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I. INTRODUCTION

Self assessment and strategic planning are instruments designed to help TEIs advance to increasing levels of quality, taking into considerations their goals and purposes, their resources and the conditions under which they must operate.

This document must be understood as a methodological guide to aid Palestinian TEIs conduct reliable quality assurance processes and use the outcomes of these processes as a basis for flexible and effective strategic planning. In addition, it provides information on the preparation of proposals to be presented to the Ministry of Higher Education in order to obtain resources for capacity building in the fields of quality assurance and planning.

A. SOME BASIC FACTS ABOUT PALESTINIAN TERTIARY EDUCATION

The consultants analysed the “Palestinian Higher Education Statistics 2006”, issued by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, self assessment and strategic planning documentation provided by TEIs, documentation prepared by AQAC and the MoEHE and general information on Palestinian tertiary education; they visited a large sample of TEI in the country, and conducted two workshops with representatives from universities, university colleges and community colleges. In addition, they met with the Board of AQAC and representatives from the TEP in the MoEHE.

As will be shown in further detail in the next section, the picture that appeared was both daunting and encouraging. Daunting because of the serious constraints the country and tertiary education face in a context of occupation, restrictions to mobility, uncertainty of financial resources and high levels of unemployment, to mention just some of the more salient facts. Encouraging, because in spite of this very hostile environment, tertiary education has been able to gain the trust of the people and manages to deal with these severe restrictions with competency and commitment.

In order to better appreciate the situation of Palestinian Higher Education the consultants produced the following analysis based on the information gathered during their two visits to the country. Unless stated otherwise, the tables in Annex 1 are extracted from or derived from the “Palestinian Higher Education Statistics 2006” issued by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education.

The main findings can be summarized as follows:

- Palestinian tertiary education has witnessed an increasing demand for tertiary education, and enrolment has more than quadrupled in the decade

from 1994-95 to 2004-2005. Demand is still growing, as enrolment in 2005-05 grew by 8.6% from the previous year (from 138.000 to 150.000 students).

- Eighty eight percent of students are enrolled in universities, 4.2% in university colleges and 7.4% in community colleges. This shows a very slight increase from the situation in 1994-95, when 9.8% of the students were enrolled in colleges.
- Universities vary greatly in size: Excluding Al Quds Open University, they range from small institutions (three of them have less than 4.000 students) to what can be considered large institutions, two of them having more than 15.000 students. They also have different missions, as five of them state that research is part of their mission, and five offer graduate programmes; four of these engage both in research and graduate teaching. It is noteworthy that some of the smaller universities are engaged in research and offer graduate programmes.
- Most of the students follow first degree programmes: eighty four percent of students are on first degree programmes, 10.2% on diploma programmes and 2.8% on masters' programmes. At the same time, two disciplinary areas, Education and Social Science, Business and Law account for 66% of students in the system¹.
- Fifty three percent of students are female; this shows a substantial increase from a decade ago, when the female portion of the student body was only 43%. In contrast only 16% of academic teaching staff and 22% of all staff are female.
- Overall, 46% of staff are full-time, 47% part-time, with the employment status of 7% being unknown. If the Open University is excluded, the figures become 61%, 29% and 10%. The ratios vary significantly over the different types of institution. The ratios of full time to part-time and unknown in universities are 1 to 0.83; in the Open University 1 to 6.04; at university colleges 1 to 0.15 and at the community colleges 1 to 1.51.
- In the universities 47% of academic teaching staff hold PhDs while the figures in the other types of institutions are understandably much lower. Still, in the community colleges 8% of the academic teaching staff holds a doctoral degree. A higher proportion of PhDs are found amongst the full-time staff; in the Open University for example, 44% of the full-time staff are PhD holders.
- An attempt has been made to calculate Student/Staff ratios (SSRs) for the different types of institutions, using the admittedly arbitrary assumption

¹ Perhaps some thought should be given to breaking down these classifications, in particular Social Science, Business and Law

that a part-time teacher is equivalent to 0.25 of a full-time teacher; the calculation also ignores the 683 teaching assistants. On this basis the SSRs are universities 44 to 1; the Open University 90 to 1; university colleges 16 to 1 and community colleges 30 to 1. It should be noted that the Ministry's statistics do not differentiate between full and part-time students, but it is likely that the Open University has a higher proportion of part time students, which would explain its high figure.

The above shows a wide diversity among TEIs, which makes it necessary to develop flexible and open schemes for quality assurance and strategic planning. This diversity should also be taken into account in the more qualitative analysis that follows, which focuses mostly on the self assessment and strategic planning experience within Palestinian TEIs.

B. THE FRAME OF REFERENCE FOR THE GUIDELINES

The Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MoEHE) is currently carrying out a Tertiary Education Project (TEP). The project "aims at:

- i. improving the policy making environment for tertiary education management, governance and quality assurance
- ii. increase internal and external efficiency of tertiary education institutions (TEIs) as a first step towards achieving sustainability; and
- iii. create incentives and provide the basis for improvements in quality, relevance and equity of tertiary education institutions in order to meet the socio economic needs of the Palestinian population."

Tertiary education in Palestine provides clear evidence of the resilience of the country in the face of extraordinary challenges: the hardships imposed by occupation, the limited and uncertain resources available for tertiary education, the isolation imposed by travel limitations into and out of the country, the difficulty to find and retain qualified teaching staff, could make it impossible to perform in anything resembling normal operation of a tertiary education institution. But it is important and fair to recognize that, in spite of the strong political and economic constraints that they face, Palestinian TEIs have found their own ways to develop and to address these difficult issues.

At the same time, the MoEHE has set policies for increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of TEIs, and is developing a number of strategies intended to support their ability to implement them. These have to do with self assessment as an initial stage of quality assurance, and with the development of strategic planning as a tool that enables TEIs to work towards their goals selecting the most appropriate strategies.

These guidelines have been developed under Component 2 of this project, in order to support universities and colleges to enhance their capacity for planning and quality assurance. They intend to provide TEIs with tools that are appropriate to Palestine and at the same time have international validity.

They have been developed within this double framework: the main elements associated in the international higher education community with self assessment and strategic planning, and some features of the Palestinian tertiary education institutions that became apparent during the information gathering stage of this project. They may help TEIs identify the external and internal restrictions they face, recognize the ways in which they affect the achievement of their objectives and deal with them through the well recognized mechanisms of self assessment and strategic planning.

Palestinian tertiary education has significant and particular features. It also shares many of the characteristics of tertiary education systems around the world which are facing increased demand from students with limited resources. These guidelines focus on the experience within Palestinian TEIs on self assessment and planning, and take into account the current developments as well as the main restrictions present for these processes. Therefore, the main elements related to the Palestinian frame of reference for the guidelines are the following:

1. The basic framework for self assessment and strategic planning is the statement an institution makes on its mission and purposes. In the case of Palestine, institutions must deal with a wide range of demands, not all of them equally clear and explicit. Almost all the institutions the team visited pointed out that their main purpose was to develop close links with the local environment, and to provide programmes that would enable their graduates to enter the labour market, both in the country and abroad. At the same time, informal conversations clearly emphasize a strong commitment to the development of a shared set of values, and the development of a national identity, but this is seldom found in explicit statements or as a formal requirement in the development of programmes of study. Palestinian TEI could also be implicitly expected to keep young people busy for longer periods of time, in a context where external opportunities for work or personal development are severely limited, and this could have an impact in the incentives for a more efficient teaching – learning process. These are questions that all TEIs should ask themselves at least every once in a while, but which do not seem to appear in their present agenda. It is expected that the application of self assessment processes, in the way they are being presented in these guidelines, will provide institutions with an

opportunity for reflecting on their actual purposes and organize their strategic plans accordingly.

2. As was stated in the Introduction, enrolment in tertiary education has been growing steadily in Palestine during the last decade. As a result of the restrictions to mobility, the high levels of unemployment and in general the conditions of occupation, tertiary education has very low opportunity costs for prospective students, and therefore, it is likely that demand for TE will not decline in the near future. At the same time, the institutions' reliance on income from tuition (and in all but one cases tuition covers over 60% of the total budget) makes increasing enrolment a particularly attractive option for many TEIs.
3. Several of the institutions visited mentioned this as one of their concerns, since they see increased enrolment as a threat to quality. Increasing enrolment may be achieved either by accepting more students in the same programmes, or by opening new programmes in different areas. Both pose different challenges to the quality of teaching, and learning about the requirements involved in either approach would certainly help institutions to make better decisions in this respect. The provision of accurate and timely information would support quality decisions, and the guidelines make suggestions and recommendations in that direction.
4. Most Palestinian tertiary education institutions have carried out self assessment exercises, mostly at the programme level. However, this experience is limited and it does not always seem to have provided the institutions with the opportunity thoroughly to analyze their work.
5. The development of a more thorough understanding of the meaning of self assessment and of the role it can play in improving the quality of institutional processes is one of the main objectives of the guidelines.
6. All institutions have established quality units², with a wide range of remits and styles of operation. In some cases they provide useful and significant support to quality assurance activities, but in others, they seem to exist solely as a response to an external requirement. These guidelines are based on the premise that these units operate as the centre of expertise for quality assurance, assist faculties and other units in their own self assessment, coordinate activities within the institution and act as a link with outside bodies. They should not be seen as the unit within the institution that is responsible for quality. The principle underlying the concept of a quality culture – which many Palestinian HEIs are striving to achieve – is that all

² As is explained further on, these units should really be called *quality assurance units*, since their role should focus on supporting quality assurance efforts, and making clear that quality is the responsibility of all members of an institution, and not of a specific unit within them.

members of the institution have a shared responsibility for quality. The promotion of such an approach should be one of the main tasks of the Quality Assurance Units (which seems a better name for them), and these guidelines are intended to support their work in that direction.

7. A significant aspect of quality assurance is the consideration of the needs of external stakeholders. Many Palestinian TEIs are interested in increasing the involvement of employers, professional associations, governmental bodies, business and other private bodies in their operation. The guidelines pay attention to this issue, as well as to the need for TEIs to keep track of their graduates, and get their feed back. The extent to which they find employment, especially in jobs that are relevant to their field of study, is an important performance indicator³ and it provides information on the need to maintain, modify or even close some programmes. Their satisfaction with the education received, and the relevance of the studies to the needs of the labour market also provides important information that should be taken into account when assessing and planning for academic quality. They can also provide important insights on continuing education needs, thus helping the institution in its future planning efforts.
8. Most HEIs in the country have also engaged in some form of planning, in spite of significant constraints that make it difficult to develop good practices for long term planning:
 - One of the main constraints has to do with the instability of funding. Most institutions depend on the tuition paid by students and on the contribution of the MOEHE to cover their operations. But the economic and political situation has made it impossible to raise tuition fees, or even to keep up with inflation; on the other hand, the Ministry is not always able to distribute the funds that have been committed. This makes institutions highly dependent on other sources of income. Some of them can obtain resources from community services, but for many the only other source is donations from different individuals or organizations. This, of course, restricts their ability for long term (and sometimes, even short term) planning; the guidelines recognize this and try to suggest ways in which some restrictions may be by-passed or addressed.

³ Employment rates, types of employment, salary levels and other significant indicators should, however, be taken and analysed with care. Especially in social contexts with significant economic and political constraints, as is the case in Palestine, the failure to find a job may not say much about the quality of the university or the college, but rather about the lack of work opportunities available in the labour market. But even in these conditions, graduates of a quality TEI should find themselves in a better position than people who did not benefit from such an education; in this respect, the opinions of graduates and their situation provides always important information, although its analysis is neither simple nor linear.

However, it should also be recognized that there are many issues connected with long term planning which do not necessarily depend on the availability of substantial resources, such as curricular development, new teaching methodologies, changes in organizational structure. The guidelines clearly distinguish between resource based strategies (highly dependent on financial and other resources) and process based strategies (which can also be called the intelligent strategies, since they focus more on doing things better, or differently, sometimes with the same level of expenditure), which seem more relevant for the Palestinian higher education institutions.

- It is also difficult for some institutions to deal with planning because of the lack of experienced staff. Planning units are usually understaffed, and while the people may be highly competent, they do not have the necessary support. The fact that Component 2 of the Tertiary Education Project dedicates funding especially for capacity building within HEIs takes this into account; the guidelines offer advice on how to apply for these resources, and put them to good use. In any case, this will clearly not completely solve this problem. It may be necessary either for the MoEHE, for AQAC, or for some other organization, to develop a significant capacity for providing continuing support and advice to TEIs. One way of doing this is to organize the institutions themselves in some sort of support group, which can respond to specific requests and demands from institutions as they engage in strategic planning.
 - The economic and political situation has put many institutions in a reactive mode. The guidelines are intended to help them move to a proactive mode, which is something HEIs are anxious to do, even though they are aware that external conditions will not alter significantly in the short or possibly the medium term.
9. The guidelines also intend to show the most useful information that should be gathered and used for self assessment and strategic planning. They also make clear the need to have data that can be co-ordinated in such a way as to enable relationships to be established between, for example, entry qualifications and graduation rates, for data-mining to be carried out and for the effective processing of information to support management decision making.

At the same time, the need to develop Management Information Systems is clear, and the project may provide significant support in this respect through the development of projects, either by individual institutions or through joint applications.

10. Finally, even though HEIs have carried out both quality assessment and planning exercises, there has been little articulation between the two. The guidelines refer explicitly to the links between these two processes, and thus can help establish the organizational mechanisms that would help institutions achieve their goals.

In summary, the guidelines are intended to help develop an institutional capacity for self assessment and planning that goes beyond short term, or limited training. They should be used as a tool to identify the institutional mechanisms needed to plan, assess quality and increase internal and external effectiveness; the provision of specific funds through competitive projects will also be helpful. However, as mentioned before, neither will be sufficient to achieve this goal. Both guidelines and projects need to be complemented with a strong support from the MoEHE and AQAC, either directly or through the promotion of a support group made up of TEI experts. In fact, most institutional leaders in HEIs are competent and able to carry out these tasks effectively. They have a good knowledge of their institutions and the system, and a clear idea of their needs. Some of them could become the nodes of a supportive network which could provide on-going assistance to all HEIs, in the fields of self assessment and strategic planning.

C. THE CONTENTS OF THE GUIDELINES

As stated above, the Introduction provides a frame of reference for reading and understanding the guidelines. The contents of the different chapters are described below.

Chapter II provides a conceptual framework both for self assessment and strategic planning: how self assessment is understood in a wider context of quality assurance and the conditions that must be met in order effectively to carry out a self assessment process. A similar approach is taken in relation to strategic planning: what it is, how it connects to the Mission and Vision of an institution and a description of the general issues that must be taken into account when carrying out a strategic planning exercise. Finally, this chapter provides an overview of the ways in which these two processes interact and how they feed on each other.

Chapter III is dedicated to a short discussion on the definition of quality and the need for it to take into account the current diversity of higher education systems. It then proposes a set of quality criteria, which summarize the international consensus on the issues that must be taken into account when reviewing a HEI and which are believed to be applicable to the Palestinian TEIs.

Chapter IV focuses on self assessment. It looks at it from the point of view of the development of a quality culture; it describes the components for an effective self assessment process and provides some guidelines on the conduct of a self assessment exercise. Having said that, it is important to remember that this is not a self assessment handbook or manual; such a handbook should go into further detail on the different ways of dealing with the components of self assessment, and should be closely linked with the requirements of the external quality assurance body.

Chapter V deals with the strategic planning process. It analyses its components, the development of different scenarios and the means of constructing effective strategies. It shows how different quality factors can be related to each other, and the conclusions that can be drawn from the identification of these relations. It also discusses how to make decisions based on the information gathered in this process.

Finally, Chapter VI provides information on the preparation of funding proposals under the conditions stated in Component 2 of the Tertiary Education Project.

STATISTICAL ANNEX TO THE INTRODUCTION

Table 1: Tertiary institutions in Palestine

Number of TEIs	Total	WB	Gaza	Public	Government	Private	UNRWA
Universities	11	8	3	8	2	1	
University Colleges	13	10	1	9		2	2
Community Colleges	19	15	4	9	1	8	1
Total	43	33	8	26	3	11	3

Table 2: Characteristics of universities

Number of students	Number of universities	Number of U with research as part of mission	Number of U with graduate programmes
Less than 4,000	3	1	1
4,000 – 7,000	2	1	2
9,000 – 12,000	3	2	1
15,000 – 20,000	2	1	1
Over 20,000	1	-	-
Total	11	5	5

Source: Team's Interviews with TEIs

Table 3: Numbers of students by level of course and type of institution, 2005/06

	Total	%	Ph D	Masters	Higher Diploma	Bachelor	Diploma	Teacher Qual	Prof Dipl	Other
Universities	79,877	53.2	3	4,230	130	74,905	51	473	20	65
Open University	52,914	35.2				52,685		222		
University Colleges	6,347	4.2				2,218	4,129			
Community Colleges	11,136	7.4					11,136			
Total	150,274	100	3	4,230	130	129,808	15,316	695	20	65

Table 4: Students by gender – percentage of females, 2005/06

	Total	Ph D	Masters	Higher Diploma	Bachelor	Diploma	Teacher Qual	Prof Dipl	Other
Universities	54	0	39	48	54	49	73	35	57
Open University	53				53		53		
University Colleges	57				59	56			
Community Colleges	43					43			
Total	53	0	39	48	54	46	57	35	57

Table 5: Distribution of students at HEIs by Main Programme, 2005/06

	Totals	%	Trad Univ	Open Univ	Univ Coll	Com Coll
Education	52,653	35	22,296	27,824	1,315	1,218
Humanities and Arts	14,721	10	13,601		608	512
Soc Science, Business and Law	46,951	31	18,991	21,706	1,933	4,321
Science	15,226	10	9,643	3,129	564	1,890
Eng, manuf. and construction	9,765	6	8,297		608	860
Agriculture and Vet Med.	869	1	621	248		
Health and Welfare	9,574	6	6,150		1,265	2,159
Services and others	515	0	278	7	54	176
	150,274	100	79,877	52,914	6,347	11,136

Table 6: Distribution of graduates at HEIs by main programme, 2005/06

	Totals	%	% female	Trad univ	Open univ	Univ coll	Com coll
Education	4,288	25	73	2,323	1,592	254	119
Humanities and Arts	1,817	11	69	1,436		205	176
Soc Science, Business and Law	5,815	34	47	2,953	1,892	402	568
Science	2,275	13	52	1,498	257	145	375
Eng, manuf. and Construction	1,401	8	33	1,009		131	261
Agriculture and Vet Med	61	0	36	51	10		
Health and Welfare	1,582	9	61	762		359	461
Services and others	62	0	69	42		16	4
	17,301	100	56	10,074	3,751	1,512	1,964

Table 7: Distribution of employees by grade, 2005/06

	Total	Acad teaching	Acad research	Acad admin	Teach asst	Professional and tech	Others
Universities	6,501	2,519	11	308	579	705	2,379
Open University	2,481	1,641		52		77	711
University Colleges	1,089	450		32	45	131	431
Community Colleges	1,116	667		36	59	89	265
	11,187	5,277	11	428	683	1,002	3,786

Table 8: HEI employees, Gender balance, percent female, 2005/07

Academic Teaching	16
Academic Research	45
Academic Administration	9
Teaching Assistants	34
Professional and Technical	20
Others	30
Total	22

Table 9: Academic Staff (academic teaching) by qualification and employment status (full or part-time)

	Employment status				Qualifications (percentages)			
	Total	FT	PT	Unknown	PhD	Masters	Bachelors	Others
Universities	2,519	1,562	595	362	47	46	4	3
Open University	1,641	233	1,408		23	76	2	
University Colleges	450	392	58		14	44	39	4
Community Colleges	667	266	401		8	35	52	3
	5,277	2,453	2,462	362				

Table 10: Estimated student/staff ratio*

Universities	44
Open University	90
University Colleges	16
Community Colleges	30

* The SSR is based on the assumption that 1 part-time staff = 0.25 fte and ignoring teaching assistants

II. FRAMEWORK

This section provides a general conceptual discussion of self assessment and strategic planning, and of the relations between them.

