

Types of Audits in Higher Education

Alignment with the Manual for Institutional Audits 2021

- **Standard Institutional Audits:** Pages 25-30 cover the purpose, objectives, and processes, including self-evaluation, external peer review, and site visits.
- **Special Institutional Audits:** Pages 33-35 explain the triggers, scope, and targeted nature of these audits, initiated due to compliance concerns or ministerial directives.
- **Themed Audits:** Pages 37-39 detail the sector-wide focus on emerging educational challenges, benchmarking, and policy recommendations.

Types of Institutional Audits

1. Standard Institutional Audits

Purpose:

A comprehensive review to assess an institution's quality management system, focusing on governance, academic offerings, and student outcomes.

Key Features:

- **Institutional Self-Evaluation:** Submission of a Self-Evaluation Report (SER).
- **External Peer Review:** Evaluations by independent academic and industry experts.
- **Site Visits & Consultations:** Validation through interviews and policy reviews.
- **Accreditation Compliance:** Ensures alignment with the HEQSF and CHE standards.

Process:

1. **Self-Assessment:** Internal policy and performance review.
2. **Submission of SER:** Demonstrates compliance with quality assurance frameworks.
3. **External Review & Site Visit:** Interviews, policy evaluations, and assessments.
4. **Audit Report & Recommendations:** Identifies strengths, deficiencies, and actions needed.

Key Takeaway:

Standard audits ensure high academic standards, governance practices, and institutional accountability.

2. Special Institutional Audits

Purpose:

Unscheduled and targeted audits initiated by concerns over academic integrity, financial stability, or governance failures.

When Are They Conducted?

- **Declining Academic Standards:** Not meeting teaching, research, or support benchmarks.
- **Governance or Ethical Breaches:** Leadership issues or financial mismanagement.
- **Programme Accreditation Failures:** Identified in prior evaluations.
- **Ministerial Directive:** By the Minister of Higher Education for systemic quality issues.

Process:

1. **Initiation & Scope Definition:** By HEQC or ministerial request.
2. **Targeted Review:** Focuses on specific issues, not the entire institution.
3. **On-Site Investigation:** Intensive policy and compliance assessments.
4. **Recommendations & Sanctions:** Corrective actions, potential closures, or funding reductions.

Key Takeaway:

Special audits are regulatory interventions to maintain compliance, transparency, and institutional credibility.

3. Themed Audits

Purpose:

Sector-wide evaluations addressing common challenges like student retention, online learning quality, and research impact.

Why Conduct Themed Audits?

- **Benchmarking Best Practices:** Aligning with national and global quality models.
- **Identifying Challenges:** Helps address systemic quality gaps.
- **Policy Development:** Provides insights for education reforms.

Examples of Themed Audits:

- **Blended Learning Audit:** Evaluates online and hybrid education models.
- **Research Impact Audit:** Assesses contributions to societal advancements.
- **Student Success Audit:** Reviews graduation rates and support systems.

Process:

1. **Issue Identification:** CHE selects a key academic challenge.
2. **Data Collection:** Institutions submit reports on quality initiatives.
3. **Cross-Institutional Analysis:** Performance comparison and trend analysis.
4. **Policy Recommendations:** Influences national education policies and funding.

Key Takeaway:

Themed audits enhance the higher education sector by promoting continuous improvement and addressing systemic issues.