiliations with relevant national and regional organisations
- Programme review process

Institutional Governance and Management

The NIE, Sri Lanka, was established in 1986 under the provisions of the National Institute of Education Act No. 28 of 1985. The Open School Unit is governed by the NIE Council, which decides on the organisational structure of the unit. The NIE Council is also responsible for mapping out the strategic direction of the institution.

The Council is the supreme governing body, and is vested with the administration, management and control of the affairs of the Institute. The Academic Affairs
Board, functioning under the Council, decides on standards, content, curricula and evaluation processes of academic programmes undertaken by the Institute. The Director General, who is the chief executive officer, is directly responsible to the Council for the efficient functioning of the Institute. The Chairman of the Council is the Secretary to the Ministry of Education.

Financial Management

Financial management of the Institute shall ensure that there:

- are sufficient funds to cover the institution’s operational costs, given the nature of the programmes, current learner enrolment and the academic and support staff complement;
- is a well-developed plan showing current and projected learner intakes, recurrent expenditure and details of how the programmes are financed;
- is an unqualified financial audit statement at the end of each academic year to show sound financial management; and
- is an annual financial audit schedule that uses external auditors.

Programme Design and Development

SLOS will design and develop programmes according to the needs and demands of local society in accordance with national and international standards. Any programmes designed by the School shall be approved by the Council and Academic Affairs Board before they are implemented. Programmes shall be reviewed every five years using quality standards defined as per this QA policy.

Teaching and Learning Strategy

The SLOS policy will promote a teaching and learning strategy that puts learners at its centre and shall consist mainly of independent learning using self-instructional materials, with occasional face-to-face sessions with tutors.

Learner Support Services

- Learner Support Services will be provided in line with the availability of resources and the needs of learners in the Open School Unit. A wide range
of support services will be offered in order to cater for the varied needs of
the diverse group of learners in the School.

- As much as possible, appropriate technologies will be used to enhance
learner support. Where such technologies are used, both learners and
staff shall be instructed in the appropriate use of the technology.

Learning Materials (including OER)

- The SLOS develops learning materials that are self-instructional. These
materials will be developed by qualified staff with expertise in ODL
pedagogy. The learning materials will consist of self-learning modules,
workbooks and supplementary books with integrated audio and video
equipment.

- The School will also make use of available online educational resources
(OER) in order to enhance the quality of learning. SLOS will make its ma-
terials openly available to interested users. To create an enabling envi-
ronment for embracing OER, the School will develop an OER policy.

Learner Assessment

Learners will be assessed through both formative and summative assessment.
Formative assessment shall include assignments and the number of such as-
signments shall be determined by SLOS academics. Summative assessment shall
consist of examinations on-site at the end of each academic year. Both the end-
of-year examinations and the coursework marks shall count towards the end-of-
year mark.

Admission Process

According to the requirements and nature of learners, different admission proce-
dures will be adopted. SLOS shall admit only learners who are over 14 years old.
These learners are deemed to be capable of benefiting from independent learn-
ing. Admission of learners to courses of study shall be fair and transparent.

Physical Infrastructure and Resources

- Government-provided facilities for formal education, community and re-
ligious centres will be used for open schooling. The enrolment of the Open
School shall be in line with the available resources and infrastructure.
• In line with its inclusive policy, the Open School shall establish facilities that are user-friendly for learners with physical challenges.
• Where facilities belonging to other organisations are used, the Open School shall sign formal agreements with the owners to ensure that learners are not disadvantaged. In all such instances, the responsibility for service provision to learners shall lie with the Open School.

Staffing
• Tutors will be recruited from qualified teachers/academics from formal schools and retired personnel from the same system.
• The Open School will have a staff development programme in order to keep its staff up to date with latest developments in ODL.
• Measures will be put in place to retain experienced and qualified staff and reduce the rate of staff turnover.

Advocacy and Infrastructure Dissemination
• Information will be disseminated through brochures, handbooks, newspapers and broadcast media. SLOS will also conduct occasional awareness programmes on open schooling in the various provinces of the island.
• The Open School shall exercise the utmost professionalism in its advocacy campaigns.