A. SELF ASSESSMENT

1. Assessment within a broader context

In order effectively to understand and apply the concept of self assessment it is important to put it within the context of a broader framework of regulation and quality assurance.

Quality assurance, following the UNESCO definition, refers to an ‘ongoing, continuous process of evaluating the quality of a higher education system, institutions or programmes. As a regulatory mechanism, quality assurance focuses on both accountability and improvement, providing information and judgments (not ranking) through an agreed upon and consistent process and well established criteria’ (Vlăsceanu et al., 2004, pp. 48–49, quoted in the INQAAHE glossary).

One of the necessary elements of quality assurance is evaluation⁴, or assessment, which, also according to UNESCO, refers to “the process of the systematic gathering, quantifying, and using of information in view of judging the instructional effectiveness and the curricular adequacy of a higher education institution as a whole (institutional assessment) or of its educational programmes (programme assessment). It implies the evaluation of the core activities of the higher education institution (quantitative and qualitative evidence of educational activities and research outcomes)” (ibid).

A quality assurance process, therefore, combines the following elements:

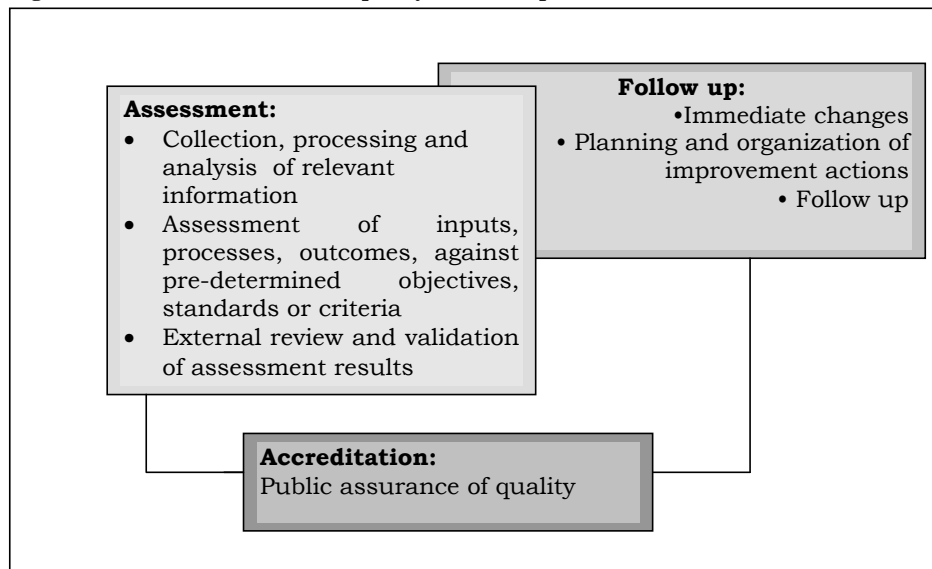
- Assessment, which involves the gathering and analysis of relevant information and its comparison with a previously determined standard or criterion, in order to make a decision, be it a grade, or the initiation of some action. Assessment usually includes self assessment and an external assessment, carried out either by an external agency, or organized by the same institution, as an external component of the internal process.
- Follow up, or management of change, which means acting on the outcomes of the assessment exercise, making immediate changes when possible, planning for more comprehensive or more complex changes and following up on the actions determined as a consequence of the assessment exercise.

⁴ Evaluation and assessment will be used as synonyms in this text.

These two elements are essential, and may be carried out entirely within a higher education institution, without any involvement of an external agency. But in some systems, a third element is added:

Accreditation, or public assurance of quality, understood as the certification that an institution or programme actually meets the quality standard the system has developed.

Figure 1. The three elements of a quality assurance process



As mentioned above, assessment may be either the responsibility of the actors directly involved in the programme or institution, which is called self assessment, or carried out by external evaluators, who judge whether a higher education institution or programme meets the quality standards that have been developed for the process.

Both external and self assessment may be effective tools for the improvement of an institution or programme, but if taken individually, they have some limitations that must be pointed out.

Self assessment implies identifying and understanding one's own strengths and weaknesses, and thus, taking responsibility for them. As such, it not only helps understand the conditions under which an institution or programme operates; it also generates a strong commitment with its outcomes and with the development of a useful improvement plan. At the same time, it runs the risk of being complacent and explaining away many of the identified weaknesses.

External assessment, on the other hand, may focus too strongly on externally defined standards or criteria, and evolve towards a 'culture of compliance', where changes are made not because of an internal commitment, but rather because they are imposed from without.

Thus, quality assurance processes normally combine both: self assessment as the main component, ensuring that the actual stakeholders really learn about the way in which their programme or institution is operating, and organize themselves for improvement, complemented by an external assessment whose main focus is the validation of the outcomes of the previous process.

It is important not to confuse self assessment with internal assessment. An institution may decide to evaluate its programs, and to appoint a committee of academics to do so. It is certainly an internal assessment process, since all those involved belong to the same institution. But, from the point of view of a specific programme, it cannot be considered self assessment, since those carrying out the evaluation are not the same people involved in the operation of the programme⁵. Thus, all self assessment is internal, but not all internal assessment processes constitute self assessments.

2. The self assessment process

Self assessment should be part of a permanent, cyclical process leading to the provision of a sound basis for decision making. In order to be effective, some conditions must be present:

- Most stakeholders must have a clear understanding of the process, its scope and its limitations. It is a useful tool to understand the way an institution or programme operates, to learn about its strengths and weaknesses, to yield a basis for informed decision making, or to develop improvement plans. It is not a mechanism for rationalization of human or material resources, curricular homogenisation, or the evaluation of individual staff members.
- Internal motivation. In many cases, self assessment is undertaken because the leaders of an institution, or an external agency, demand it. There are many external valid reasons to do so, but in any case, it is necessary to translate them into significant internal motivation. Until it has become embedded into the normal operations of the institution, self assessment means hard work during an extended period of time. If it is not considered useful and worthwhile for the academic and administrative staff involved, it will not be effective.

⁵ An interesting comment from a Dean who had gone through such a process was the following: "I just had my faculty *self assessed!*" He did not feel bound to accept the outcomes of the process, since he and his colleagues had not been actively involved in the identification of strengths and weaknesses, or in the development of an improvement plan.

- Ability to accept an external review and commitment with the outcomes of the process. Self assessment, as mentioned earlier, has its limitations. An external viewpoint is always an important component, but the involved stakeholders must be willing to share their experience and allow an external team to look into the process and validate its outcomes.
- Explicit and authentic commitment and support from institutional leaders. Self assessment requires strong institutional support, because it may compete with other functions or activities within a higher education institution; it also requires financial and academic support, plus an institutional commitment to the improvement actions resulting from the self assessment process.
- Resourcing: the self assessment process demands permanent dedication from some academic or administrative staff members, and will involve the rest of the staff on a less permanent basis. Provisions must be made to ensure time, financial and other resources.

Other conditions include the need for a coordinator and a team responsible for carrying out the main actions associated with self assessment (gathering and analysing information, preparing progress reports, disseminating preliminary outcomes, organising discussion groups); information must be made available, either through the selection of available information or through the collection and processing of new, relevant data. In many cases, self assessment brings as a special bonus the organization of an institutional information system.

Finally, it is important to set as one of the main goals of the self assessment exercise the definition of concrete improvement actions. It is useless to strive to identify strengths and weaknesses if they are not translated into an effective action plan. Many self assessment processes end up with a long shopping list of things to do, which exceeds the capacity of most units. The ability to reach a shared consensus on the priorities to be addressed is fundamental for real improvement to be achieved.

Self Assessment in Palestinian TEIs

Most institutions have experience with self assessment, either as a result of taking part in a UNDP funded project with other Arab universities, which ended with an external assessment carried out by the QAA of the UK, or as part of the work with AQAC. However, this experience is limited and it does not always seem to have provided the institutions with the opportunity to analyze their work in support of strategic decision making. In many cases, TEIs take the questions provided by AQAC as a questionnaire to be answered, without undergoing a more substantive analysis or providing evidence of their strengths or weaknesses.

Quality Assurance Units have recently been established in most of the Palestinian TEIs to be responsible for either facilitating quality improvements or, in some cases, undertaking quality improvements within their respective institutions. Despite the establishment of these units, there seems to be no formalized system of involvement of the various groups of stakeholders, including the students, recent graduates and employers in a comprehensive process of evaluation and improvement planning.

B. STRATEGIC PLANNING

1. Introduction

Higher education institutions are presently exposed to strong pressures and demands coming from the local and global context. Keeping up in this extremely dynamic environment requires careful planning, strategies and actions which have to be achieved over long periods and/or large investments.

The role of education institutions is mainly determined by the nature of its programs, the target population, its community services and research activities.

Substantial long term changes may be associated with size or quality issues associated with these activities:

- Changes in quality of the education offered in current programs
- Changes in student population (size or nature)
- New programs offered
- Commitment to community services
- Commitment to research activities.

Mission and Vision can be defined in several ways. For the purpose these guidelines Mission and Vision will be understood as follows: o

- The Mission and Purpose of the institution expresses the nature of the education offered as well as the nature and purpose of its community services or research activities. In a sense the Mission determines the domain of interests of an institution on a conceptual level.

There are several ways in which the purposes proposed in the Mission can be fulfilled, depending on the development conditions of the institution, context conditions and present and future opportunities and trends:

- The Vision displays in a concrete way how the institution should “look like” in the middle or long term future: Its student population, the offered programs, community service and research activities and organization (centers or programs within schools or faculties), academic staff and

infrastructure requirements. The Vision is a concretion of the Mission for specific conditions. One same Mission can be fulfilled by several middle term and long term Visions. The vision can be visualized as the “backbone” for a specific Strategic Plan.

The Vision is an essential input for Strategic Planning⁶; it synthesizes the long term aspirations of an institution and as such it should be appealing to all members of the academic community. But the Vision is a very general picture which can only turn into a feasible reality if detailed planning of all systems that interact are analyzed within the context of the proposed Vision. Such planning is not a simple operational planning. Normally the proposed Vision deals with substantial changes in the institution; therefore, repeating every day actions will not be sufficient for achieving the Vision.

A detailed, consistent description of all systems associated with the proposed Vision will be called the Final State of the Strategic Planning process. The detailed description of the current systems will constitute the Initial State or Baseline. Both states should take into account the main components or institutional subsystems: Academic Processes (which include academic programmes, community services and research activities), Students, Academic Staff, Infrastructure, Technological and Information Resources, Financial Resources and Environment including employers (local, regional and global).

Strategic Planning can thus be summarized as the process by which the different governance authorities and relevant members of the academic community study, design and display a consistent and feasible route that conducts the institution from its *Initial State* (present situation) to a *Final State* (which represents the Vision in a detailed and structured way). Final states have to be consistent with the Mission and Purpose of the institution, although Mission changes can be considered under very special circumstances related to overall changes in the context and general environment in which the HEI operates.

The final state to which the Strategic Plan aims is characterized by a set of general goals associated to the main systems which constitute the institution.

The routes which lead to the different goals will be called the strategies in this document. Strategies unfold in various actions which address very specific issues, while strategies are comprehensive in nature.

⁶ In some literature, the Vision refers mostly to the ‘dream’ that informs the Mission. In this sense, it shows the ideal state for the fully developed institution. In this document, as stated above, the concept of vision is used in a middle or short term perspective, translating this ideal state to a very concrete definition of the main aspects related to institutional development.

Many Palestinian TEIs have been involved in some strategic planning exercises. In a number of cases, they have adopted a “bottom-up” approach to the development of strategic plans. While this is to be commended, it is necessary to introduce some safeguards in order to avoid a result more closely resembling a ‘wish list’ than a realistic plan. The more important safeguards are:

- That the departmental inputs are governed by the institution’s mission and are related to a number of themes that have been agreed at institutional level
- That the institution has both the will and capacity to make an assessment of the extent to which the aggregate of the departmental inputs represents a realistic and appropriate plan and to propose to the Board of Trustees (or its equivalent) the changes that are necessary to arrive at a realistic plan that is consistent with the institution’s aims and priorities.

Working in a combined top down and bottom up approach will increase the commitment of the academic community with the resulting plan, and at the same time, help institutions develop relevant and viable plans.

Vision and SWOT analysis: There is no unique route to go from the initial (or present) state to the final state (in accordance with the Vision). Several alternative routes are possible, and the Strategic Planning process should include an analysis of these alternative routes, taking into account the limitations and opportunities posed by internal conditions, as well as the external context. A set of strategies and actions depict one specific route which the directives and academic community consider adequate to fulfil the proposed goals. SWOT (Strength, Weakness, Opportunities, Threats) analysis is an important tool which should be used when considering diverse routes which satisfy the expectations proposed in the Vision.

The elements involved in SWOT analysis can be defined in various ways. For these guidelines we propose the following definitions which are consistent with the rationale of Strategic Planning presented in II.B.3. Given a system under study:

- *Strengths and weakness* have to do with the *characterization of the present state of the system* (associated processes, resources, stakeholders). Strengths and weaknesses act as *qualifiers* of the various system components.
- *Opportunities and threats* are *conditions which stimulate or restrict* strategies and actions associated to strategic planning purposes.

When a particular system is considered (i.e. a specific TEI) most probably it will be immersed in a larger system (i.e. the country’s socio-economical environment). This larger system can also be object of a SWOT analysis (for a given set of goals and purposes). Generally the larger system’s strengths and weaknesses act as conditions which limit or stimulate the operation of the smaller system; i.e. they somehow determine part of the opportunities and threats of the smaller system. In addition, there can be very specific

opportunities and threats for the smaller system, which are relatively independent of the general context (larger system) and which still have to be considered.

SWOT analysis can be conveniently split into *context* and *institutional* components. For the purpose of these guidelines, *context (or generic) SWOT* analysis studies the local (and global if relevant) economical, political and social conditions in which the Palestinian education has to operate, and it may be considered fairly common to all Palestinian institutions. *Institutional SWOT* analysis considers the strengths, weakness, opportunities and threats associated to a single institution. This component will be considered in depth in chapter V. Opportunities and threats for a specific institution are partially determined by the present socio economic environment, previously studied in a general context SWOT analysis; but still very particular restrictions and opportunities may be present for a specific institution which cannot be detected in a context SWOT analysis. These conditions have to be fully studied in the institutional SWOT.

In these guidelines it is suggested to keep the distinction between context and institutional SWOT analysis in order to distinguish clearly what actions can be conducted at an institutional level, and which require a more general perspective and line of action (i.e. governmental). For the case of Palestinian education, institutional operation is particularly sensitive to very complex local context conditions.

Although some overlapping will always exist between different levels of analysis, the distinction may be helpful in several stages of Strategic Planning.

The context component of SWOT analysis gives the correct framework in which the whole Strategic Planning in a particular institution is conducted. Present political, social and economical conditions in Palestine will come forth as strong limitations for long term planning Tertiary Education Institutions. Such limitations should be properly characterized through the context SWOT analysis.

The following elements can be present as *contextual weaknesses* in SWOT analysis and should be carefully considered as premises of the planning process:

- Uncertainty and instability of financial resources in Palestinian economy which finally affect the operation of TEI
- Restrictions to mobility of students and academic staff within the Palestinian territory, which strongly limit scale economies and efficient use of resources within the education system.
- Difficulties to attract or retain properly qualified academic staff for Palestinian TEI

- General qualifications of secondary school leavers

On the other hand, for the Palestinian education as a whole the following important *strengths* can be pointed out:

- Well established academic community and academic programs
- Positive attitude and commitment of academic community and governmental agencies to establish quality assessment and strategic planning processes
- Continued increasing demand for tertiary education

The above factors constitute a starting point for a context and institutional analysis, all of which should be characterized qualitatively and quantitatively when possible.

2. General Aspects concerning the Mission and Purpose of Higher Education Institutions

Although the Mission should reflect the “deep nature and purpose” of the institution, such statements tend to be so generic and abstract, that they fail to define clearly the role and special features of a particular institution. This section focuses on some special concepts related to the Mission and Vision that should be considered in the Strategic Planning process. Such considerations can help make the Mission an effective tool rather than a mere rhetoric statement.

Institutions of higher education can be boldly characterized in terms of its outputs, which for this document correspond to what we have called the academic processes: Academic programs (undergraduate and graduate); community services and specialized consultancy; research activities.

All these academic processes are intended to satisfy social and economical demands or to stimulate a new demand in fields considered strategic within the evolution of the economical, social and cultural context in which the institution operates.

Inputs correspond mainly to the student population in the case of academic programs, and research and/or consultancy demand coming from the institutional or external context, for academic processes related to research and community services. This simple consideration of the nature of inputs and outputs delimits the Mission and Vision of an HEI.

The following sections describe various concepts which should be clear when the Mission and Vision are considered for Strategic Planning purposes. They are clearly related to the analysis and understanding of inputs and outputs. Some are related to what has to be done and others have to do with how things are done. What has to be done, and how things are done are

equally determinant of the quality, effectiveness and efficiency of education programs and processes.

i. Models of tertiary education institutions

TEIs can be classified according to the spectrum of academic processes which are considered in the mission. Many such classifications exist, with different levels of detail. For the purposes of this document it is sufficient to make the following distinctions:

- a. Technical or Community Colleges which offer 1 or 2 year programs;
- b. Institutions offering undergraduate/professional programmes.
- c. Comprehensive universities which offer undergraduate and graduate programs and may carry out some research activities.
- d. Research universities which offer undergraduate and graduate programmes but in which a high production in research is expected from academic staff staff.

This classification based on the spectrum of academic processes should not be understood as a progression in relevance or quality of the institution. Each category may be relevant for a given context, and each category has its own quality criteria. It is commonly misunderstood in the Higher Education community that moving along this spectrum necessarily represents an increase in the quality of an institution. In some cases such a move is natural for the institution; in other cases the consequence of forcing a move may result in transforming a good institution in one category into a deficient one in another category.

