

Audit Panels and Their Roles

Alignment with the Manual for Institutional Audits 2021

CHE Manual for Institutional Audits (2021), pages 10–11 – The Audit Process and pages 11–12 – Standard 1: Governance, Strategic Planning and Management

Introduction:

Audit panels are integral to institutional audits in higher education. Comprising external experts, these panels provide objective, evidence-based evaluations of institutional quality management systems. Their findings inform accreditation decisions, highlight areas for improvement, and promote transparency and accountability. Understanding how audit panels operate is essential for institutions preparing for audits and for professionals involved in quality assurance.

Key Definitions:

Audit Panel – A group of external evaluators appointed to assess the quality assurance systems, governance, and performance of a higher education institution.

Chairperson – The lead member of the panel who oversees the audit process and ensures alignment with the Council on Higher Education (CHE) framework.

Conflict of Interest – A situation where a panel member's impartiality may be compromised due to prior relationships or associations with the institution under review.

Key Concepts Explained:

Audit panels are selected based on experience, sectoral diversity, and expertise in higher education quality assurance. Their roles include reviewing the institution's Self-Evaluation Report (SER), analysing the Portfolio of Evidence (PoE), conducting site visits, and interviewing key stakeholders. Panel members follow strict ethical guidelines to maintain objectivity, confidentiality, and professionalism. Their responsibilities are divided among specific roles: the chairperson leads the process, scribes document proceedings, and the report writer drafts the final audit report. Institutions must engage transparently with audit panels and be prepared to present credible, well-organised evidence. The success of an audit depends not only on institutional readiness but also on the panel's ability to evaluate fairly and thoroughly.

Career Benefits:

Understanding the audit panel process is invaluable for anyone involved in higher education governance, quality assurance, or institutional accreditation. Professionals may serve as panelists or liaison officers, gaining insight into national standards, external review practices, and quality benchmarking.

Conclusion:

Audit panels play a crucial role in maintaining the integrity and quality of the higher education system. Their independent evaluations drive institutional improvement, ensure compliance, and promote trust among stakeholders. Institutions that engage proactively and ethically with audit panels position themselves for success in the evolving higher education landscape.