Research and Community Service Engagement
• SLOS will encourage academic staff to conduct action research on open and distance learning, participate in local and international conferences and publish in international journals.
• The Open School will encourage and support staff in community service engagement in order to enhance community development and bridge the gap between the academic community and local community.
• Resources will be set aside for research and for community-based projects.

Partnership and Cooperation
• SLOS will collaborate with relevant organisations in order to exchange knowledge, ideas and information about other related matters.
• The School will go into partnership with relevant stakeholders in order to make its operations more efficient and more cost-effective.

Integration of Technology
SLOS shall embrace the latest educational technologies in order to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Efforts will be made to equip all regional study centres with suitable technological infrastructure for use by learners and staff. Both staff and learners will be instructed in the use of the technology.

Affiliations with Relevant and Regional Organisations
SLOS will affiliate itself with relevant international, regional and national organisations in order to keep abreast of regional and international trends in open and distance learning.

Programme Review Process
The Open School programme will review its programmes every five years, primarily to evaluate on an ongoing basis programmes in the context of the following:

• Progress of the programme.
• Provision and efficient use of resources.
• Feedback from stakeholders.
• Changes taking place in the country and in ODL generally.
• Getting information for future plans.

7. APPROACHES TO QUALITY ASSURANCE
This quality assurance policy will be implemented as a strategy to meet the general accepted standards defined by the NIE and the Ministry of Education, Sri Lanka. The QA approach of SLOS will be:

• Self-reviews: The Open School Unit will conduct self-reviews on a regular basis in order to monitor and ensure systematic achievement of set standards. Such reviews will lead to the compilation of self-review reports.
- **Peer reviews**: These will also form an integral part of the quality improvement strategy of the School. The reviews will be conducted by external peers from other institutions or from other departments within the institution.

### 8. QUALITY ASSURANCE STRUCTURE

An appropriate quality assurance structure shall be established at SLOS to facilitate policy implementation. This structure will comprise players at various levels within the Open School, as shown in the diagram below.

The Quality Assurance Structure of SLOS
9. ACCOUNTABILITY

The Director General, the Deputy Director General, the Director and academic and non-academic staff at both island and regional level are accountable for the implementation of the quality assurance policy.

- The QA policy shall be reviewed on a regular basis.
- Any changes to the QA policy document shall be approved by the Director General of NIE.
APPENDIX 1:
List of Abbreviations

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ASC</td>
<td>Accredited Study Centre</td>
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<td>ASOS</td>
<td>Assam State Open School</td>
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<td>BEU</td>
<td>Basic Education Unit</td>
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<td>BoG</td>
<td>Board of Governors</td>
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<td>BOU</td>
<td>Bangladesh Open University</td>
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<td>COL</td>
<td>Commonwealth of Learning</td>
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<td>DIAS</td>
<td>Department of Inspectorate and Advisory Services</td>
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<td>ECOL</td>
<td>Examinations Council of Lesotho</td>
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<td>EFA</td>
<td>Education for All</td>
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<td>EMIS</td>
<td>Education Management Information Systems</td>
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<td>ICT</td>
<td>Information and Communications Technology</td>
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<td>IEDA</td>
<td>Instituto de Educação Aberta e à Distância (Institute of Open and Distance Learning)</td>
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<td>JC</td>
<td>Junior Certificate</td>
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<td>JSS MVP</td>
<td>JSS Mahavidyapeetha</td>
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<td>JSSKOS</td>
<td>JSS Karnataka Open School</td>
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<td>LDTC</td>
<td>Lesotho Distance Teaching Centre</td>
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<td>LGCSE</td>
<td>Lesotho General Certificate Secondary Education</td>
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<td>MCDE</td>
<td>Malawi College of Distance Education</td>
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<td>MDG</td>
<td>Millennium Development Goal</td>
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<td>MINEDH</td>
<td>Ministry of Education and Human Development</td>
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<td>MOEST</td>
<td>Ministry of Education, Science and Technology</td>
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<td>NEA</td>
<td>National Education Act</td>
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<td>Acronym</td>
<td>Abbreviation</td>
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<tr>
<td>NFE</td>
<td>Non Formal Education</td>
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<td>NIE</td>
<td>National Institute of Education</td>
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<td>NIOS</td>
<td>National Institute of Open Schooling</td>
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<td>ODL</td>
<td>Open and Distance Learning</td>
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<td>ODPP</td>
<td>Office of the Director of Public Procurement</td>
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<td>OER</td>
<td>Open Educational Resources</td>
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<td>QA</td>
<td>Quality Assurance</td>
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<td>QAC</td>
<td>Quality Assurance Committee</td>
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<td>QMS</td>
<td>Quality Management System</td>
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<td>SLOS</td>
<td>Sri Lanka Open School</td>
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<td>TMA</td>
<td>Tutor-Marked Assignment</td>
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<td>VC</td>
<td>Vice-Chancellor</td>
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APPENDIX 2:
Glossary of Terms