The Palestinian higher education system is composed of the first three categories: community colleges, university colleges and universities, which focus on professional or undergraduate programmes and in some cases are developing as comprehensive institutions, offering also master's programmes and establishing some research units.

A *mission* statement should explicitly state what the institution intends to do, and point out the type of programmes it intends to offer, the target student population, its links with the professional, labour or disciplinary communities; in so doing, it can focus the institution within one of these categories. On the other hand, *vision* related studies may consider in their middle or long term plans the migration of the institution within this spectrum, which in a sense implies a change in the mission. Both the decision to keep the operation within a given category and the decision to move to a different one, have a deep impact in planning processes.

ii. The nature of education

Institutions delivering equivalent degrees can have very different approaches to the education process. Here we will briefly describe some of the most relevant variants of what we could call the nature of the education delivered.

- HEIs are extremely important and effective in transmitting values and principles for a given society. In Palestine, especially, they are a significant part of the commitment to the national pride, in the context of a Palestinian identity. The Mission and purpose of the institution should be explicit in stating the values and principles that guide its actions, since they will determine the institutional priorities. Thus, they become essential when defining the Vision and the approach to many of the strategic decisions to be made, and will definitely affect long term planning processes.
- Undergraduate programmes may focus primarily on the development of general, transferable skills, or on the training for a specific profession. In Palestine, most institutions have a clear professional orientation, but at the same time, the uncertainties of the labour market make it necessary to provide a sound general basis that will help graduates adapt to the changing conditions they will encounter after leaving their colleges or universities. The demands of both general education and professional training are important aspects that must be taken into consideration in the definition of institutional priorities, as they will affect curricular design, demands on academic staff time and skills, teaching methodologies and other significant aspects of planning.
- Depending on education traditions, general conditions of access to higher education, and the demands of the labour market, undergraduate professional programs may be designed as terminal degrees or they may be considered a first stage in a progression with increasing demand for postgraduate degrees or other continuing education alternatives. Distinctions in this sense determine the length of undergraduate programs, the level of flexibility and electivity of curricula and the possibility of higher requirements in general education. Focus and scope are desired values of higher education. There is no unique way of determining the adequate proportion of such characteristics. This is part of what the nature of education considerations have to solve for each institution consistent with its Mission statement.
- Institutions can address their efforts to different types of students. Some will attract an intellectual elite. Others will work with a wide and heterogeneous range of students, with different academic qualifications, motivations and needs. Still others will work with students who, in general, have low academic qualifications and poor entry skills. When the

student population is of a homogeneous high academic quality, their achievement is less sensitive to the quality and sophistication of teaching processes, and the conventional teaching process based exclusively in lecturing may be appropriate. As higher education widens its recruitment base, new strategies are required to increase the rate of success of less outstanding students.

The restrictions to student mobility evident in Palestine tend to bring together in most universities student groups with diverse qualifications, in spite of the restrictions linked to tawjihi scores. As in the discussion above related to the combination of the general and professional components of education, this means that a large amount of attention must be paid to curricular design and teaching methodologies, and that these requirements must be built in the planning of the teaching – learning process.

At the same time, community colleges work with students with consistently lower qualifications. They also have shorter programmes, and must adjust to stronger regulations coming from the MoEHE. It is necessary that these regulations are adapted to the actual conditions in which these institutions operate, in order to support their contribution to the national goal of increasing the knowledge base of Palestinian community college graduates⁷.

A large amount of education research in the last 20 years has been devoted to increase the effectiveness of learning processes in higher education. Constructivist theories of education from which many trends and techniques such as Problem Based Learning, Teaching for Understanding, Active Learning or Hands On Learning are derived, are important devices for building genuinely inclusive education institutions. Such methods and techniques require academic staff with new attitudes, competences and roles in education, which have to be considered thoroughly in long term planning.

A report from AQAC points out that the West Bank and Gaza have witnessed an increasing demand for tertiary education, which is expected to grow in the future. However, the evolution of quality indicators is of serious concern to university administrators and teaching staff. Approximately half of the teaching staff in the university hold a doctoral degree; books/students and journals/teacher ratio are decreasing. Research activity generally appears to be meager across the tertiary system, although there are marked differences between institutions on all of these indices. In the college (polytechnics and community college), the situation appears to be improving somewhat. There is a slight increase of full time faculty members, a decrease in the student/teacher ratio and an increase in the books/student ratio. Anyway, the student/teacher ratio is low, even by developing countries standards. But, just as at the university level, there is a high variance on all of these indices among different colleges.

⁷ For many community colleges, the operation of a National Council for Community Colleges directly addressing the quality of this level of teaching would be a significant step in the direction of helping them achieve their goals and provide a quality education to the students they have.

The variance on these indices and the fact that, to date, very few institutions have institutionalized systemic program evaluation and development procedures, reveals a need for monitoring and improving academic quality.

Source: www.aqac.mohe.gov.ps

The decision to focus on technical programs, on undergraduate/professional degrees, to offer both undergraduate and graduate programs, to develop a significant provision of continuing education opportunities or to devote part of the institution's resources to research means quite different demands in terms of the qualifications of the academic staff, the distribution of their time, the resources required and many other. Links with the productive sector, funding for research activities, demand for updated facilities and equipment, may imply considerable increment in operational costs, which in many cases will not be covered by tuition fees. Thus, they may require additional funding and involve the need to look for specific donors or other sources, which should be carefully analysed in the long term planning of an institution.

Educating students with a varied range of entry skills requires special efforts, attitudes and abilities of academic staff, not common in higher education traditions. Although modern trends in education such as active learning or problem based learning, rely heavily in increasing the engagement of students with their learning process, such engagement depends strongly on a higher effort of academic staff in developing teaching material, evaluation processes and other non conventional teaching activities. Perhaps conventional lecturing is the less expensive of all teaching process, but at the same time is the less inclusive of all practices. As expected, inclusive education costs more, but at same time is appropriate for larger portion of student population.

3. General Issues in Strategic Planning in HEI

Although Strategic Planning must be adjusted to the needs and characteristics of each institution, its main issues (for an education institution) can be classified as follows:

- Quality issues
- Growth issues (higher population for given programs)
- New programs
- Research and community service expectations

Coverage of education (population covered by education in a given level) and quality are the most important challenges for any education system, ranging from institution level to the governmental level. Coverage and quality issues can be understood as mutual restrictions: The most important limitation for growth is maintaining quality and/or the most important restriction for

achieving high quality standards is the size of population to which given education programs are provided.

This is a particularly sensitive issue in Palestine, since the heavy reliance on tuition fees for almost all TEIs gives them a strong incentive to increase enrolment in their current programmes or to open new programmes.

i. Components of strategic planning analysis :

A general approach to the main issues of strategic planning is that of considering the whole planning process as a general optimization problem: There is an objective function to be achieved; there are external and internal and restrictions (facts which cannot be (easily) affected); and there are system components which must be affected in order to achieve the objective functions. In the case of any education institution this optimization problem admits the following identifications:

- *Academic products* pursued by the institution (number of graduates in given programmes, research or community services expectations) and the quality of such academic products constitute the so called *objective function*.
- *Economic resources and economic, social and cultural context conditions* are the *restrictions* within which the objective function is pursued.
- *The variables of the optimization problem* are the so called **system components**: students profile, academic processes, academic staff and physical resources

Consequently Strategic Planning as proposed in this document should include the following components:

- Mission and Vision considerations as well as contextual SWOT analysis, already introduced in section 2 of this chapter.
- Developing a specific or institutional SWOT analysis. Such process will be considered in some detail in chapter V.
- Establishing *operational relations* between the *quality of current or new programmes* and each of the *system components* (How does each system component determine quality?). This is sometimes covered under institutional research processes, but it may also be the outcome of a self assessment exercise. This activity must take into consideration the general framework established by the contextual and institutional SWOT analyses.
- Establishing *institutional goals* which can be achieved through the strategies and *actions* affecting the system components in the direction of the expected goals. Given the multiple systems components which determine quality, a great variety of strategies and actions can be devised

for affecting such systems. Thus, strategic planning in general produces many paths for achieving the proposed goals.

- Establishing cost estimates and cost-benefit relations for proposed strategies and actions. It is in general possible to identify the nature of the costs that will be involved but it might not always be possible to make precise estimates of their magnitude. The identification and measurement of benefits is often a more complex and elusive task which, particularly in the case of the measurement of the benefits, will require judgement. Thus, the analyses of the relationship between costs and benefits is usually not a straight forward technical exercise but one which also include qualitative and conceptual elements.

All the mentioned steps require a considerable effort of the institution in the direction of understanding (or making evident) relations among many aspects that affect the operation of an education institution. In that sense strategic planning, as presented in this document, goes far beyond a Vision, or a collection of thoughtful and structured dreams. It means a consistent effort to bring together the different components of the educational process, in a comprehensive effort to achieve the expected results within a predetermined period of time, and within an agreed budget.

Sometimes it seems that it is not worth while to engage in these activities. Institutions develop and survive without self assessment or strategic planning. But in a context where higher education is moving to the centre of national development plans, and where knowledge is rapidly becoming one of the most significant resources for any society, the management of TEIs must also be professionalized and developed in a much more systematic and structured way. It may seem that self assessment and planning are costly, but the cost of not doing them, even if it is hidden, is much larger.

In chapter V the proposed rationale for developing SP will be considered. Strategies and actions coming out from SP will be classified into: *Resource dependent strategies*, *process dependent strategies* and combinations of the two. Resource dependent strategies usually require high investments, while process dependent strategies may only imply a moderate increase in operational costs. For the current conditions in Palestine, which imply severe economic, political and social limitations and instabilities it is especially important to keep in mind this classification of strategies when developing a SP. Relying primarily on resource dependent strategies may cause indefinite delays in the implementation of the proposed plans, until needed resources are found. Therefore, plans should be conceived on the basis of a multiple-route scheme. The whole purpose of this type of schemes is to provide enough

flexibility during the implementation process in consideration of the present limitations of TEIs in Palestine.

C. RELATIONS BETWEEN SELF ASSESSMENT AND STRATEGIC PLANNING

Most Palestinian HEIs have been involved both in self assessment exercises and strategic planning efforts. Unfortunately, there has been little articulation between the two, thus making less effective use of the outcomes of both processes.

As has been mentioned, planning requires a clear identification of three elements: an initial state, or baseline, showing the current state of the institution, programme or unit; a desired state, or Vision, showing in a clear and concrete way the state which is expected to achieve after a certain period of time; and the most appropriate strategies to travel from one to the other.

In all these elements, self assessment can make important contributions:

- It is the main way of determining the current state or baseline: A good assessment of the situation in which the institution is at a given moment of time provides information on the things that it is doing well, its main strengths, and also on the aspects that must be improved. It also makes it possible to identify the external factors that affect the operation of the institution: the contextual threats and opportunities that must be taken into account when making any future plans.
- It is also a good way of reaching a degree of consensus on the desired state. In Palestinian TEIs, as in many other higher education systems, institutions operate on a bottom-up approach, gathering opinions from the different units about their expected future state. In order to make effective use of this approach, it is necessary to ensure that these inputs are governed by the institution's mission and are related to a number of themes that have been agreed at institutional level. Then, it is important that the institution has the will and capacity to assess the extent to which the aggregate of the departmental inputs represents a realistic and appropriate plan. This is easier to do within the context of a self assessment process, where the institution's aims and priorities are discussed and taken into account.
- Finally, the definition of alternative strategies and the selection of the most appropriate ones can be enhanced by the thorough identification of the processes in place, the resources available and the threats and opportunities arising from the external context. These inputs are easily obtainable through well organized self assessment processes; self assessment also provides institutions with a well defined mechanism to review and iterate the different stages of strategic planning, as will be seen in the following chapters.

III. CRITERIA FOR INSTITUTIONAL SELF ASSESSMENT

Despite the particular difficulties faced by Palestinian TEIs, there seems no reason why the internationally accepted principle that it is the TEI that is ultimately responsible for the quality of its programmes should not also apply in the country. However, those responsibilities must be carried out in the light of national priorities established at the level of the Palestinian Authority and of the policies and procedures of the AQAC.

A. A DEFINITION OF QUALITY

A quality assurance system must include a set of criteria or standards which are the basis for self assessment and at the same time, provide the tools for strategic planning. These standards must be interpreted within the framework of a definition of quality.

In a context where, as in Palestine, there is a wide diversity of TEIs (in particular the different characteristics of the universities and community colleges) and these are subject also to a wide range of demands, one such definition may be too general to be of use. It is thus necessary to recognize that there may be many ways of achieving quality, and this should be taken into account when developing standards or quality criteria.

An operational approach to this problem, which makes it possible to adapt the definition of quality to different contexts while at the same time assuring that it will be treated rigorously, is to consider two basic elements in it:

- *External consistency*, that is, the adjustment of the goals, actions and resources of a given TEI or its programs to the requirements of the relevant reference group. This reference group may be formed essentially by the disciplinary, professional or labour community for a given program (e.g., engineering) or by the demands made in the national or international context to a specific type of TEI (e.g. what a university, or a community college should be and do). The consideration of national requirements is the first stage, but in the medium or longer terms, international requirements must also be taken into account.
- While external consistency is important in order to acquire social legitimacy and be able accurately to respond to the demands of different stakeholder groups, *internal consistency* is also essential. Internal consistency means the TEIs ability to respond to the guidelines, priorities and approaches that come from its own mission statement: the principles guiding its operation, the target population, the type of programmes it offers, the priorities set for teaching, research or services.

The prime responsibility for ensuring quality lies with the TEIs themselves. Thus, they are the ones to determine how internal and external consistency are to be defined and combined within a given institution. In order to do so they must take into account the regulatory framework within which they operate, the quality assurance requirements the national system has in place, the current institutional or disciplinary requirements and the needs from the social environment. At the same time, they must be able to translate these requirements and demands into their own specific mission and purposes, and in so doing, meet both internal and external quality requirements.

B. CRITERIA OR STANDARDS.

Most quality assurance systems focus on the same issues, even though they may be organized in different ways. The following section provides a summary of the main areas of concern which guide the assessment process. In the case of Palestine, AQAC has provided quality standards at the programme level; the quality standards or criteria for institutions should be developed at a later stage, probably with strong inputs from the institutions themselves. However, it is likely that they will address most of the issues highlighted here, even though they may decide on a different arrangement.

In all definitions of quality criteria, there is a short statement that describes what is expected of a tertiary education institution; in some cases, this is also followed by a more detailed description of the ways in which these expectations translate in terms of the actual operation of an institution, and/or examples of possible sources of information.

The following set of standards has been devised to be relevant to the circumstances faced by Palestinian TEIs. However, it should be noted that they are to a large measure consistent with those that have been developed internationally.

1. Mission, goals & objectives

- The institution has clearly stated mission and goals appropriate to its resources and the needs of its stakeholders.
- The mission and goals of the institution are accepted, widely understood and actively pursued by its stakeholders.
- The goals and objectives are periodically reviewed, and are communicated to all its stakeholders.

2. Organisation, Administration and Planning

i. Governance

- The organisation of the institution is such that powers and responsibilities are clearly assigned to designated bodies and individuals.
- The delegation of powers and responsibilities is such that it facilitates learning and teaching, scholarship and research (where appropriate) and fosters their improvement.
- The institution has a governing board actively fulfilling its responsibilities for policy and resource development.

ii. Academic Management

- The institution has means to insure that its educational programmes are consistent with its mission, educational policies and objectives.
- The institution has means to insure that its educational programs are conducted at levels of quality and rigor appropriate to the levels of degrees and other qualifications offered.
- The institution organizes its academic activities (calendar, timetable, etc) and support services so as to facilitate the attainment, by the students, of the objectives of their programs.
- The institution has means to insure that evaluation of student learning is rigorous and based upon clearly stated and distinguishable criteria.
- Academic records are accurate, secure and comprehensive.

iii. Planning:

- The institution makes use of appropriate methods to ensure its development within the framework of its mission.
- The institution is responsive to the need for institutional change appropriate to its goals and resources.
- The institution has ongoing institutional planning aimed at increasing the institution's effectiveness.
- Planning and evaluation are systematic and appropriate to the institution's circumstances.
- That the institution articulates its internal self-assessment with its strategic long-term planning.
- The institution has the ability to identify the major priorities and restrictions for its development and is responsive to the need for institutional change appropriate to its goals and resources.

iv. Communication:

- The institution demonstrates integrity and transparency in its communication practices.
- The institution ensures honesty and accuracy in published materials and in public and media relations.
- Institutional publications give clear guidance to students about admission and completion requirements for all programmes, the fee structure, financial aid and student support services.

3. Institutional scope

i. Educational programs

- The institution's educational programs are congruent with its mission and appropriate to tertiary education.
- The institution clearly defines, for each program, the educational objectives and means for achieving them and the admission requirements.

ii. Research (when applicable)

- The institution's research activities are congruent with its mission and suitable for an institution of higher education.
- The institution has policies that guide its selection of research activities, selection of research partners, and contracts that regulate collaborative work.
- That any research activity it undertakes serves to enhance teaching or community service.

iii. Community & professional service

- The institution's community and professional activities are congruent with its mission and appropriate for an institution of higher education.

4. Institutional resources & services

i. Human resources

- The institution has an adequate core of qualified academic and support staff to support its educational programs
- The institution provides a clear statement of academic and support staff responsibilities including curriculum development and student assessment.

ii. Student services

- The institution has clearly stated admissions and other student policies appropriate to its mission and goals.
- The institution has student services appropriate to the educational, personal and career needs of its students

iii. Educational resources

- The institution holds or otherwise provides access to sufficient information and learning resources to support its purposes and educational programs.

iv. Physical resources

- The institution maintains physical facilities that are appropriate for its mission and educational programs.

v. Financial resources

- The institution has sufficient financial resources to support its purposes and current range of educational programs.
- It has mechanisms in place that will enable it to react to sudden declines in the resources available to it.

5. Institutional development

- The institution monitors its performance against its objectives, and, as necessary, it adjusts its objectives to maintain their currency in the light of external changes, including changes in available resources and political constraints, and adjusts its procedures to improve its activities.
- The institution strives to attain a “quality culture” (see below)

IV. MECHANISMS FOR AN EFFECTIVE SELF ASSESSMENT

A. THE QUALITY CULTURE

A number of Palestinian TEIs have expressed their ambition to introduce within their institutions what has become to be termed a “quality culture”. In broad terms it means that quality assurance is built into the everyday life of the institution and is seen to be the shared responsibility of all members of the academic community, staff, both academic and administrative, and students.

In this ideal model quality assurance does not depend primarily on the five or six yearly event in which the programme or institution is assessed either internally or externally. The adoption of a quality culture does not mean that the need for the periodic internal or external review is no longer required, but the nature of that review will change as a quality culture is embraced. Such reviews will become more concerned with the steps the institution has taken to encourage the growth of a quality culture and the means by which the institution assures itself of the quality of its provision.

