

Site Visits and Interview Protocols in Institutional Audits

Alignment with the Manual for Institutional Audits 2021

1. **Lesson 1: Purpose of Site Visits in Audits**
 - **Pages 38-40** explain the purpose, objectives, and format of site visits, including validation, verification, and evidence triangulation.
 - It details how site visits provide contextual understanding and ensure compliance with quality management standards.
2. **Lesson 2: Preparing for Site Visits**
 - **Pages 38-40** and **54-57** outline the roles and responsibilities of the audit officer, institutional contact person, and site visit coordinator.
 - It specifies logistical arrangements, stakeholder engagement, and documentation review as critical preparatory activities.
3. **Lesson 3: Conducting Effective Interviews**
 - **Pages 54-57** provide detailed guidelines on interview protocols, including ethical considerations, confidentiality, and effective questioning techniques.
 - It emphasises active listening, non-verbal cues, and ethical guidelines, ensuring accurate and credible data collection.

Introduction

This micro-course equips staff with essential knowledge and skills to effectively prepare for and conduct site visits and interviews as part of institutional audits, ensuring compliance with Council on Higher Education (CHE) standards.

Key Definitions and Concepts

- **Site Visits in Institutional Audits**

Site visits are conducted to validate the information provided in the Self-Evaluation Report (SER) and Portfolio of Evidence (PoE). They ensure that an institution's quality management systems are functional, credible, and aligned with CHE standards.

- **Purpose:**
 - Validate and verify institutional claims through direct observation and stakeholder engagement.
 - Triangulate evidence from multiple sources (documents, interviews, observations).
 - Provide contextual understanding of institutional practices and culture.
 - **Key Activities:**
 - **Interviews and Focus Groups:** Engage with stakeholders for diverse perspectives.
 - **Observation of Practices:** Assess teaching, learning, and administrative activities.
 - **Facility Inspection:** Verify adequacy of infrastructure and learning resources.
 - **Document Verification:** Cross-check supporting documents and performance reports.
 - **Example:** Interviewing academic staff validates claims of innovative teaching methods, ensuring accurate and credible audit findings.
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- **Preparation for Site Visits**

Proper planning and coordination ensure the effectiveness and efficiency of site visits. This includes defining the visit's scope, scheduling interviews, and arranging logistical support.

 - **Key Preparatory Activities:**
 - **Initial Meetings:** Define scope, focus areas, and objectives with senior management.
 - **Stakeholder Identification:** Identify relevant stakeholders for interviews.
 - **Documentation Review:** Analyse the SER and PoE to prepare targeted questions.
 - **Logistical Arrangements:** Ensure venue availability, ICT support, and health compliance.
 - **Roles and Responsibilities:**
 - **Audit Officer (CHE):** Coordinates logistics and ensures adherence to audit frameworks.
 - **Institutional Contact Person:** Manages internal preparations, communication, and logistics.
 - **Audit Panel Members:** Conduct interviews, observe practices, and review documents.
 - **Example:** Coordinating stakeholder schedules ensures comprehensive data collection and diverse perspectives.

- **Conducting Effective Interviews**

Interviews are critical for validating the information presented in the SER and PoE. They provide direct insights into institutional practices, stakeholder experiences, and the implementation of quality assurance mechanisms.

- **Purpose:**
 - Validate institutional claims by gathering firsthand accounts.
 - Contextual understanding of institutional culture and quality management.
 - Triangulate evidence from multiple sources for accurate and credible findings.
- **Interviewing Techniques:**
 - **Open-Ended Questions:** Encourage detailed and insightful responses.
 - **Probing Questions:** Seek clarification and deeper understanding.
 - **Follow-Up Questions:** Validate and confirm statements for consistency.
 - **Active Listening and Non-Verbal Cues:** Ensure accurate interpretation and build trust.
- **Ethical Considerations:**
 - **Confidentiality Assurance:** Maintain anonymity and protect interviewee identities.
 - **Informed Consent:** Clearly explain the purpose and scope of the interview.
 - **Non-Biased Approach:** Maintain neutrality to avoid influencing responses.
- **Example:** Assuring confidentiality encourages honest feedback, enhancing data credibility and validity.

Purpose and Importance

1. Site Visits

- Validate and verify institutional claims in the SER and PoE.
- Provide a comprehensive understanding of the institution's context, practices, and culture.
- Ensure compliance with CHE standards and quality management practices.
- **Example:** Observing teaching practices validates curriculum delivery claims.

2. Interview Protocols

- Gather diverse perspectives and firsthand experiences for evidence triangulation.
- Enhance the accuracy, credibility, and validity of audit findings.
- Inform balanced judgments and credible recommendations for continuous improvement.

- **Example:** Interviewing students provides insights into the effectiveness of student support services.

Key Takeaway

Site visits and interviews are crucial components of institutional audits, ensuring credible validation and verification of self-evaluation reports. Effective preparation, strategic questioning, and ethical considerations enhance the accuracy, reliability, and credibility of audit findings, leading to informed judgments and actionable recommendations for continuous quality improvement.