The following terms are defined in the context of this report.

**Accreditation**: Official recognition of adherence to prescribed standards.

**Assessment**: An evaluation or appraisal based on performance. Educational assessment is the process of documenting knowledge, skills, attitudes and beliefs. In the context of quality assurance, assessment is the process of identifying the means and measures that will ensure that appropriate internal procedures are in place and operational and that outcomes of academic programmes and activities are in accord with established standards.

**Audit**: Checking transparency and accountability in the use of institutional resources. An external audit is conducted by external (independent) qualified accountant(s) to determine, among other things, whether accounting records are accurate and complete and prepared in accordance with legal requirements.

**Benchmark**: A standard or point of reference that is used as a basis for achievements.

**Continual improvement**: Professional development that contributes to the expected growth in quality progress in an institution or system.

**Evaluation**: A systematic and critical analysis of the quality of an education institution or a programme.

**External audit**: See Audit

**Governance**: Establishment of policies and continuous monitoring of their proper implementation.

**Learning Post**: A place where literacy classes take place. It is usually made up of a group of neighbouring villages.

**Learning Post Administrator**: A literacy teacher who is placed in a Learning Post. This person recruits learners; keeps learner registration information up to date; distributes learning materials; facilitates teaching, learning
and all other activities at the Learning Post; and safeguards all material for which they are responsible.

**Quality:** The fitness for purpose of a product or service according to a set of required standards.

**Quality assurance:** A process whereby measures are established to ensure that outcomes of academic programmes and activities are of a prescribed standard. This is an ongoing process.

**Quality audit:** Evaluation of the quality of a system.

**Quality management:** An aggregate of measures taken regularly at system or institutional level in order to assure the quality of education or organisation with an emphasis on improving quality.

**Quality monitoring:** The process of reviewing quality assurance criteria to ensure that they are being followed and are producing the desired results. In educational terms, quality monitoring entails the collection and analysis of data for selected indicators so that managers can determine whether key standards are being achieved and are having the expected effect on the target population.

**Stakeholders:** These are the groups, or sometimes individuals, who have a significant interest in the successful outcome of a particular initiative or activity. In the case of an educational institution, some examples would be employees of the institution, current and future learners, future employers of the learners and funding agencies.

**Student Information Management System (SIMS):** System with learner profiles that include, for example, demographic information, formal schooling records and prior learning experiences and achievements, details of any special needs, and language profile.

**Study centres:** Offices that provide services to Continuing Education Unit learners.

**Tutor:** Qualified high school teacher who marks and/or provides face-to-face sessions for Continuing Education Unit learners.

**Tutor-marked assignments (TMAs):** Worksheets marked by tutors (in contrast to self-assessment assignments). The worksheets each have a cover sheet on which learners can request an explanation for anything they did not fully understand. All queries are answered by tutors who are engaged on a part-time basis.
Author Biographies

**Amadeu Afonso** completed his university education at the Universidade Pedagógica, Maputo (teaching Chemistry and Biology) in 1996. In 1995 he began teaching chemistry at secondary schools in Maputo, while he completed his degree, and during 2001 and 2002 he worked as a secondary school deputy director. In 2003 he was invited to join the Department of Distance Education in the Ministry of Education of Mozambique, where he was actively involved in the conceptualisation and launching of the Programa do Ensino Secundário à Distância (PESD) (secondary-level distance education programme). He is currently employed at the Instituto de Educação Aberta e à Distância (IEDA) (Institute of Open and Distance Learning).