One of the first organisations to adopt the term quality culture was the European Association for Quality Assurance for Higher Education (ENQA) who undertook a Quality Culture Project from 2002 to 2006. The project was devised to increase the capacity of universities to meet the needs for accountability (ensuring that all its programmes were operating at or above threshold standards) as well as the growing demand on higher education to deliver more, with greater levels of quality but without a commensurate increase in resources.

The term “quality culture” has been chosen to emphasise that the most appropriate approach to quality assurance in higher education is not one based on top-down, managerial concepts such as quality control, quality management etc. Instead, the word culture is used to convey a connotation of quality as a shared value and a collective responsibility of all members of the institution including students and administrative staff.

The characteristics of a quality culture

- There is recognition on the part of staff and students of the need for a system that ensures accountability and strives to enhance quality.
- A quality culture places students at the centre.
- That there is a shared ownership of quality within the institution.
- Leadership is inspirational rather than directorial and leadership is provided by those at all levels of the institution – it is not thought to be the preserve of senior management.

- A quality culture depends on partnership and co-operation, the sharing of experience and team working.
- Quality assurance should not be seen to be the preserve of senior management or of a specialist quality assurance unit.
- Wherever possible steps should be put in place to prevent actions which diminish quality from taking place rather than concentrating on mechanisms that will identify that things have gone wrong. Or, when that this is not possible, weakness should be identified quickly and remedial action initiated as soon as possible.
- External critical evaluation should be welcomed from a range of informed sources. When dealing with an external quality assurance or accreditation agency an institution that has adopted a quality culture will not seek to hide their weaknesses but will instead share with the agency the problems that it has identified and the steps that it is taking to overcome them.

The fact that the European Quality Agency was one of the forerunners in the introduction of a Quality Culture should not be interpreted as meaning that that the approach is only feasible in developed countries where there are adequate resources to devote to issues of quality.

The emergence of an effective Quality Culture is primarily based on changes in attitudes on the part of the internal stakeholders, i.e. the governing body, staff and students. It does not rely on the introduction of new mechanisms and procedures that require additional resources. The position is quite the reverse. If a TEI has an effective Quality Culture in place it will be able to reduce expenditure. For example, fewer staff would be needed in the Quality Assurance Unit and fewer formal surveys would need to be undertaken.

Perhaps the most important factor in establishing a Quality Culture is institutional leadership and, in particular, the encouragement of an attitude of sharing in the way in which the organisation is managed. This does not mean that all matters have to be decided by a popular vote and that there are not decisions that properly fall within the remit of a University Council or Board of Trustees. It means, rather, that there is a clear decision making structure where staff, and where appropriate students, feel that they have an effective voice on matters of direct concern to themselves such as the way that programmes of study are managed and administered, within the framework of institutional wide policies.

A Quality Culture depends very much on the concept of partnership and in order to establish that necessary spirit of partnership it is important not to link the quality assurance processes with the system of rewards and penalties. If it were thought that such a link existed those concerned would strive to ensure

that the quality assurance system produced what, would be for them, the right messages, in other words the culture would be of compliance and not quality.

It is of course important to have a system of staff appraisal and ways of rewarding staff who are performing well and of dealing with those whose contribution is less than satisfactory. To the extent that this is possible these processes should be kept separate from those relating to quality assurance.

Another important element of a Quality Culture is that it increases the self regulatory capacity of an institution. This requires a degree of openness, which means that problems once identified should be openly accepted and not hidden even if, in the short term, there is a danger that the reputation of the programme or institution might be put at risk. The potential risk would certainly be minimised if the institution, at the same time it recognizes a problem, demonstrates that it is taking effective steps to deal with it, without waiting for an external agency to demand actions to be taken.

Palestinian TEIs have carried out self assessment of programmes for several years, in different schemes: under a UNDP project, with external evaluation from the UK QAA, and in compliance with AQAC requests and guidelines.

They now wish to learn more about institutional quality assurance, and to use this as a tool for planning. Their needs can be summarized as follows:

- Development of a process that allows them to focus on improvement, in accordance to their purposes
- Focus on institutional characteristics, in order to use the outcomes to feed into strategic planning
- Substantive and timely feedback from external reviewers and the external agency
- Clear quality standards, that are flexible enough for different types of institutions, but at the same time, not open to conflicting interpretations
- More support during the process – this means clear and effective manuals, trained technical staff at the quality assurance agency, capacity building at the institutional level

In summary, they want to work towards the establishment of a quality culture; as usual with cultures, they take a long time to develop, and must become embedded in the practices of the institution.

In many instances, especially given the circumstances faced by the Palestinian higher education system, the initial diagnosis will show the problem to be related to a lack of resources and it will often be the case that additional resources can not be obtained. Even in these difficult conditions, the self regulated institution will recognize that it is not in the country's best interests to hide the problem, especially since it is in no-one's interest, especially students, for an institution to attempt to do something for which it is not

adequately resourced. In a context where quality is a shared responsibility, it is much more likely that institutions can deal with these problems creatively, and find other ways in which the problem can be solved with the available resources.

In looking for a wide range of linkages among quality factors, the methodology suggested in these guidelines intends to help in that direction: by increasing the number of variables related to specific outcomes, it will help institutions address common problems in new and varied ways, some of which will almost certainly involve making better use of available resources, whether it is teachers, students in the upper courses, information technology, new teaching strategies or special links with employers, government or other external stakeholders.

B. COMPONENTS OF A SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

1. Conditions for an effective self assessment

Most self assessments begin with the identification of the main areas to be addressed. These usually start from the institution's or programme's goals and purposes, and are organized around the main criteria or standards to be applied. Some processes are comprehensive and intend to achieve a general picture of the operations of a given institution. Others focus on specific aspects of institutional life: teaching and learning, research activities, academic services, specific faculties or departments. In any case, it is necessary to determine clearly the focus of the study, and resist the temptation to look at everything.

As mentioned before, self assessment involves a careful analysis of the performance of a given tertiary education institution, unit (i.e., faculty, department, etc.) or program. While doing this makes it possible for the institution to identify its main strengths and weaknesses and to learn about its environment and the threats and opportunities it poses, and therefore, to plan for improvement and development, this is by no means automatic. It requires organization and an action plan, besides needing the involvement of a fair proportion of all relevant stakeholders.

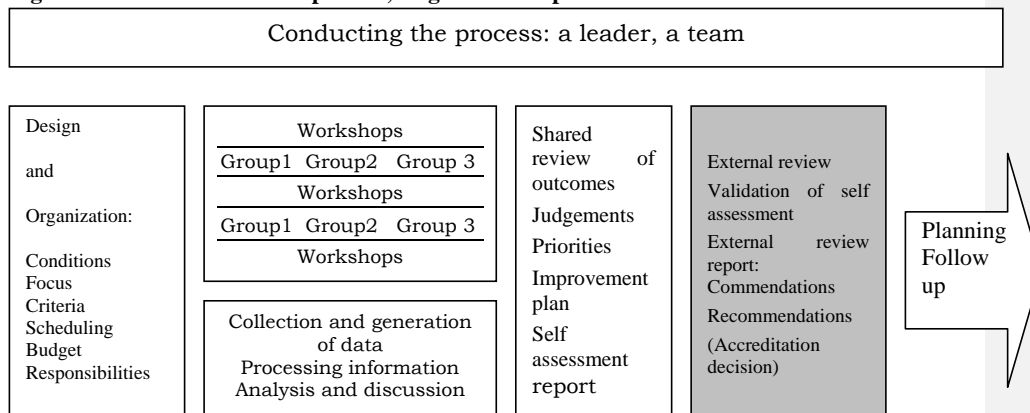
Some basic conditions for effective self assessment are the following:

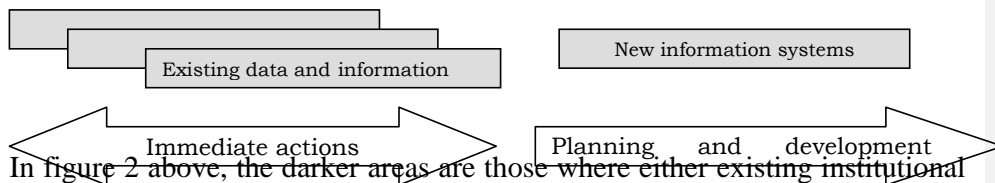
1. The appointment and action of a leading team, in charge of facilitating and promoting the active participation of all stakeholders. This may be supported by an institutional quality unit, but they should not be the main players in this respect: quality is the responsibility of all the actors involved in the operation of the institution, the unit (department) or program, and it should not be shifted towards the quality unit. The composition of the

leading team must take into account the institutional culture: in some, this team would have to include the leaders of the institution. In others, the inclusion of the leaders should be avoided. In any case, it is important that the leading team is seen by the institution as legitimate (that is, that it has the interests of the institution in mind, and not that of any particular group within the institution) and effective (and not just part of an academic exercise, with little chance of having its outcomes implemented).

2. Motivation and interest on the part of the different stakeholders. The leading team should have as one of its main roles that of keeping open different options for the participation of academic, administrative and support staff and students in the process. It is essential that self assessment is understood as a collective effort to learn as much as possible about the operation of the institution or its components, determine the best strategies to improve it and commit themselves to the necessary changes. The different evaluation tasks may be assigned to existing, natural groups (such as departmental units, for example) or to specially appointed committees if this is seen to be more effective.
3. A focus on improvement. In order for self assessment to be as effective as it can be, it should be addressed towards the identification of areas and actions for improvement. It does not make much sense to work in the identification of strengths and weaknesses if this is not translated into decisions taken with the purpose of supporting strengths and improving the weaker areas. It is usually necessary also to develop prioritizing strategies. The areas for action identified through self assessment processes normally exceed the immediate capacity of an institution. Therefore it is necessary to analyse the outcomes of such a process with a view to determine realistic and shared proposals for change, in the short, mid or long term.

Figure 2: The self assessment process, stages and components





In figure 2 above, the darker areas are those where either existing institutional systems are in place (or should be), such as those having to do with information, or where an external agency may take part. As can be seen, most of the process is internal, and depends on the institutional actors themselves. This is what can make it so effective: by involving institutional leaders, academic, administrative and support staff, students, graduates, employers and other significant stakeholders, it makes change easier to understand, to organize and to achieve. It makes it less threatening, and thus, more easily accepted.

2. Information, an essential component of self assessment

Self assessment is based on information, but it goes far beyond an accurate description of an institution, its units or its programs. It involves the collection of relevant data and opinions from significant stakeholders, both internal and external to the institution, but data must be processed to be turned into information, and information must be analysed and interpreted in order to become knowledge.

One of the most time consuming tasks for an institution that is beginning to carry out self assessment processes is that of gathering information. In the first place, institutions tend to gather too many data, without a clear picture of their possible uses. Therefore, it is sometimes difficult to identify those that are relevant, to organize them in a significant way or to detect the gaps that must be filled.

Quality units may have a significant role in this respect, providing the team in charge of the self assessment with the basic information, gathering any necessary data and organizing the process for the collection of opinions. They may also do a primary processing of data, but it is important to remember that the actual analysis and interpretation should not be restricted to the quality unit, but an exercise in which all stakeholders are invited to take part.

In order to make quality judgments possible, it is necessary to gather different types of information, which can be described as follows:

- *Quantitative descriptive information.* These are hard data which provide evidence on the current status and the evolution in time of indicators dealing with students, academic staff, learning-teaching process, outcomes, resources, research or other significant variables.

- *Qualitative descriptive information.* This involves a narrative description of the main inputs, processes or outcomes, such as expected learning outcomes, a description of the evaluation process for academic staff, or competencies of graduates.
- *Analytical information,* prepared on the basis of the qualitative and quantitative information gathered. This makes it possible to interpret information in a contextual framework, taking into account specific features of the institution, the unit or the program under evaluation. It may include trend analysis or the relationship between qualitative information (such as admissions policies) and quantitative measures (such as attrition or graduation rates).
- *Opinions or the judgment of different stakeholders* on the performance of the institution or the programme. This is usually gathered through surveys, focus groups or other similar tools.

Information may be gathered from different sources. The institutional ones are quite obvious: statistical data, descriptions of the main processes, and so on. But it is also essential to consider external sources, and here the process of gathering information is not so obvious. Most Palestinian tertiary education institutions have made it clear that they want to increase the involvement of external stakeholders in their quality assurance arrangements; some ways to do this are discussed below.

1. Any assessment of tertiary education should begin by taking into account the external regulations that provide a framework for institutional operation: governmental policies, funding mechanisms, qualifications frameworks when they exist, other significant regulations. While these are not expected to give feedback on an institution's operation, they certainly set the stage for the decisions that must be made, and determine the range of possible or necessary actions. It is fairly easy to gather this information, but it must be done in a systematic way and it must be taken into consideration when analysing the institution's vision: it, plus the mission statement, define many of the opportunities available, as well as making it possible to identify some of the restrictions.
2. A second level of information comes from the social environment: economic and political considerations, not directly related to tertiary education, nevertheless provide a social framework that cannot be ignored. Employment opportunities, demand for specific programs, opportunities for community services, need for certain research or study outcomes, restrictions or opportunities for student and professional mobility, are also elements that must be taken into consideration when developing a vision for the future. While it may be relatively easy to gather the relevant

information, it is not always easy to interpret it. A constant effort must be made to give it a significant place in any prospective analysis and certainly in any strategic planning process.

3. The third source of external information is directly linked to the operation of the institutions, and has to do with the opinions of graduates. All tertiary education institutions must develop graduate follow up procedures, in order to learn about the degree of their satisfaction with the education they received, the way in which they have been accepted into the labour market, and – very importantly – their needs for continuing or further education. There are many ways in which this can be done and some of them will be discussed in the following sections. One of the necessary tasks in this respect is to organise a database of recent graduates, and ask them to keep the institution informed of any changes. Then it becomes much easier to contact them for alumni meetings, surveys or focus groups if necessary.
4. Finally, other practitioners of the disciplines taught by the institution, employers and other professionals in the field can provide significant feedback on the performance of graduates and of the developments in the disciplinary, technological or professional areas related to the subjects being taught. This should be taken into account when evaluating the curricula, or when making decisions on the establishment of new programs. It is usually much more difficult to reach these stakeholders, but through seminars, linkages with disciplinary or professional associations, employers of the institution's graduates, it may be possible to develop a strong group of qualified informers in this respect.

The external quality agency can provide good support by developing manuals or handbooks to help institutions prepare adequate questionnaires, train academic staff members to carry out focus groups or to analyse survey results. Quality units within institutions can also support these efforts, and there are many available materials to draw from.

Once information has been collected and processed, the team leading the process may distribute it to specific groups or committees for its analysis and interpretation. This not only makes work easier, it is also an effective means for increasing participation. It is important to remember that self assessment is a task undertaken by a collective, that is, the main actors in a given institution or programme. Therefore, the analysis must involve most, if not all, those actors, and the outcome must reflect a collective opinion, and not just the views of the small group leading the process.

This analysis leads to a self assessment report, which includes for each area or criterion to be considered, a short description of the situation, a discussion

of the degree in which it meets (or fails to meet) the relevant standards or criteria and improvement plans.

The report is not a flat description of the programme or the institution. It must determine the main priorities to be addressed, based on the institutional goals and purposes, and organize the improvement actions accordingly.

In such a way, it becomes an essential tool for the strategic planning exercise, which is intended to translate these outcomes into effective action.

In Palestine, as in many other countries, TEIs need support to develop Management Information Systems. They gather data, but it is not always easy for them to translate those data into useful information, and even less to use the information to generate knowledge about the institution.

C. CONDUCTING A SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

A self assessment exercise is only useful if it helps a TEI move towards increasing levels of quality. As stated before, quality depends on the internal and external consistency of an institution or its programmes. Self assessment focuses on both, and it uses as criteria for making quality judgements the institution's mission and purposes, for internal consistency, and the standards of the profession, or the quality assurance agency, for external consistency.

Therefore, the first step in conducting a self assessment exercise must deal with an analysis of the institutional mission and purposes, and the degree to which they actually serve as a guide for decisions and actions at all institutional levels.

1. On-going internal processes

It would be costly in terms of time and resources and would be likely to result in a less effective result if the internal self-evaluation was carried out as a stand-alone exercise. Instead the self-evaluation should be seen as the culmination of a number of quality assurance exercises that are part of the on-going activities of the institution.

2. Internal Quality Assurance – the main strands

The main strands of internal quality assurance are

- Review of management practices in view of the institutional purposes
- Initial approval of programmes
- Annual review of programmes. Some times this may be accompanied by subject or disciplinary reviews.
- Thematic reviews of such things as library provision, IT or student services.

- Regular reviews of programmes every five or so years
- A regular systematic self-evaluation that will draw heavily on the above elements

3. Review of management practices in view of the institutional purposes

A significant part of the quality of tertiary education institutions depends on its leadership, and the links the governance structure has with the stated purposes or the institutional mission. While these issues are seldom assessed in a formal manner, they must provide the basic framework for an institutional self assessment, and they are definitely a central component in the strategic planning effort.

One way to address these issues is to focus on management practices. They embody the set of policies and mechanisms the institution has in place in order better to organize its actions and resources towards the achievement of its stated purposes. Therefore, it is necessary to look at the different elements in this regard. Some of them should be assessed every year; others can be assessed only when the regular, systematic self evaluation process is carried out.

- The first element has to do with the identification of the aspects of the institutional mission and vision that impact on the actual operation of the institution: the purpose that underlies its main activities, the balance between teaching and research, services or other functions the institution may decide to carry out, the target population, the types of programmes it will offer. This should involve all levels of the institution, because the actual operation of the institution happens in the faculties, the schools, the classrooms and in the day to day interaction between the main internal stakeholders. It should also take explicitly into account the main external constraints or opportunities that may affect the institution. The outcome of such an assessment should provide a basic framework for all the other evaluation exercises carried out at the institution.
- Other significant aspect is the governance structure of the institution, the organization of its decision making processes, mechanisms for the participation of academic staff or students, as appropriate, and the degree of alignment between the decision making processes and the priorities of the institution.
- An important part of decision making has to do with the management of material, human and financial resources. How needs are determined, where the different resources are obtained, how they are allocated, how they are used, must be reviewed against the institutional purposes.

- Finally, the mechanisms that make it possible for the institution to identify its strengths and shortcomings, to plan, to make adjustments and even, if necessary, to change the stated priorities, must also be reviewed. This includes the existence and operation of a management information system or its equivalent, which will allow the institutional decision makers to act on a sound basis.

When this component of self assessment is properly carried out, it provides a sound basis for strategic planning, and is an essential tool for working towards the internal consistency that is such a strong part of the definition of quality.

4. The Initial Approval of Programmes

The initial approval of a programme may be defined as the outcome of accreditation or validation and is the formal confirmation that a programme of study has been judged to meet the institution's requirements.

At present the AQAC has the responsibility to license and accredit new programmes and institutions, and has provided criteria and materials for this purpose.

While the external agency's provisions are important, and give the institution a broad outline to follow, it is essential that each institution develops its own procedures for developing and approving new programmes.

Thus, every institution should have in place mechanisms that allow it to develop proposals for new programmes, and decision making instances that analyse these proposals and determine whether a new programme will or will not be authorized. Proposals are developed at the department level, even though the initiative for a new programme may come from different places within a TEI. The information requirements relevant to the initial approval of courses might be summarised as follows

- The context of the programme in terms of the institutional mission
- Specifications and regulations
- Syllabus and teaching, learning and assessment methods
- Curriculum organisation and staffing
- Resource requirements (and possibly where they are to come from).

The proposal must be approved at the department level before being raised to the institution level decision making unit, where its relevance and viability will be determined. Once it is approved, the decision will be reported to the department, in order to have it implemented.

5. The Monitoring of Programmes

Monitoring is the regular, normally annual, internal process by which the institution appraises the operation of the programme between reviews and ensures that appropriate standards are maintained.

It should not be too heavy – it should not be a case of pulling up the roots. It should be an opportunity to check that nothing is going seriously adrift and that the normal routine ongoing monitoring processes are being properly carried out.

It is an opportunity to look at the key performance indicators such as retention and employment rates.

The outputs of annual reviews should be considered within the institution (see discussion of the internal management of quality assurance) and will be an input to the regular more fundamental programme reviews.

The possible content of an annual monitoring report include

- Basic statistical information about such matters as enrolment, examination pass rates and employment rates together with comments on the significance of the data.
- A progress report on the required actions identified in the previous annual report.
- A report on the feedback from students and on any feedback from other stakeholders such as employers.
- Any changes that have been made to the curriculum during the year, together with any significant changes that may have taken place to student services, learning resources or other aspects of the institution that impact the students' experience.
- Changes in academic staff associated with the programme including the curriculum vitae of new members.
- Any actions that are proposed including those based on an analysis of the statistical report and the consultations with students and other stakeholders.
- An overall evaluation of the quality of the program made either by the program leader or the program committee.

**Quality Assurance and Enhancement:
What is being done in Palestinian TEIs in Course Evaluations**

There are a number of the components of a quality assurance system in place in Palestinian TEIs. The arrangements for the completion of annual course evaluations by staff and students are common features in most TEIs, and they are intended to ensure that a methodical annual review is in place. Additional practices in this regard include the review of the grades achieved by the students on each course by the relevant Departmental Council at the end of each semester. This process allows the teaching and assessment of each course to be considered. There is also a process for the consideration of course and overall programme content as well as the possible introduction of new programmes, which are processed through

appropriate levels of the TEI's governance systems.

The evaluation of courses by students is relatively well organized in Palestinian TEIs. The level to which the results of these evaluations are fed into the staff-appraisal system varies from one TEI to another. In the best cases, students' course evaluations are fed into staff appraisals, where, together with the staff members' self evaluation, they are considered by the Chairpersons of the Departments, the Dean of the Faculties and the University Vice-Presidents for Academic Affairs. However, in the majority of cases, there is no system to provide feedback to the students on the outcomes of their evaluations.

Most TEIs in Palestine carry out substantial evaluation of programmes every semester, gathering student opinions on the provision of courses. While this is an important input, it should be complemented by other instruments, in order to obtain a more complete picture.

6. Regular Programme Reviews

These are typically carried out at five yearly intervals and provide an opportunity to examine the aims and objectives of the programme – it is the time to pull up the roots.

Even if the reviews are internally organised they should include participants from outside the department and/or outside the institution.

A review may be defined as the process whereby the progress of a programme is critically appraised at intervals, first by its own members and relevant stakeholders, and then by a group including external peers, and any plans for change are considered. This is in order to confirm that the programme remains academically valid and continues to meet the conditions for the awards of the institution.

In Palestine the AQAC is currently undertaking programme reviews on an external basis, taking as their starting point the internal self-evaluation reviews carried out by the institutions.

7. Thematic Reviews

In some countries institutions carry out thematic reviews on a regular basis of cross institutional activities that are relevant to the teaching and learning experience such as IT provision, career guidance and facilities for students with disabilities while others might focus on the teaching and learning of a discipline over a number of programmes.

A different way of looking at programmes across a TEI system is for the external review agency to systematize the results of programme reviews. This would be an interesting exercise for Palestine, where the AQAC looks at all programmes in a given field and thus, gathers significant information on the provision in that field. This not only makes it possible to develop national

benchmarking on selected programmes, it can also help in the identification of relevant policy issues.

8. The role of the above in the context of institutional self-assessment

The conditions necessary for the conduct of an institutional self assessment were set out at the beginning of this section. In a coherent internal system of quality assurance of the type described above, the necessary statistical data and the assessment of the successes and failures of the period under review will be readily available as will information about the steps that the institution has put into place both to enhance quality and to correct those deficiencies that it has identified. These will have an important place in any institutional self-evaluation.

Self-evaluation is not only backward looking; it is also concerned with a consideration of whether the institution should consider changing its mission and purpose. The lessons learnt from the ongoing annual quality assurance procedures will be of great significance in the consideration of the possible need to amend the institution's mission and purpose.

9. Student Involvement in Internal Quality Assurance

This is one of the most important aspects of internal quality assurance but is perhaps one the areas which is most likely to be affected by cultural traditions and in particular the extent to which students will express criticisms of their institutions. In addition to the fact that some students may feel reluctant to criticise people "in authority" there is also the point that students are part of the process and, to be pragmatic, would not wish to cast doubt as to the value of a qualification that they are seeking to achieve.

In Palestine considerable use is made of student questionnaires but there are other methods of obtaining the views of students and there are inherent risks on an over reliance on any one form

10. Ways of Gathering Student Feedback

- The use of questionnaires
- Discussion (focus) groups
- Immediate feedback in lectures and classes
- Informal means
- Student representatives on university committees.

Some of these will be discussed in a little more detail below

i. Questionnaires

It is important that they should be used but they should not be used in isolation but should be combined with other means of obtaining feedback. Questionnaires might indicate that something is wrong but they often do not indicate not why it is going wrong. They are usually conducted at the course or module level but they might cover non course specific services such as the library.

There is a great danger of over surveying students as there is a risk that they will then be answered mechanistically with little original thought. The problem is exacerbated if there is not adequate feedback to students as students may then adopt a cynical attitude to the exercise.

A possible model is to use quite short and simple surveys on an annual basis and a more detailed one every two or three years.

ii. The design of questionnaires

The following questions need to be considered:

- Are the purposes and the uses to which the information will be put and how results will be reported back clearly stated?
- Are the questions unambiguous?
- Are the questions answerable by the students? (a question as to whether the teacher has a good knowledge of the subject may not be answerable by students)
- Are questions phrased in a way that is easily understood by the students?
- Are there some open ended questions?
- Are closed questions answerable on a ordinal scale (for example 5 very good, 1 very bad)
- How many questions are there?

iii. Feedback

Feedback is essential and students should be told the results of any feedback exercise and the resulting actions, if any.

iv. Other Methods

One of the most effective ways of obtaining student feedback is through informal means such as conversations between staff and students. It is important to ensure that any significant information obtained in this way is passed on to the departmental or, as appropriate, institutional management.

While not widely used, at least one Palestinian university has reported great success in the use of student focus groups.

11.External stakeholders' involvement in internal quality assurance

External stakeholders – essentially, graduates and employers – can provide extremely valuable insights into the actual performance of a TEI. It is normally difficult to get their views, since most TEIs do not have systematic and organized mechanisms for doing so. When these mechanisms are in place, most institutions find that the benefits largely exceed the effort spent in setting them up.

Graduates can report on the quality of the teaching they received, and the relevance of their study plans. They can also provide important information on their needs for further education, thus helping the institution in its mid and long term planning. Employers will inform an institution on the needs and requirements of the labour market, and thus help improve the employability of the future graduates.

There are many tools that can be used to gather information from graduates and employers, such as questionnaires, focus groups, interviews, seminars or technical meetings. The main restriction here is to have access to a useful database that records the names and addresses of graduates, and identifies employers who have connections with the institution.

12.The focus and management of internal quality assurance

The initial approval and regular reviews of programmes would be undertaken at institutional level. The annual process of programme monitoring is usually best undertaken at departmental level and the process should have very close links with the day to day management of the programme. Summaries of the annual monitoring should be produced for consideration at faculty (in larger institutions) and institutional level.

While it is important to encourage and sustain the notion of a quality culture, that all members of the institution see themselves as sharing responsibility for quality it is still helpful to identify leadership roles that may be divided into three elements

- Individual
- Institutional Governance
- Administrative Support

At the individual level it is important that a senior member of staff, normally at vice-president level, takes responsibility for the oversight of quality assurance system.

It is generally regarded important to involve the wider academic community in the quality assurance process and thus, in terms of institutional governance, it is desirable to establish quality assurance committees at both

departmental and institutional levels, and in the case of larger institutions, at faculty level. Departmental committees should be responsible for the day to day and annual procedures and in producing annual reports for consideration by institution wide committees.

The institutional level quality assurance committee would in most circumstances take responsibility for the work necessary to approve and review programmes and prepare institutional internal self-assessment reports even if the formal responsibility to approve programmes was part of the remit of a more senior committee.

All Palestinian institutions have established or are establishing a “quality unit” or “quality assurance unit” which provides the specialist administrative support for the quality assurance procedures. It is important to emphasise that the prime responsibility of such units is to provide administrative support and every effort should be made to ensure that the impression is not given that the unit is itself responsible for the assurance of quality as this would absolve the wider academic community from their responsibilities in this area.

D. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL ASSESSMENT

The Accreditation and Quality Assurance Commission (AQAC) was established in 2002. Since its establishment it has successfully implemented a system of licensing and accreditation of new institution and programmes and has initiated a number of programme reviews. Programme reviews have been carried out in the following areas: Health Studies, Economics, Arts and Religious Studies and Engineering and IT.

AQAC has demonstrated its ability to function as a learning organisation. It appears that a number of institutions experienced difficulties with the earlier programme reviews but the reports of institutional experience of the most recent programme review, IT and Engineering, were much more positive.

It is understood that the Commission is now contemplating a programme of institutional evaluations.

The relationship between any external quality assurance and accreditation body with the institutions that fall within its remit is critical if an efficient and effective national system of quality assurance is to be established and sustained.

The twin goals of efficiency and effectiveness are more likely to be achieved when the internal and external process are closely harmonised. Thus, to the maximum extent possible the external process should be based on the work that has been done as part of an internal self-assessment. To the extent that circumstances allow, the external review should seek to assure

itself that the conclusions of the internal review are robust and reliable and not itself seek to replicate what has been done in the internal review.

The achievement of an “ideal” position requires actions to be taken by both the agency and the institutions.

The agency should ensure that its requirements minimise that additional work that has to be undertaken by an institution that is managing its affairs effectively and, in particular, is conducting a properly functioning process of internal self-assessment. It should also ensure that its own policies and procedures are developed in full consultation with the institutions and, once established, that the policies and procedures are clearly articulated and transparent and are publicised in easily accessible forms.

The institutions, on their part, must make themselves aware of the requirements of the quality assurance which will often, to a significant extent, be influenced by national priorities and build these into their own internal procedures.

V. THE STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESSES

A. STRATEGIC PLANNING AND SYSTEM COMPONENTS

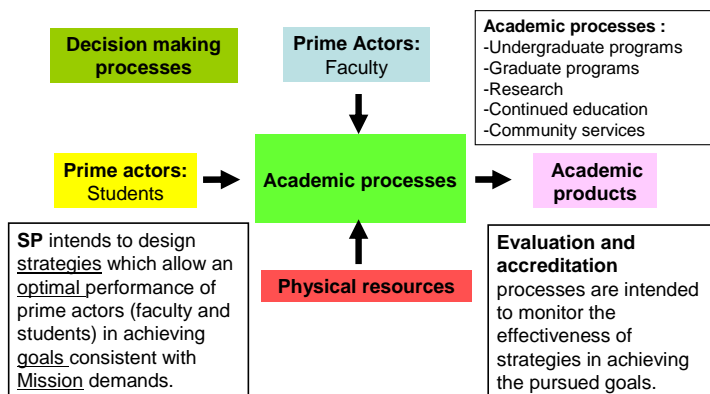
In this chapter we will be referring to the core issues related to strategic planning, as stated in III.1: ¿How should planning be carried out to affect the different system components of a TEI in order to achieve a certain objective function (quality standards of academic programs and research activities).

Considering the components of strategic planning proposed in chapter II, , we will organize this chapter in three sections:

- Prime actors
- Prime processes
- Resources

Prime actors (academic staff and students⁸) are the driving force for the academic processes considered (academic programs, research and community services). Resources are (simply) inputs handled by actors to support academic pursued goals.

*System components of a TEI
for SP purposes*



⁸ Administrative and support staff are also significant actors; however, in this section we shall focus on academic staff, and leave to the HEIs themselves the task of extending the analysis to the other human resources necessary for developing academic processes.

1. Academic staff

Academic staff are the driving force of any education institution, and as such they should be considered, with students, the *prime actors* of all academic process. In analyzing academic staff for Strategic Planning several issues have to be considered, ranging from the very basic and obvious to more complex issues. Such issues we will classify in the following categories:

- Size of academic staff, teaching loads and “critical mass” for community services and research activities
- Rules and incentives :
 - - Salaries
 - - Rules concerning selection, promotion and evaluation procedures.
- Academic qualification and teaching qualifications.

Size of academic staff, teaching loads and critical mass for research: academic staff represents a high percentage of operational budgets in tertiary education, and such cost is directly proportional to salaries and staff size (associated finally with teaching loads). On the other hand income is proportional to student population and/or tuition (especially when public funding covers only a fraction of the budget, as is the case in Palestine). Salaries are dictated either by government regulations or market restrictions. Affordable tuition fees and student population are determined by local socio-economic conditions and demands. Teaching loads are closely related to quality of education, although not necessarily in a linear way as usually argued. Thus, there is a very interesting and complicated relation between quality expectations, local socio-economic conditions, regulations and teaching practices, which finally determine staff size for a given institution.

A first and simple indicator of academic staff size is the *ratio of students per teacher (full time equivalent)*. This ratio is useful to detect extreme deficiencies or strengths. But while the ratio of students to teachers makes some sense for the whole institution, the variables that affect this ratio for a particular academic unit make such an indicator difficult to interpret⁹. A finer indicator related to academic staff size, which can be used across the institution or for each academic unit, is the *average size of courses delivered by an academic unit* (department, faculty or the institution itself). This is more directly related to the level of attention that academic staff can give to students in teaching-learning processes.

⁹ As an example of this, consider the Mathematics department, which may have a large academic staff to cover the demand for service courses in other programs, but have a small number of students following a Mathematics major.

Self assessment should be able to establish recommended ranges for the above mentioned indicators, but they are not direct indicators of quality. For a given range of any of these indicators, equal quality can be achieved depending on the nature of teaching-learning processes (see IV.3). Thus we can state here a key question for Strategic Planning purposes as:

- How to optimize cost-benefits associated to staff size, by adopting more effective teaching practices, i.e. adequate resource (academic staff) - process (teaching process) relations.

This issue is especially significant in the case of Palestine, as will be stressed at the end of this chapter.

To this point we have only presented the discussion of academic staff size as related to teaching processes. When research activities and services are present in the Mission of the institution, other considerations come into place.

The provision of services to external parties is becoming a significant part of tertiary education. In Palestine, at least three universities have organized systematic units dedicated to serve their local communities and other interested parties, obtaining a non negligible income from them. But this also poses specific requirements, both in terms of the human resources involved and in the links between these services and the teaching and research activities carried out in the institution. Staff time, special qualifications, professional experience, marketing efforts, must all be built in the requirements for academic and administrative staff within the institution.

Research activities and specialized consultancy (associated to the provision of services) are increasingly dependent on highly qualified team work. Thus, significant levels of research production and consultancy can only be achieved if a critical *mass* of researchers in a given field is available.

Rules and incentives: selection, evaluation, promotion, responsibility assignment and incentive mechanisms are the governing rules for a staff member. Clarity in the rules and transparency in its application are key elements to construct an appropriate environment in the institution. In particular evaluation procedures and corresponding incentive schemes are the most effective way of leading staff members towards professional and personal goals consistent with the Mission of the institution.

The relation between the above mentioned governing rules should have a clear *inner consistency and overall consistency*:

- Inner consistency means that periodic evaluation procedures should be based (only) on clearly defined responsibility assignments. Promotions, considered as a mid-term non periodic evaluation, should be based on a comprehensive analysis of periodic evaluations. Incentive mechanisms,

(including, but not limited to, salaries) should be consistent and objectively related with evaluation procedures.

- Overall consistency demands that the evaluation and incentive procedures are aligned with the Mission and Strategic Planning goals.

A key element in long term planning is the review of the whole body of governing rules for staff members, checking for *internal and overall consistency and transparency in the application* of such rules and incentives.

Evaluation and promotion mechanisms should be rigorous in their application, but care must be taken to preserve the essential values of university work, such as academic and intellectual freedom of academic staff.

Disciplinary qualification and teaching qualification of academic staff: Most modern universities clearly and consistently require a high level of disciplinary qualification of its academic staff. At the same time, they tend to ignore complementary requirements in teaching qualification.

It has been assumed that good disciplinary training will derive in good teaching practices, which is a highly questionable premise in the context of new demands in teaching practices and increasing demands for the development of diverse competences and skills in graduates. At the same time, academic staff in many areas should be able to combine and balance academically accomplished and professionally experienced members. The emphasis on research will necessarily be associated with a requirement for higher qualifications or doctoral degrees.

Universities which include research or the provision of graduate programs as a significant part of their mission most probably require a very high percentage of academic staff with doctoral degrees. But TEIs which focus on undergraduate, professional or technical programs should analyse critically the actual qualifications required, without assuming that the possession of a doctoral degree automatically ensures quality of teaching¹⁰.

Given the uncritical requirement of doctoral degrees in universities world wide, there is a large offer of these degrees, not always with the adequate quality standards. There is a risk that hiring people with doctoral degrees may only improve the statistical profile of the academic staff, without building the expected research capacity within the institution. While there is a strong pressure on increasing the disciplinary qualifications of academic staff, there are little, if any, teaching qualification requirements. University education is evolving towards new forms of teaching–learning processes, which emphasize

¹⁰ This is particularly relevant in a context where QA regulations sometimes impose certain formal requirements, without paying enough attention to the actual effects those regulations are trying to achieve: academic staff qualifications are an input measure of quality of teaching, but holding a specific degree does not always translate into increased effectiveness in teaching.

a higher engagement of students with their education processes and demand a different attitude with regard to teaching and the development of new skills among the academic staff.