**Dr Kuldeep Agarwal** has postgraduate degrees in English and Education, and a PhD in Education. He started his career as a school teacher and then worked as a teacher educator at the University of Delhi, India. He has significant experience in managing formal as well as open schooling systems, and is currently a Director (Academic) at the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS), India. As a key participant in setting up and successfully managing the Haryana Open School, he is widely consulted in many education-related fields and has written school textbooks and self-learning materials. He has also presented numerous papers at national and international conferences and conducted several training programmes for teachers. Dr Agarwal was the 2008 recipient of the Endeavour Executive Award from the Government of Australia. He currently holds honorary positions as Treasurer of COMOSA (Commonwealth Open Schooling Association) and Managing Editor of the COMOSA Journal and Open Learning Magazine published by NIOS.

**Rasika Balasuriya** is an academic member of the Open School Unit, National Institute of Education, Sri Lanka. He participated in preparing the quality assurance policy for the Sri Lanka Open School. Balasuriya holds undergraduate and postgraduate degrees from the University of Colombo and has participated in many audio programmes related to open schooling.
Jyotismita Borah holds a BEd and a postgraduate degree in English. She currently works as the Project Associate in the Assam State Open School, Guwahati, Assam, but started her career as a college English lecturer. She has contributed to an increase in enrolment in the open schooling system in the state and is closely involved with different activities designed to universalise secondary education through the open schooling programme throughout the state. Borah has significant study material development and training module development experience with the State Council for Educational Research and Training, Assam, and participated in the development of the Tool Kit for Achievement survey conducted by Rashtriya Madhyamik Sikshya Abhihaan and Sarva Siksha Abhijan, Assam, in the upper primary level. She is currently coordinating the translation of the senior secondary- and secondary-level self-learning material of the National Institute of Open Schooling.

Sarawanamuthu Dunaisingh is an academic member of the Open School Unit, National Institute of Education, Sri Lanka. He played a key role in the preparation of the quality assurance policy for the Sri Lanka Open School. Dunaisingh graduated from the University of Colombo and followed postgraduate degree programmes from the Open University of Sri Lanka and universities in India. He previously taught in many government schools in Sri Lanka and currently coordinates many programmes for the Open School unit.

Rukhsana Durrani is passionate about working in distance learning, especially where it relates to the education of traditional school dropouts. She has a master’s degree in Political Science from the University of Peshawar and a master of philosophy degree in Education from the International Islamic University Islamabad (IIUI), where she is currently writing her PhD thesis. She joined Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) in 2011 as a lecturer and is still employed there. She is also working as a training coordinator of open schooling at BUESP and is responsible for the training of teachers under the open schooling programme. Her previous experience includes a lecturer position at IIUI and the Women Institute of Science and Technology Islamabad, as well teaching in primary, middle and secondary schools. Rukhsana worked with Mrs Zahida Sajjad Qazi on the quality assurance policy for open schooling.
**Dr T.N. Giri** obtained a postgraduate degree from Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, and an MPhil and PhD from the School of International Studies of Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, in 1998. Dr Giri currently works as Regional Director at a regional centre Chandigarh, one of the biggest regional centres of the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS), India. Prior to this, he worked in different capacities in NIOS, including Academic Officer, Assistant Director (Academic) and Deputy Director (Academic). He has contributed to the development of curricula and self-instructional material, as well as the development of the Open Basic Education (OBE) programme, in addition to writing a number of articles and papers and a book.