When developing strategic plans which concern academic staff, Palestinian TEIs must consider restrictions such as the following:

- Local political and economic conditions may prevent universities from having an adequate academic staff in size or quality. Budget restrictions, due to the prevailing economic situation may restrict the size of a sustainable academic staff and may cause unfavourable labour conditions (salaries, job stability, academic environment).
- Inadequate labour conditions (low and unstable salaries) may undermine the commitment of academic staff with the institution and with their expected responsibilities.
- Political constraints make it difficult to find qualified academic staff, both in Palestine and abroad; closures make staff mobility difficult, and in some cases, impossible, thus making universities lose qualified teachers who can no longer travel to their places of work.
- Training new academic staff may be especially difficult in the case of Palestine:
 - Budget restrictions limit the possibility of financing candidates for the graduate studies required for university teaching¹¹.
 - Occupation and political conditions in Palestine restrict the inflow of new academic staff candidates and/or prevent the development of an attractive academic environment for new academic staff starting their professional and academic careers.
- Although scholarly research may not be a priority for Palestinian higher education, at least five universities emphasized that their mission includes the development of a research capability, at least in some specific areas. This is important because even a limited research activity within a university enhances teaching and creates better conditions for modern, relevant, mainstream disciplinary education, not only for the institution itself but also for the system at large. If finding and keeping qualified teachers is difficult, it is even more difficult to get adequate human resources for the development of even restricted research operations.

Any strategic planning effort must take into account these restrictions, and work around them. Special provisions and programs associated to the efficiency and effectiveness of the teaching-learning process, collaboration between TEIs, the provision of incentives other than increased salaries, the inclusion of leading professionals as teachers, and other such measures must

¹¹ Or the types of available scholarships are not related to actual institutional needs. Some TEIs mentioned that many scholarships are closely linked to human rights and socially relevant issues, but that less attention was paid by some donors to more professional or disciplinary oriented areas.

be taken into account. The strategic planning methodology explained in Chapter V shows when to include the restrictions in the process, but the actual answers still have to be provided by the TEIs themselves.

2. Students

Students are present in many parts of this document: Mission statements clarify the type of education provided by the institution for their students. Curricula and teaching learning processes (next section) make explicit how to achieve educational goals. Academic staff implement such processes. Here we will address some of the issues concerning students, but some of them will be covered in other sections.

Admission procedures and nature of education: Admission policies and mechanisms should be designed in a way that admitted students have a high probability of success. This, in turn, strongly depends on curricular design and the organization of the teaching and learning process. All TEIs have some specific admission policies, but they are seldom linked to issues of curricular design, instructional methods or learning resources.

Determining the level of incoming students, and designing education for the success of such students are the ways in which a TEI effectively defines itself as an inclusive or selective institution. Selective institutions can determine themselves as so by establishing high requirements of admission. It can also do so by setting high standards for the performance of students during the first year(s), turning, in practice, that year or years into a part of the selection process.

Inclusive institutions have a wider range of admission possibilities, but in order to be genuinely inclusive, curricula and the teaching learning process must be adapted to guarantee success of a large portion admitted students without lowering quality standards. (See section IV.3.2)

Admission policies, whether defined by the institution or by external regulations, determine much more than population size. They implicitly determine the nature of delivered education. This aspect is not always recognized, and not doing so may seriously distort the institution's mission and purposes.

Autonomy, responsibility and working loads in education process: Modern professional environments require people who are able to learn and adapt to continuously changing demands. Tertiary education has the main responsibility for educating students for autonomous and responsible self study skills, and in doing so, learn how to act with autonomy and responsibility after graduation. Part of these skills may be developed in secondary education, but in many countries, including Palestine, the school

system is not wholly successful in this regard. This change in study attitudes expected at university levels strongly affects students' performance in their first year(s) in university. Thus an important question to answer in this sense is:

- What is the general educational strategy that allows the students to build autonomy and responsibility in order to deal properly with tertiary education requirements?

Tertiary education curricula assume that full time students devote to study between 40 to 50 hours per week. This is much more than the typical work load of secondary education and some follow up studies show that the actual work load of students in tertiary education is much lower most of the time. Getting young students used to these working expectations requires special efforts. Getting academic staff to organize their work so their expectations are both realistic and consistent with the course requirements may also need a significant level of effort. This, then, leads to another important question:

- Does the institution know what is the actual working load of students, and the way in which this compares with academic staff expectations? Are there any adjustments to be made?

Student support services: All the above cautions are intended to point out that there may be a strong difference between institution and academic staff expectations and student possibilities. In general education institutions should have student support services which help the university understand students' motivations, expectations, attitudes and backgrounds in order to give them appropriate feedback to handle the high requirements of tertiary education. *Tertiary education is not only a stage in which professional knowledge and skills are developed, it is also the very critical stage in the life of students in which they transit from adolescence to adult life.*

- Institutions should review what the general procedures are and support services available for students in order to deal properly with the requirements of tertiary education.

While the above are relevant topics, they must be viewed within the restrictions that are present in the Palestinian case:

- Most Palestinian tertiary education institutions rely heavily on tuition to cover operation budgets. But at the same time students have strong limitations in their capacity to pay higher tuitions. Thus budget requirements within a restricted economy may lead universities to admit an increasing number of students under-qualified for tertiary education, who then require a more expensive educational process if they are to succeed.

- Under normal circumstances, institutions which by principle define themselves as highly inclusive institutions compensate the needs of admitted students with special curricular provisions and/or educational support services. These provisions increase the costs of education per (admitted) student. Most Palestinian TEIs admit a diverse group of students, with different levels of qualifications, but in all cases, increasing the enrolment means also increasing the diversity of the students. Thus, a special cost benefit analysis must be carried out in order to compare the economic benefits of a higher enrolment, with the costs of the education support services required for an increased number of under qualified students.
- Considering how important the number of enrolled students is for institutions relying heavily on tuitions, the quality of secondary education becomes a highly critical issue. The intifada and the occupation must have had a strong impact on the performance of secondary education, which means that TEIs must find the ways in which to overcome the shortcomings in that level. Curricular design, including subjects that should have been mastered at a previous level, teaching strategies addressing specific needs in reading comprehension, writing and communication, numeracy and other general skills, becomes an unavoidable necessity.

3. Curricula and teaching learning processes

Curricula are the underlying structure on which academic programs are built. And teaching-learning processes are the core activities which implement curricular goals. These two elements tend to be overlooked in planning processes. Curricula tend to be considered a “solved problem” in tertiary education. And teaching-learning processes tend to be replicated uncritically from generation to generation: “Teachers teach as they were taught”. But of course, curricula are not neutral, they express the mission and purpose of the institution and reflect the nature of education delivered by a university; and teaching-learning processes allow for curricula purposes to be achieved. Excellent curricula can be completely overshadowed by ineffective teaching processes

i. Curricula

In this document rather than considering detailed issues of curricular design, attention is drawn to gross characteristics which should be contrasted with the nature of education pursued by a particular institution.

General questions are relevant in curricula analysis:

- ¿What type of general education requirements does the institution consider essential for professional performance in any field? Here general education requirements are considered to be associated to communication skills, foreign languages and foreign cultures, information technology, quantitative methods.
- ¿What sort of balance should undergraduate studies attain between breadth and depth of education? Curricula can be grossly split into 4 different curricular components of education: a) General education (already mentioned), b) Basic arts and science requirements, c) Professional requirements d) Complementary professional education. This last includes the need of most careers to complement education with knowledge from related disciplines on the professional level (i.e. Economics for engineers). Breadth and depth of education are finally expressed by the relative importance that these different components have within the curricula¹².
- ¿How does the institution handle the difference between achieving professional knowledge and professional skills and/or competences?
- The emphasis that education puts on skills and competences is a modern trend of education, although the way of achieving such purpose is presently an unsettled problem. Curricula are traditionally displayed by a course plan, and courses are described by programs in terms of contents. Correspondence between course programs (contents) and skills and competences is not always evident, an aspect which reflects the unsettled problem of achieving competences based on a content based education tradition.
- ¿Are programmes (finally) adequate to satisfy professional demands of the labour market? Graduates should be professionally competent within the labour market to which they are exposed. But such market may be wider than the strictly local market. In a globalised environment, graduates may have professional opportunities outside local markets, thus curricula should

¹² One of the universities interviewed in the course of this project organizes its curricula in six main components:

- University level, required of all students: 20 credit hours dedicated to basic courses in Arabic, English, Library Science, Physical Education and Cultural Studies.
- Faculty level, required of all students in the faculty, of courses covering up to 25% of the curricula. These are introductory courses in the respective discipline.
- Department level, required of students in a given programme, covering up to 65% of the curricula, and dealing with introductory and advanced courses in an area of specialization.
- Electives
- 120 hours of community work

This is an excellent example of a way to solve the different and sometimes conflicting requirements of a tertiary education curriculum.

not be designed strictly limited to such demands, restricting possibilities to graduates.

Simple indicators can be associated to some of these concepts:

- Proportion of credit hours dedicated to general education requirements and nature of such general education requirements.
- Proportions of credit hours of different curricular components (general education, basic arts and science requirements, professional requirements, complementary professional education)
- Proportions of elective versus compulsory courses.

General curricular structure should be consistent with Mission Statements. Some gross inconsistencies can be revealed by simple indicators suggested above. More subtle inconsistencies can only be revealed by in depth analysis of curricula. For example, inconsistencies between contents displayed in course programs and pursued competences and skills, usually require a more detailed analysis of curricula.

If Strategic Planning is really concerned with aligning all education actions with the Mission Statement of the institution (in other words if Mission Statement really matters) then the *base line* for Strategic Planning should include a comprehensive and well supported diagnosis of curricular offerings, which should address the main questions presented in this section: General education requirements, breadth versus depth, knowledge (contents) versus skills and competences. Aligning curricula with the nature of pursued education is essentially a *process dependent strategy* which should address specific actions concerning each of the proposed questions. Actions will range from very general in nature to very specific detailed curriculum design

- Prescription of gross curricular extension of the different education components.
- General objectives of different education components
- Design of general sequences of areas and courses
- Course programs which include a clear mapping of contents into skill and competence requirements and expectations.

For the Palestine tertiary education system some particular cautions have to consider in the process of curricular design:

- The breadth of undergraduate education is widely recognized as an added value which should be enforced through extensive and increasingly demanding general education requirements. These increasing demands on undergraduate curricula tend to be partially compensated by an increasing possibility of students going into graduate school. This being a very limited option within the Palestinian education system, a careful analysis of the

professional requirements versus general education requirements has to be conducted in order to balance the need of a rigorous professional training with the benefits of a broad education experience.

- The problem of under prepared students entering the tertiary level education system addressed in past sections, definitely affects curricular design. At least in the coming future levelling programs for some portion of admitted students may be required. Academic authorities at the institutions should consider in their middle term planning diverse curricular alternatives for students with different secondary school backgrounds and performances.
- If a high proportion of admitted students have a low probability of success with the regular curriculum, or a low probability of completing the program within the specified time, then a new curriculum should be designed, including special courses for developing the skills these students are lacking. It is much easier to exempt a few students from a given course, once they show they have already mastered its objectives, than it is to impose extra work on already overloaded students.
- Average time for graduation is commonly used as an indicator of social (and economic) efficiency of tertiary education institutions. Considering the limitations imposed on Palestine education system by political and economic circumstances these type of indicators have to be reviewed critically. From one point of view, higher time for graduation implies added social and financial costs which should be considered unaffordable for the Palestinian education system. But from another point of view hand the above mentioned limitations may imply special curricular design, which tend to lengthen the undergraduate programs, guaranteeing the quality of graduates.

ii. Teaching Learning processes

Teaching learning processes are the action by which curricula are finally implemented, thus they are absolutely critical in achieving all educational purposes. The key question that finally has to be answered is: *Are students really achieving the educational objectives proposed by a given curricula?*

There basic issues concerning teaching learning processes could be summarized in:

- Teaching practices (or methodologies)
- Student engagement in their learning processes.
- Evaluation procedures
- Quality of secondary education and admission procedures
- Costs and efficiency in teaching learning processes.

A very general overview for Tertiary education teaching-learning processes connects these elements as follows:

iii. Teaching processes, student engagement and evaluation procedures

Tertiary education tends to be very conservative in teaching practices and methodologies. By far, world wide, basic and secondary education has been more active in research and implementation of more effective teaching learning methodologies. Lecturing has been the basic tool of tertiary education. This can be easily explained by the fact that tertiary education academic staff have a strong disciplinary training and almost inexistent training in teaching, having as a primary consequence that “teachers teach as they were taught” (by lecturing). But students engagement with learning processes (such as self study discipline or active learning processes) more than quality of lecturing is widely recognized by researchers in education as the most essential element for effective learning.

On the other hand evaluation procedures (such as examinations, projects and homework assignments) are the elements that most definitely determine on what aspects students concentrate their learning efforts. Simplifying, “students study to approve evaluation procedures” and “students associate learning with successfully approving examinations”. This gives to evaluation procedures a special and critical significance. Careless evaluation design can end up overshadowing many objectives of education. Particularly critical is the problem of evaluating skill and competence development. Academic staff are not usually trained for this purpose, and evaluation procedures can ignore or mishandle this type of evaluation. The result is that although modern curricula stress the importance of skill and competence training, the absence of such processes in evaluation procedures may turn these objectives to mere wishful thinking.

Proper characterization (base line) and follow up of teaching-learning processes for long term planning should try to answer basic questions concerning:

- *What are* students routines and engagement level with the learning process, taking into account such factors as: Hours dedicated to study per hour of lecturing; distribution of study loads along the academic periods; distribution of study load depending on the relative importance that students give to different courses; group study strategies.
- How effective are evaluation procedures, when *confronted with course objectives*, with special care in considering the effectiveness of such procedures in guaranteeing skill and competence development.

- Student periodic evaluation of academic staff and courses should focus in particular to detect extremes: good teaching practices (from which others could learn) and deficient teaching practices for which the institution should provide corrective actions.

iv. Quality of secondary education and admission procedures

In this context we will only be concerned with the level of understanding that tertiary education institutions have of secondary level education and the entry skills of their students. The main concern can be summarized in two questions:

- Are secondary level graduates appropriately prepared for tertiary education requirements?
- Do admitted students have a high probability of success in the tertiary education institution?

In many cases, TEIs act on very unrealistic assumptions about the qualifications of secondary school graduates, and they seldom take the time to diagnose the entry skills of their actual students. Curricular requirements and teaching practices should be based on a good understanding of the qualifications of the students, and the requirements of the degree to be granted. Thus, long term planning for quality in teaching-learning processes could include some of the following procedures:

- In Palestine, admission is based on the students' secondary education scores; therefore, statistical and time series studies can be conducted to determine the probability of success in different undergraduate programs as a function of different score levels.
- Students for which the above mentioned studies predict a low probability of success the institution should take levelling courses; if they are a high proportion of the total enrolment, these courses should be included in the regular curriculum (and especially qualified students could be exempt from them). Curricula and teaching learning processes should be designed for the success of a large proportion of admitted students. This sole purpose may drastically affect the totality of the first years of undergraduate programs. Not doing so may have an unacceptable social cost.
- Tertiary education institutions should provide permanent feedback to secondary education institutions and government education authorities, in order to help improve the quality of that educational level.

v. Costs and efficiency of teaching-learning processes

Teaching processes costs, present through academic staff salaries, are (by far) the highest item in an undergraduate college operational budget. Thus teaching costs are crucial in determining the whole economy of a university, as well as long term planning strategies. There are very simple unavoidable economic-academic interactions present in almost any undergraduate college which may strongly affect and determine the nature of teaching learning processes:

The cost of academic staff is proportional to salaries and the number of academic staff required for a given program. But the number of academic staff required is proportional to teaching load and student population. And teaching load can be characterized by number of courses taught per term and average number of students per course. Thus for an equilibrated budget with an affordable tuition, in which academic staff costs are mostly covered by tuition, teaching loads are bounded from below. The combination of number of courses taught and number of students per course have a lower limit. Under such limit, academic staff costs can not be covered, and the school is non sustainable, unless other resources exist to cover operational costs.

Such lower limit teaching loads establish strong limitations for teaching-learning quality. Time required for teaching activities is more sensitive to the number of courses taught, than to the number of students per course. Thus staff will tend to force an upper limit to the number of courses for full time equivalent positions. But quality can be very sensitive to the number of students in a course. Thus the institution has to carefully establish both parameters that characterize teaching load, in order to guarantee quality without overloading the academic staff.

A more detailed analysis of teaching-learning processes will certainly reveal that quality is not (simply) linearly dependent on course size. Nor is time required for teaching activities (simply) linearly dependent on the number of courses: Courses taught with no more resource than simple lecturing process, may have the same quality, regardless of size, above a certain threshold. In other words, if no advantage is taken of small course size (which tends to happen with certain lecturing styles) then size is not a factor determining quality. By the same trade, one same course taught with different methodologies (for an equal size) may demand considerable different amount of time for academic staff. *In general, methodologies which increase students engagement in learning process, require a higher effort of teachers.*

These nonlinear possible characteristics of teaching processes pose a very interesting and difficult optimization (and resource allocation) problem:

- How to maximize quality by investing in more effective teaching methodologies (active learning, problem based learning, hands on learning, which increase student engagement) and minimize overall costs.

The “trivial solution” for quality improvement is more academic staff for smaller course sizes; in other words more resources. The “non trivial solution” requires a fine tuning which includes more effective methodologies, the use of information technology, time for the preparation of materials to enhance learning processes, and less time dedicated to conventional lecturing.

Academic process analysis for long term planning should review the efficiency of present teaching learning process, as well as new possibilities which take into account active learning methodologies, appropriate engagement of students and use of information technologies

Strategic planning for quality must certainly consider carefully this so called optimization problem for teaching processes. Base line descriptions and follow up procedures should include fairly simple indicators such as:

- Average teaching load, measured in courses per academic term.
- Average course size, for courses corresponding to different disciplines.
- Lecturing time per week (credit hours of courses for different disciplines)
- Estimation of time required by academic staff in preparing lectures, teaching material and grading.

Interesting and useful studies can be conducted to relate students performance and student evaluation of academic staff and courses, with indicators such as size of courses, lecturing time and/or methodologies used.

These simple indicators are the input for institutional research projects intended to establish optimal design of academic staff allocation and teaching methodologies, which optimize quality and minimize costs. Actions in this direction are clearly *process dependent strategies* related to quality, in which quality improvement is not necessarily a matter of higher resources, but a matter of better practices.

Costs and efficiency of teaching learning processes is a matter of concern for any institution which tries to use its resources in an optimal way. But in the case of Palestine, where economic limitations impact on several aspects such as number of academic staff, appropriate labour conditions and the quality of admitted students to tertiary education, the efficiency of teaching-learning processes is absolutely critical.

Several issues should be reviewed critically:

- The possibility of increasing course sizes once appropriate educational support activities are designed (which may have a cost per hour less than that of conventional lecturing). The first reaction of most TEIs to the need

to improve teaching is to reduce the student/teacher ratio, thus increasing the size of the academic staff. But combining lecturing (which can be done to a large number of students) with different strategies may definitely improve the quality of teaching without changing the number of staff in the institution. It will be necessary to train some of the teachers in new methodologies, prepare new materials, and therefore, it is not without cost, although the cost of these strategies will always be much lower than hiring new academic staff .