**Harold Efraim //Guiob** obtained his Higher Education Diploma for Secondary Education in 1990 from the University of Namibia. After teaching History and English for three years in Rundu and Grootfontein, //Guiob returned to Windhoek and obtained a BEd (Honours) from the University of Namibia in 1995. In 1997, he enrolled for an MEd in Educational Leadership with the University of the Free State in Bloemfontein, South Africa, and in 2009 enrolled for an MPhil in Chinese Studies with the University of Wales (ongoing). //Guiob left NAMCOL in February 2012 after 13 years, during which time he introduced the quality assurance system, including the drafting of the quality assurance policy. //Guiob is currently working towards the establishment of a quality assurance system for a church organisation in Namibia as part of his social responsibility commitments.

**Dr Manju Gupta** is Deputy Director (Academic) at the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS), India, the largest open schooling system in the world. She has more than 22 years’ experience of working at NIOS, and has worked in different capacities in different departments of the school as well as regional centres for providing academic support at school level. Dr Gupta holds graduate and postgraduate degrees in Commerce and Education, and a PhD in Commerce. Her particular area of interest is the development of self-learning materials for academic and vocational courses at school level. She has participated in national and international conferences and seminars in many platforms, and is regarded as
a resource person for different organisations involved in the field of course material development and evaluation strategies as well as blended learning.

**Nawab Mamood Hussain** is a retired IAS officer currently working as Chairman in the Assam Higher Secondary Education Council. Prior to that he was the Commissioner-Secretary, Education to the government of Assam.

**Dr Sandhya Kumar** holds postgraduate degrees in Home Science and Education as well as a PhD in Education. Currently working as Deputy Director (Academic) at the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS), India, she has worked in various departments of NIOS, such as Academic, Vocational Education and Student Support Services. She was instrumental in bringing about tremendous growth in student enrolment at the Regional Centre in Dehradun. Instructional designing of self-instructional materials is her forte, and she has particular interest in capacity building of open schooling functionaries and research in open and distance education. Her first-hand experience with Open School learners has empowered her to execute capacity building and research. She has presented papers at national and international conferences and developed self-instructional materials for NIOS.

**Ananya Laboni** joined the Open School of Bangladesh Open University (BOU) as a Home Economics lecturer in 2003 and currently works there as an assistant professor. Prior to that, she worked in an international research centre as a research officer. Laboni is passionate about working in the field of distance learning, especially where it can benefit vulnerable populations. She has presented papers at national and international seminars and collaborated with Professor Sadia Afroze Sultana in preparing a quality assurance policy for BOU under the guidance of COL. She is a core cell member of a team that introduced a customised online-base distance education program for the armed forces of Bangladesh. Since 2010, she has been a programme coordinator for the Secondary School Certificate programme, the largest educational programme of Bangladesh Open University.
Anna 'Mamakate Maieane is a Mathematics and Chemistry teacher and the Head of the Writers Section of the Continuing Education Unit (CEU) of the Lesotho Distance Teaching Centre (LDTC). She trained in ODL materials development and first joined LDTC as a course writer in the Writers Section. She then transferred to the Basic Education Unit (BEU) where she was an editor before returning to the CEU. She contributed a chapter to a book on Learner Support Services and she was the Mathematics 12 Team Leader in the development of OERs for open schools. She has a passion for technology and believes it can contribute to successful ODL practices.

Marcelle Martin, a Managing Member, Administrator and Executive Trainer, has worked in the Public Service of Namibia, and specifically education, for 17 years. She also has more than seven years of experience in corporate training, management and customer service. She has a diploma in Education from the University of Namibia, a Bachelor’s degree in Education from the University of Namibia, and a Master’s degree in Education and Social Sciences from the University of Umea. Martin has been working in facilitation, training and organisational development since 2006, while managing a private consulting business. With certified qualifications in quality management systems, she designs and presents training in response to customer needs, facilitates small and large groups, leads organisational change efforts, and conducts individual coaching sessions.