- Homework, project assignments and all other activities which increase students engagement with their learning process, should guarantee that students use efficiently and properly their independent study time.
- Use of Information Technology resources which enhance teaching learning processes with moderate investment costs should be strongly stimulated.

In general it can be stated that the more limitations are imposed on human resources and quality of students in the Palestinian context, the more urgent it is to build a capacity to review critically all common practices in teaching, in a permanent search for an overall efficiency which compensates the lack of conventional resources.

4. Research activities

It is certainly desirable for any society and any country to develop a strong research capacity. Arguments include economic ones, associated to the so called “knowledge based society” in which science and technology intensive products, highly dependent on research capacity, have the highest economic added values and thus highest associated profits, extremely convenient for any economy. But also strictly cultural arguments exist: Any society has the right to build its own “knowledge capacity”, which is part of its cultural endowment, partially constructed and deeply rooted in universities.

For the tertiary education system in a developing country, perhaps the question concerning the building of a research capacity in universities is not that of convenience, which is finally evident. The key question is rather how to build a *locally relevant* research capacity. Local relevance may be considered a vanishing requirement in a highly globalised economy, but it is certainly unavoidable in a context of limited resources. Then, the delicate matter of *international competitiveness* comes forth, and associated to international competitiveness there always is the need for *international cooperation and networking*.

In the Palestinian context, the main issue seems to be that of local relevance, which has to do both with the development of knowledge about nationally significant issues and with the capacity to apply knowledge

developed elsewhere to local needs and transfer needed technology to the national productive and services sector.

Given these concerns relative to research activities in HEI, the following institutional issues have to be considered:

- Proper balance and links between teaching and research activities.
- Research sustainability
- Academic staff qualification strategies

Palestine does not have, and will probably not develop, research universities in the middle term. But some universities are devoting a significant part of their efforts and resources to building *research units*, either as centres of excellence in given fields or as part of existing faculties. Therefore, long term planning for these institutions must consider strategies and actions regarding these three issues.

Research vs teaching activities: It would be naïve not to recognize that these two activities compete for the attention and time of academic staff. So unless clear rules and policies exist which regulate the way academics within an institution handle them, one may override the other, severely affecting quality expectations. Mature systems should be able to develop teaching processes in which research activity enhances learning. But this is not self evident, and it is usually done mostly at the graduate level. Institutions wishing to develop a research capacity will have to find the way to connect and build up synergies between research and teaching activities, because the natural and easier approach is to keep them as dissociate, or even worse, competing activities.

- *Research sustainability:* A key issue to be addressed in research processes is sustainability. ¿Where do the resources come from? This issue has to do with relevance of research within the economic context already mentioned. Thus identifying research stake holders is a critical issue. Sustainability depends strictly on this consideration. Some specific costs have to be included in sustainability analysis:
 - Developing a research capacity within a faculty will increase the operational costs of teaching, since teaching loads have to be smaller for those staff members actively involved in research. In some cases, teaching (that is, income from tuition fees) will subsidize research, but this quickly becomes untenable.
 - Laboratory requirements in Science and Technology are considerably more expensive for research purposes than those for teaching purposes, but in many cases these are more easily developed and equipped through international cooperation.
 - Information systems (libraries and databases) have different cost structures for (undergraduate) teaching activities or research activities. Good journal libraries and databases, vital for research activity, have very high annual operating costs, which can clearly exceed the costs of book libraries adequate for undergraduate programs.
- *Academic staff qualification strategies:* Research activities require staff with doctoral degrees. High costs and long training periods are required,

so long term planning should include these processes as core programs within research capacity building. It must be taken into account that doctoral training abroad will not necessarily be related with research topics considered locally relevant, therefore research planning should include special programs and incentives for young doctoral graduates to construct research careers in which local relevance and international competitiveness are properly combined for the benefit of the institution and the country, as well as their own academic and professional benefit. Otherwise outstanding researchers will hardly be retained.

These requirements clearly exceed the regular budget of a university in most countries, and in Palestine, where most of the institutional income comes from tuition, it is essential to look for other sources of income. One such source is international cooperation or specific donations from businesses interested in the development of applied research or technology transfer. Another is the provision of research related services, rendered to external parties for a fee. But in all cases, institutions wishing to engage in research activities must develop effective fund raising strategies, especially in the absence of a nation – wide governmental strategy to support these institutional efforts.

Although Palestinian institutions cannot be considered research universities, some carry out *important* research activities, which on the long run will be strongly beneficial for the Palestinian society and economy. Research activities in universities should not be treated as a “black or white” situation in which either the institution is a “research university” (with all its first world connotations) or (completely opposite) research is absent and considered irrelevant.

Considering all the limitations and difficulties of Palestinian economy, research activities should be stimulated, as long as such activities, on an overall basis do not compromise human, physical and financial resources in a way which can be clearly recognized to undermine quality and sustainability of teaching activities.

There are many possibilities to be explored by the Palestinian academic community in which research activities can be used to enhance education, increase the level of engagement of students with their course work, and also increase the level of personal, academic and professional satisfaction of academic staff.

5. Decision making processes

Tertiary education institutions have two characteristics which make them very special among other organizations: The first one has to do with the nature of their processes and products. These are extremely varied in terms of the

disciplines they cover, the levels of education offered (undergraduate and graduate), or the outcomes of their work, which range from professional education to research and community service products. This diversity allows for many organizational cultures within the institution, a fact which certainly requires flexible and adaptable government structures and decision making processes. The second feature is that of the necessary intellectual and cultural autonomy that pervades university work.

These two characteristics of higher education, and especially of universities: diversity and autonomy pose important challenges for decision makers which can be summarized as follows:

- How can substantial institutional changes be conducted (when needed) within a very autonomous governing structure? How can academic authorities be effective in leading change processes without harming academic autonomy?
- How can institutional issues and processes which involve the whole of the institution be carried out within the diversity of academic units. Some examples of such institutional issues are: General education requirements of curricula which compete with professional requirements; interdisciplinary activities which take resources from disciplinary activities; modern teaching learning processes which may be contrary to the common practices of academic staff.

There are general aspects of organizational structure which determine decision making processes in a university. These should be critically analysed in a strategic planning process which may imply long term changes within the institution:

- Universities are organized by disciplines, and in Palestine, this translates into Faculties. Such faculties may be designed to be self sufficient and autonomous in most academic processes and decisions. Or, the university can be built on the basis of a strong cooperation and dependence of different schools in a sort of “matrix organization” in which programmes (the rows of the matrix) are implemented with the contribution of several disciplinary units (the columns of the matrix).

The baseline for strategic planning should begin by characterizing the organizational and programme structures, showing the strengths and weaknesses of such an organization. Special emphasis should be placed in questioning how appropriate are current schemes to deal with changes (which might challenge long collegiate traditions) and/or long term institutional goals and purposes which require the articulated action of all schools or faculties..

- Central authorities of most universities are divided into academic (vice president for academic affairs) and administrative authorities (vice president for administrative affairs). In general, academic authorities set the academic goals and programs of the institution and administrative authorities study the feasibility of such programs and provide general support for the operation.

In the context of long term planning the relation between these central authorities should be revised critically. How well informed of economic restrictions are academic authorities? How involved are academic authorities in resource allocation within the institution? How well informed and sensitive are administrative authorities to academic priorities, the relevance of different programmes and academic strategies?

These questions and analyses should be carried to other levels of the organization (schools, departments, research units) in which academic and administrative problems have to be considered simultaneously in order to achieve proposed goals.

- Modern TEI are complex organizations, with large academic and support staff, dealing with budgets which have complicated cost structures. In general, decision making is not only a matter of managerial talent and strong leadership. Decisions are strongly based on accurate information concerning costs, efficiencies, outcomes, and process and resource indicators.

How well established and articulated are information systems (including academic and economical information) for managerial decisions is a key issue in modern planning and implementation of organization strategies. How competent is the planning support staff also determines the quality of decision processes. This includes different type of support units which provide planning, quality assurance and institutional research capabilities within the institution.

- Strategic planning in itself is a key instrument for decision making, thus several aspects have to be considered associated to this process:
 - Strategic Planning can be conducted as a top-down process in which institutional goals and strategies guide the academic units' specific strategies and goals. It can also work as a bottom-up process in which academic units establish their needs, guiding the construction of the institutional plan. Most probably the best solution is a combination of top-down guidance, followed by bottom-up specific implementation and feedback on institutional issues. The institution authorities should analyze what are the best alternatives for designing and implementing long term planning, which combine adequately participatory processes with academic leadership and institutional priorities, in order to build the correct consensus.
 - Strategic planning processes require an adequate balance between the formulation of desired academic goals and the economic restrictions within which such plans have to operate. How are Strategic Planning processes designed in order to combine adequately

- input from academic and administrative authorities is a key issue in determining useful long term planning.
- Strategic Planning processes should incorporate adequate managerial information which allow for proper definition of goals, strategies and actions.

6. Resources

The resources with which Strategic Planning should be mostly concerned can be classified in:

- Infrastructure : Buildings and laboratory facilities
- Laboratory equipment, both for teaching and when necessary, for research or services.
- Libraries, considering books and journal subscriptions, as well as online provision of documents.
- Information systems for teaching and research purposes which include:
 - Internet and intranet facilities
 - Teaching software platforms which facilitate instructor-student interaction, teaching material delivery, course administration.
 - Professional software in several fields mostly related with science and technology. .
 - Academic data bases and data acquisition systems
- Managerial information systems which integrate academic and administrative information concerning main processes in the institution.
- Support information systems.

Particularly concerning resources associated to academic processes it may be stated that below certain level in resources it will be very difficult to achieve acceptable quality levels. This may be the case concerning basic library, laboratory and information system facilities.

- The institution should consider in its strategic planning processes, objective methodologies to determine minimum requirements concerning physical resources for education (or research) purposes.

The application and use of these *minimum resources* to guarantee the quality of associated academic processes should be fairly evident. But above a certain level of physical resources, it may be stated that increments in quality associated to sophisticated resources, require special adjustments and design of academic processes. If such adjustments do not exist, expensive physical resources will have negligible impact in increasing the quality of academic processes.

- What mechanisms are used by the institution to guarantee that different physical resources are properly coupled with academic processes which really benefit from such resources?

Physical resource costs tend to be considered as investments when compared with clear operational costs, such as academic staff salaries. But when the

average lifetime of modern technologies and maintenance and replacement costs are taken into consideration, resource investment may be equivalent to an operational cost, if proper replacement policies are implemented. Thus it is important to analyze within long term planning:

- *What are the replacement policies of physical resources and how are they taken into account in projected budgets.* (The main concern here is that highly expensive resource investments are usually justified by arguing that they are “once in a lifetime” investment, when most probably this is not the case if the above considerations are taken into account)

While academic oriented resources are always considered a top priority (to the point that some strategic planning exercises end up in a list of desired physical resources), administrative oriented resources, such as information technologies may be relegated to a low priority. But, successful decision making processes (including strategic planning and its follow up procedures) are information based processes, which can be significantly improved if based in good information systems:

- How well equipped in terms of information technologies are the different directive units of the institution, and how well articulated are such information systems?

Palestinian TEIs should be very cautious concerning uncritical expenditure in physical resources for education. Beyond certain reasonably undisputed needs for physical facilities, costs can hardly be compensated in terms of efficiency and effectiveness of teaching learning processes. Information technologies provide a possible exception because of their high flexibility in terms of applications, which make them highly cost-efficient.

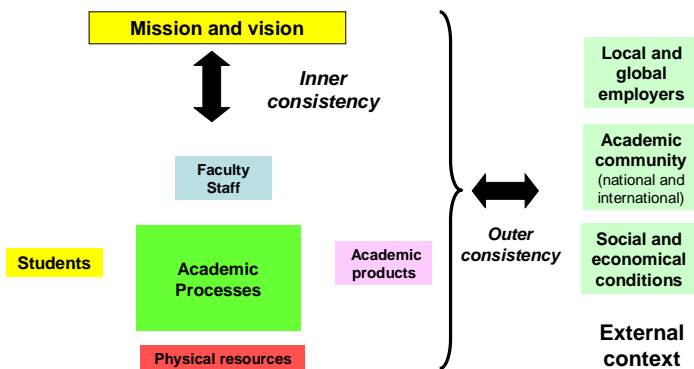
Other special considerations in the Palestinian present situation concerning physical resources are the following:

- Occupation conditions certainly increase service and maintenance costs of laboratory equipment. As mentioned above, some modern laboratory facilities have such a short average life time, that acquisition of these resources can hardly be considered isolated investments, and rather become operational costs. Under the present instability of operational budgets and taking into consideration other priorities such as academic staff costs, resource investments should be reviewed critically.
- General policies must be designed, enabling academic authorities to trace a clear boundary between what is indispensable and what is dispensable in terms of required physical resources for higher education.

B. STRATEGIC PLANNING DEVELOPMENT:

The operational definition of quality used in this Guidelines *relates quality to the degree in which the institution achieves internal an external consistency. Internal consistency* is related to the ability of the institution operation to respond to the priorities, purposes and approaches that come form its Mission statement in relation to the offered programs, research activities, and community services. *External consistency* is related to the ability of the institution to satisfy the context (regional and national) demands in tertiary education programs, research production and community service demands.

**Definition of quality:
Inner and outer consistency**



The last section has reviewed the main System Components of a Tertiary education Institution, drawing attention to special aspects which characterize those components. Such review has been very general and comprehensive and may be used to guide Strategic Planning processes.

In the following table (Table V.1) such review is summarized, considering prime actors, academic processes, and resources, and each of these system components is unfolded into a set of attributes of such systems which are critical in determining the nature and quality of the out coming products of the HEI. Such attributes will be called Quality Factors.

It is proposed in this document that quality factors presented in Table V.1 be used as the *language* in which Strategic Planning components (II.B.3) are expressed: Quality factors address specific issues which affect the degree to which a Tertiary education Institution is internally consistent with its mission

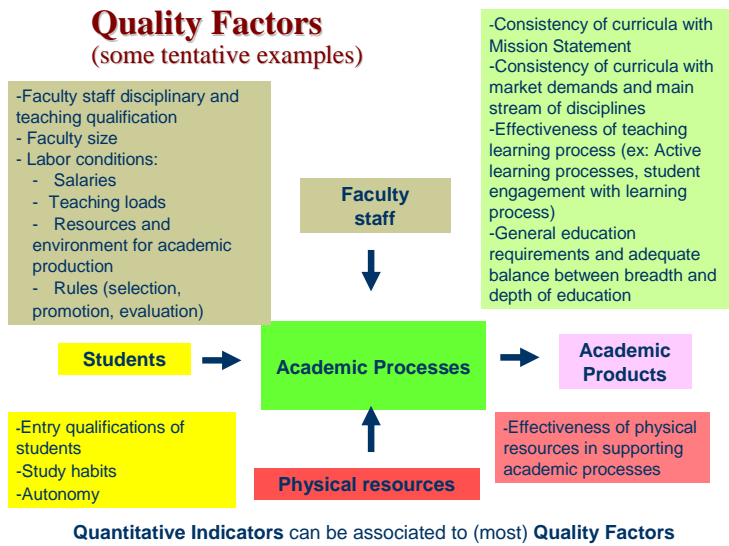
and/or externally consistent with its social demands, thus they can be used to express specific goals, strategies and actions which constitute the core of Strategic Planning.

Quality factors (unfortunately) do not operate as “independent variables” in planning process. On the contrary they are strongly coupled. For example, consider size of academic staff, teaching loads and average size of courses. This three quality factors cannot be set to different values in a completely independent way. This observation has to be kept in mind when quality factors are used for planning purposes.

TABLE V.1:

SYSTEM COMPONENTS	QUALITY FACTORS
PRIME ACTORS	
ACADEMIC STAFF	Size of academic staff Teaching Loads Critical mass for research production Rules and incentives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Selection,evaluation,promotion processes • Salaries • Incentives Disciplinary qualification Teaching qualification
STUDENTS	Admission procedures Career decision processes Work loads and autonomy Education support services
ACADEMIC PROCESSES	
CURRICULA	General education requirements Curricular components <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General education requirements • Science and humanities requirements • Profession requirements Breadth and depth of education Electivity Professional knowledge vs skills and competences Adequacy of programs to satisfy market demands
TEACHING LEARNING PROCESSES	Teaching practices and methodologies Student engagement Evaluation procedures Characteristics of secondary education Cost and efficiency of teaching learning processes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching loads • Size of courses • Drop out rates • Effective time for graduation

RESEARCH	<p>Governmental policies Local relevance International competitiveness International cooperation and networking Research costs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research stake holders • Resource investments • Operational costs • Teaching-research balance • Academic staff qualification processes
RESOURCES	
INFRASTRUCTURE	
LAB. RESOURCES	<p>Teaching oriented labs Research oriented labs</p>
LIBRARY	<p>Book libraries Journal libraries Data bases</p>
INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY	<p>Teaching and research oriented systems Managerial information systems</p>
DECISION MAKING PROCESSES	
GOVERNING LEVEL	<p>Level of autonomy of Schools in .Curricular design .Academic administration Mechanisms used to reach consensus in institutional goals and strategies Communication and articulation strategies between academic and administrative Authorities</p>
SUPPORT AND MANAGERIAL LEVEL	<p>Existence and mission of Planning and Quality Assesment units. Existence of Institutional Research practices concerning : .Efficiency of processes .Costs and cost-benefit analysis</p>
INFORMATION SYSTEMS	Existence of managerial information systems



The elements of strategic planning presented in II.B.3 unfold in to the following activities:

1. Construction of Indicators associated to quality factors

Most quality factors can be associated with sets of *quantitative indicators* and/or *descriptive (or qualitative) indicators*. There are indicators which are equivalent to quality factors (i.e. Size of Academic staff). There are others which can be easily constructed from quality factors (i.e. teaching load, which at least requires two indicators to characterize the quality factor, such as hours of teaching per week and size of courses). But there are other quality factors for which quantitative indicators may be an inadequate way of characterization (i.e. Selection, promotion and evaluation of academic staff). In this case a compact but precise description of the factor may be required as an indicator. In general, resources can be easily described with quantitative indicators, but processes tend to require descriptive indicators.

Whatever the proposed indicator for a given quality factor, it should satisfy a minimum requirement: It has to be adequate for characterizing the strengths or weaknesses of the institution associated to the considered factor.

An important step previous to other planning actions is that of agreeing on a set of basic indicators associated to quality factors. Constructing such indicators may be a revealing exercise in understanding the institution, within the Strategic Planning process.