Bernardo F. Massolonga completed his university education at Universidade Pedagógica of Mozambique in 1996, and was trained as a History and Geography teacher. He worked as a teacher from 1984 to 1997. In 1996 he joined a team of staff at Instituto de Aperfeiçoamento de Professores (IAP), a teacher training institute, and in 2000 was appointed as Head of Department of Planning and Statistic. Massolonga is the author of self-learning material for Curso Básico e Médio de Formação de Professores Primários, via Ensino à Distância and Programa do Ensino Secundário à Distância (PESD) (secondary-level distance education programme). He is currently employed at the Instituto de Educação Aberta e à Distância (IEDA) (Institute of Open and Distance Learning).
Ephraim Mhlanga is a Programme Specialist: Quality Assurance at SAIDE, the South African Institute for Distance Education, with a specific focus on quality assurance in higher education. He has previously undertaken a number of quality assurance projects in South Africa and in sub-Saharan Africa generally, and has worked with the National Institute for Distance Education (INED), a public regulatory and coordinating institution of distance education in Mozambique, the Council of Higher Education in Lesotho, The Council on Higher Education in South Africa, the Partnership for Higher Education in Africa (PHEA) Educational Technology Initiative, and the African Council for Distance Education. Mhlanga also participated in the Quality Assurance Toolkit for Open Schools, published by the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) in 2010, and published his own book, Quality Assurance in Higher Education in Southern Africa: Challenges and Opportunities, in 2013.

Noria Mlaliki Nchingula holds a Bachelor of Arts degree and has considerable experience in teaching, communication, public relations and administration. She is currently working as an acting editor for Malawi College of Distance Education, and her job involves ensuring writers and editors adhere to the house style as well making sure that all instructional materials developed are of high quality.

Zahida Sajjad obtained her Master’s degree in Pakistan Studies and subsequently joined Allama Iqbal Open University as a senior field worker in the Functional Educational Project for Rural Areas funded by Overseas Development Agencies. She holds a certificate in Distance Education from International Extension College, London University, UK. She represented Allam Iqbal Open University in a number of international conferences and seminars. Sajjad has significant experience in curriculum development, implementing strategies, teacher training, evaluation and monitoring. Her 33 years’ hard work in non-formal education have resulted in the awarding of UNESCO’s NOMA and Raja Roy Singh awards.

Dr Uma Charan Sarma is a retired Selection Grade, Lecturer of Handique Girls College. He is currently closely associated with the open schooling programme as a Course Coordinator.
Professor Sadia Afroze Sultana joined the Open School of Bangladesh Open University (BOU) as a Physics lecturer in 1998 and obtained a PhD in Engineering in Nuclear Physics from Kyushu University, Japan, in 2005. Since June 2012 she has been Dean of the Open School. Professor Sultana has done a great deal of research in the field of distance education and its potential to reach isolated communities and to empower women. She has been working with the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) to promote distance education in Bangladesh and has presented papers at international seminars and organised workshops on distance education. In addition to working on the quality assurance policy for BOU, she has prepared a policy on open educational resources (OER) and recently introduced distance education programmes for members of the armed forces of Bangladesh. In October 2014, she was elected Vice Chairperson of the Commonwealth Open Schooling Association (COMOSA).

Rao Venkateswara has a Master’s degree in English Language and Literature, Indian History and Education, and an MPhil in Education. He worked for 20 years in government institutions in Andhra Pradesh, India. He has been working in the Andhra Pradesh State Open School as State Coordinator for almost five years, looking after student support services for secondary and senior secondary students. He introduced many innovative practices to the open and distance education system, including online enrolment and fee payment, online examination registration and fee payment, online registration for verification of answer scripts, downloading of hall tickets, study materials, etc. He has attended many national and international workshops conducted by The Commonwealth of Learning, UNESCO and the Department of Adult Education, and has organised many orientation programmes on different aspects of open schooling.

Dr K.M. Veeraiah is the Director of JSS Karnataka Open School, and previously served as the Professor and Principal of First Grade Colleges JSS Mahavidyapeetha, Mysore. He has served in the National Service Scheme, Bharat Vikas Parishad and many other cultural and social organisations, and received a Best Citizen Award in 2013. He has been a Member of the Academic Council, University of Mysore, Mysore, and President of Mysore University Private College Teachers’
Association, and is currently the Secretary of the Karnataka Economic Association. Dr. Veeraiah has organised several national-level, state-level and university-level conferences, workshops and symposiums, and has published 42 books in Kannada and English.