2. Institutional SWOT analysis as a rationale for Strategic Planning

The key element for the development of the Strategic Plan will be the proposed institutional SWOT analysis (already presented in chapter II) which has to be developed within the framework of the *context SWOT analysis* previously conducted. By making use of the concept of quality factors, the institutional SWOT analysis can be defined in a fairly systematic way. The defining concepts of institutional SWOT analysis and strategic planning will be understood in these guidelines in the following way:

- *Strength and weaknesses* are qualifiers which can be associated to quality factors for a given institution. The set of agreed indicators, once evaluated should make it possible to determine the strengths and weakness of the institution. If such exercise is carried systematically for a complete set of quality factors, then this core process of *institutional SWOT analysis* should reveal a very specific and useful characterization of the institution.
- *Strategies* can be expressed in terms of actions which affect certain sets of quality factors. In general terms, *strategies can be defined as sets of actions designed to overcome institutional weakness and take advantage of existing strengths*. Such strategies must take into consideration the general constraints established in the *context SWOT analysis*.
- *Opportunities and threats* (associated to SWOT analysis) can be understood as a characterization of the institutional *positive and negative conditions in which the future plans have to be conducted*. Such conditions are strongly affected by the local and global context (detected in the context SWOT) but also by prevailing conditions within the institutions. *Threats* more specifically can be identified with the concept of “restriction” of the optimization process with which strategic planning can be identified (as proposed in II.B.3).

By considering simultaneously the concepts of *quality factor, strengths, weaknesses and restrictions* associated to such quality factors, and detected through agreed *indicators*, a clear and systematic rationale for strategic planning can be conducted.

The proposed elements of strategic planning guided by SWOT analysis can be unfolded in a number of stages:

3. First approximation at institutional level

This stage is essentially intended to have the “big picture” of the majority of concepts, variables and restrictions involved in Strategic Planning for quality improvement. This first run can be carried at an institutional level involving

the Academic Council (President, Vicepresidents and Deans) and Planning and Quality Units.

- ⊖ For each system component and quality factor a *base line* can be established in terms of strengths and weaknesses of such factor characterized with the aid of the agreed indicators.
- ⊖ A *tentative expected state* can be formulated following from general Vision considerations. Such tentative expected state can be constructed by proposing a *consistent* set of changes in quality factors (strategies), which point in the direction of the proposed Vision. These changes can be considered as an unfolding of strategic planning goals. Certainly, changes in quality factors produce changes in the configuration of the whole system, and thus in the nature of the products. Since quality factors are not independent, only certain combinations of such factors are possible. This is what is called a *consistent set of quality factors*.
- ⊖ *Tentative strategies and actions* should be proposed to achieve such consistent effect on quality factors. It will readily be noticed that coupling among quality factors strongly limits possible goals and actions.

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Once this first run is carried out it will be evident among the academic and administrative involved authorities, that planning is being carried on a very specific, down to earth domain, and not as a general ethereal methodology.

Table V.2 shows schematically these *first steps* in Strategic Planning

TABLE V.2:

	SYSTEM COMPONENTS	QUALITY FACTORS	PRESENT STATE	EXPECTED STATE	TENTATIVE ACTIONS
PRIME ACTORS	Academic staff				
	Students				
ACADEMIC PROCESSES	Curricula				
	Teaching-learning				
	Research				
RESOURCES	Infrastructure				
	Laboratories				
	Library				
	Financial res.				
DECISION MAKING PROCESSES					

4. First approximation at academic unit level

Quality factors, present and expected states, and tentative actions, need to *gain the specificity of the academic units (faculty and department level)*, but it is convenient that such process is preceded by an initial framework. Such framework is set in the first approximation at institutional level described in the last section. A (partially) top down approach is proposed for strategic planning in this document in order to avoid an “incommensurate” set of very local purposes.

5. Cost estimates and feasible scenarios

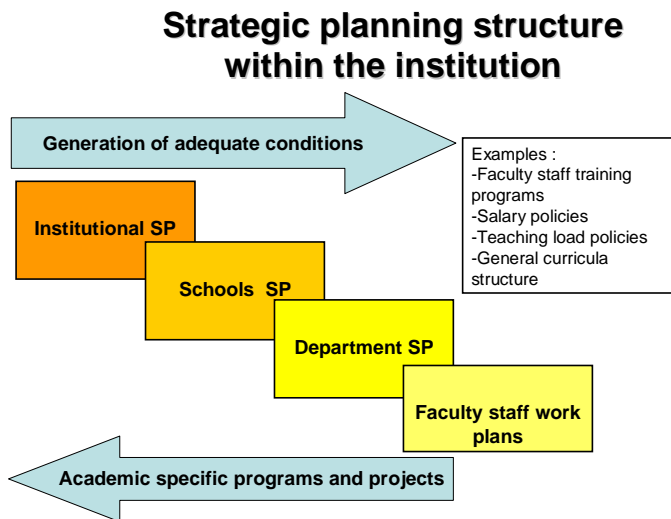
Each new set of consistent, proposed quality factors, determine a different university configuration. Achieving such configuration requires *actions* (derived from strategies) which have *investment costs*, and the new configurations will determine new *operational costs*. Investment and operational costs, restrict the feasibility of proposed actions and configurations (or expected states). These costs should have a first estimate. Thus, now we have a set of possible new states (unfolded into quality factors) and a set of associated investment and operational costs. This couple (states and costs) we will call proposed *scenarios*. Only a certain subset of the proposed scenarios is economically feasible, arriving then to a set of *feasible scenarios*. Quality of products associated to each scenario cannot be measured or estimated in a completely accurate, precise and quantitative way. Thus we cannot establish a quantitative cost benefit analysis which could allow institution authorities to decide easily among different planning routes. What we do have is a set of qualified scenarios.

6. Refinement approach to planning

Strategic Planning is a refinement process. There is no single “best plan” which can be conceived in a single run (unless there are unlimited resources, in which case no strategic planning is required). Steps 3 through 5 should be executed several times, each time with better information and arguments, better established goals, strategies and actions, and less alternatives.

A refinement approach, that is, breaking the planning problem into smaller problems (quality factors), ordering steps in top down schemes, allowing different levels of the institution to consider the global and local issues, establishing indicators, exhibiting costs of proposed actions, and systematically comparing options (scenarios), has the unique purpose of helping to build a *consensus on priorities based on a fully informed and participatory process*.

Each iteration is a top-down process, but the fact that several steps are considered makes this iterative process a combination of top-down and bottom up planning strategies, allowing simultaneously for the benefits of leadership and participatory processes.



7. Dynamic planning: Resource availability and process optimization

The more structure is built up in the design of goals, strategies and actions the better understanding of proposed scenarios, deriving on more appropriate elements for decision making. In this section some elements are recommended to enhance the strategic planning process.

Quality factors can be classified in two clearly differentiated families:

- Factors related to resources (human, technological, infrastructure) of the institution. We will call these factors *resource quality factors*.
- Factors related to how the academic and administrative processes are carried out. We will call these *process quality factors*.

Associated to this classification we have differentiated families of strategies and actions:

- Resource dependent strategies and actions which affect resource quality factors.
- Process dependent strategies and actions which affect process quality factors.

- Combined strategies in which resources and processes are affected simultaneously.

Perhaps the most common situation is that of combined strategies in which certain resources are required to conduct required processes. In these guidelines we will classify as process dependent strategies those which do not require new resources to be implemented. It is almost impossible to conceive process strategies which require absolutely no previous resources, but when they are based on already existing resources they may be considered in a different category than those which require new resources, given the differences in costs required to conduct them.

Resource dependent strategies are fairly obvious to identify, and usually imply *large investments*. *Process dependent strategies* are not obvious to identify, design or implement and they usually have *lower investment costs* associated, *once the correct resources are available*. But *new operational cost may be associated to these strategies*.

It can be clearly stated that below certain level of resources, reasonable quality standards are very difficult to achieve. Less evident but most probably true, it can be stated that above certain level of resources, increments in quality standards may be more sensible to process dependent strategies than to resource dependents strategies. Planning may tend to concentrate all efforts in resource issues, reducing the result of planning to a list of required resources, and the strategies to a matter of fund raising. This path strongly restricts the possibility of other cost-effective long term actions, associated to academic and administrative processes.

Once it is recognized that planning for quality can conveniently be designed as a combination of resource dependent strategies and process dependent strategies, the general setting of the long term planning can be devised in a dynamic way, sensible enough to uncertainties and instabilities present in the Palestinian context:

As illustrated in the following diagram the driving forces in planning for quality can be summarized in *resource availability* and *process optimization*. Guided by these two “forces” a dynamic and adaptive planning scheme can be implemented.

- Certain sets of available *basic resources* (basic academic staff with basic qualifications; basic infrastructure and educational support services) allow to launch demanded academic programs (undergraduate or technical programs, and basic community services). New resources may open the possibility of growth of available programs or the launching of new programs.

- Existing programs can be *optimized* in many ways, demanding moderate operational costs and very limited new resources. Optimization here can be understood in two senses: *increasing efficiency of processes* by achieving the same goals with less resources or increasing the quality standards by improving current practices.

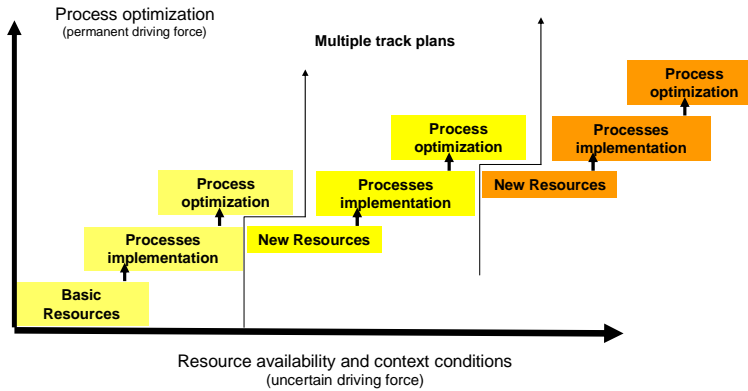
The interactive use of new resources and optimization processes is the backbone of sustained quality improvement programs. Following this rationale, long term planning implementation breaks into a multiple track process in which there is a *permanent* driving force: *optimization*; and an *uncertain* driving force, *resources*.

Even in the absence of important new resources, important process dependent strategies can be launched without delay once they are properly designed. Depending on the quality of the design of such strategies, they may well be as effective or even more effective in affecting the quality of education, as other more conventional but expensive alternatives.

If planning is conceived in this way there is no single non modifiable long term plan. There are a set of possible tracks activated by resource availability and the capacity of the institution to design and implement permanent optimization processes for existing programs. The activities described in previous sections (construction of indicators (*supra* 1), SWOT analysis at institutional and academic units level (*supra* 2, 3, 4), cost analysis and feasible scenarios (*supra* 5), planning refinement (*supra* 6)) give the correct framework and foundations to set the appropriate institutional guidelines which allow to carry a dynamical implementation of plans as proposed in this section. If these steps (*supra* 1 to 6) are not carried out, dynamical planning will be replaced by trivial operational planning. Dynamical planning has to analyse the institution globally but react locally in time.

As follows from the previous proposal, dynamic planning only gains permanency if there has been build a strong capacity for appropriately designing institutional programs and projects capable of transforming common academic or administrative practices into more efficient and effective practices

Dynamic Planning Strategy



Self assessment provides an analysis of the baseline, identifying the main strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats; it also provides information on possible strategies, and on their relative value and feasibility. Strategic planning then makes use of these outcomes in order to select the best strategies and actions, and develops indicators to measure success. Self assessment, at a later stage, is the way to learn what was achieved, and the reason for what failed to happen.

Self assessment should also serve to establish the priorities in the successive launching of the different components of the multi-track strategic plan.

VI. FUNDING PROPOSALS FOR SELF ASSESSMENT AND STRATEGIC PLANNING

A. PREPARING PROPOSALS FOR FUNDING

The Tertiary Education Project (TEP) in Palestine includes funding for the development and establishment of organizational and managerial mechanisms which will allow for the efficient implementation of national and institutional policies. These funds have a capacity building objective, and therefore, are open to all tertiary education institutions in Palestine. This of course does not mean that all proposals will be funded, but rather that assistance will be provided to those institutions that may need it in order to help them prepare sound proposals, which can assure a reasonable expectation of their effective use. Tertiary education institutions are thus invited to present projects focused either on the implementation of self assessment and strategic planning processes or on the outcomes of these processes. The following guidelines are intended to help institutions to apply for funding. They also provide information on the development of adequate terms of reference and evaluation procedures.

1. General concepts for preparing proposals

Funds are in place to be distributed to potential beneficiaries and it is important to ensure that the resources provided will be used in an effective and efficient manner.

Therefore, the written proposal must provide, in a concise and clear way, information showing that the proposed project is in accordance with the objectives of the fund, that it is reasonable to expect that the project's purposes will be achieved, that the methodology and activities proposed are consistent both with the stated purposes and the resources requested, and that all this will be completed within a given time frame and with the specified resources.

2. Steps for preparing a proposal

The first step is to become familiar with the terms of reference of the fund. This seems obvious, but many proposals are not accepted, not because they were not interesting, or relevant, or well written, but because they did not address the issues that were covered by the specific fund to which they were presented. Therefore, it is essential to learn about the objectives of the fund, the type of projects it addresses, the categories of expenses that are eligible or acceptable. In many cases, it will be necessary to combine different sources of funds, since one fund may consider some necessary expenses not eligible. This is not a problem if there are other funding sources available to which

application can be made; if there are none, it is sometimes possible to use institutional funds and apply them as counterparts.

The second step is to decide on the problem that will be addressed by the project. The self assessment and strategic planning processes described in these guidelines address this issue: through them it is possible to identify the desired situation in a given area, as well as the current situation, and then analyse possible strategic paths to cover the distance between the two. Self assessment and strategic planning will provide a clear picture of the problem to be solved, the possible cause/effect relationships and the alternatives for action.

Then there are basic decisions to be made: is this to be a proposal presented by one institution, or by one or more partners? It is much easier to write a proposal for one institution, but in many cases, especially when problems are shared with other institutions, partnerships may greatly increase the effectiveness of the project, as well as providing an element of support which may be hard to find within only one institution.

Finally, the proposal must be translated into a project. There are many methodologies for writing proposals. One of the most commonly used, because of its simple and yet complete structure, is that of the Logical Framework. A short review of it is provided here, but there are many sources that can be consulted if there is a need for further information.

3. The logical framework¹³

The logical framework is a design methodology intended to organize the components of a project, based on a thorough process of identification of a specific problem. As stated before, the projects covered under this programme should focus either on the implementation of self assessment and strategic planning processes or on the outcomes of these processes.

¹³ For further information, see:

- www.kar-dht.org/logframe.html#Sum;
- www.gdrc.org/ngo/logical-fa.pdf;
- BOND Guidance Notes, Series 1. Beginner's Guide to Logical Framework Analysis <http://www.bond.org.uk/ite/guidancenotes/logframes1.html>
- Designing Projects and Project Evaluations Using The Logical Framework Approach. Bill Jackson <http://www.iucn.org/themes/eval/english/lfa.htm>
- AusGUIDELines: The logical framework approach <http://www.aisaid.gov.au/ausguide/ausguidelines/1.cfm>
- The Logical Framework <http://www.ehrfoundation.org/Logframe.htm>
- UNESCO Institute for Education's E-learning for Literacy course for developers and practitioners <http://www.literacyexchange.net>

The logical framework, thus, is translated into a document, further described below, which brings together in one place a statement of all the key components of a project, and presents them in a systematic, concise and coherent way, thus clarifying and exposing the logic of how the project is expected to work.

The logical framework document is also helpful in that it separates the various levels in the hierarchy of objectives, helping to ensure that inputs and outputs are not confused with each other or with objectives and that wider ranging objectives are not overlooked; it also clarifies the relationships which underlie judgments about likely efficiency and effectiveness of projects and identifies the main factors related to the success of the project.

Such a framework also provides a basis for monitoring and evaluation by identifying indicators of success, and the means of quantification or assessment.

i. The logical framework document¹⁴

The logical Framework as a document is deceptively simple. There are 16 cells in a four column by four row matrix. To provide the text in the cells of the logframe (sometimes called the project matrix) the project designers are asked to address and answer a number of questions which, on the surface, seem self evident. However, articulating the answers to these apparently self evident questions exposes many unstated assumptions and hypotheses.

The process of examining these unstated beliefs should cause them to be questioned more closely during the design of the project. This examination often reveals that the assumptions and hypotheses are often questionable. If the assumptions and hypotheses are tested and the results of the work related to the project design, a higher quality design will be achieved. This has also been referred to in the Guidelines as the iterations within the strategic planning process.

The matrix has been filled in with an explanation of each term. It should be noted that the two middle cells in the Activities row do not deal with indicators, because the activities are assessed through the achievement of the outputs. These are spare cells that may be used to show the needed inputs for the project, budgeting and the use of the resources for reporting.

¹⁴ See <http://lgausa.com/logframdoc.htm>

<p>Narrative summary</p> <p>Defines the project structure, and narrates the project, explaining the way in which the different categories of objectives are linked, and distinguishing clearly the different components of the project.</p>	<p>Objectively verifiable indicators:</p> <p>These are the measures, direct or indirect, that will verify to what extent the objectives have been fulfilled. The term "objectively" implies that if these should be specified in a way that as far as possible is free of bias on the part of the observer.</p>	<p>Means of verification</p> <p>These statements specify sources of the information for the measurements or verification specified in the indicators column. For example, will statistics from an external source be used for the verification or will project resources be used to gather the statistics</p>	<p>External factors:</p> <p>These are important events, conditions, or decisions which are outside the control of the project, but which must remain favourable for the project objective to be attained. The implication here is the design team has an obligation to consider what might derail their efforts and to plan responsibly to reduce that risk of "derailment".</p>
<p>Goal:</p> <p>The wider problem the project will help solve. The project alone may not be able to achieve it, but it must make a contribution.</p>	<p>Quantitative ways of measuring or qualitative ways of judging timed achievement of the goal (What evidence can be provided to show that the goal has been achieved)</p>	<p>Cost effective methods and sources to quantify or assess indicators.</p> <p>(What method will be used to provide the evidence mentioned in the previous cell)</p>	<p>Goal:</p> <p>External factors necessary to sustain objectives in the long run</p> <p>(What assumptions we are making regarding factors that may interfere with achieving the goal)</p>
<p>Purpose: Immediate impact on the project area or target group (change or benefit to be achieved)</p>	<p>Quantitative ways of measuring or qualitative ways of judging timed achievement of the purpose</p> <p>(What evidence can be provided to show that the purpose has been achieved)</p>	<p>Cost effective methods and sources to quantify or assess indicators</p> <p>(What method will be used to provide the evidence mentioned in the previous cell)</p>	<p>Purpose to goal:</p> <p>External conditions necessary if achieved purpose is to contribute to reaching project goal</p> <p>(What measures will be taken to make sure that the necessary conditions will be in place, or that the adverse conditions are minimized)</p>
<p>Outputs:</p> <p>Specifically deliverable results expected from the project to attain the purpose</p>	<p>Quantitative ways of measuring or qualitative ways of judging timed achievement of the outputs (What evidence can be provided to show that the outputs have been achieved)</p>	<p>Cost effective methods and sources to quantify or assess indicators</p> <p>(What method will be used to provide the evidence mentioned in the previous cell)</p>	<p>Output to purpose:</p> <p>Factors out of project control which, if present, could restrict progress from outputs to achieving project purpose (How will we get around those factors if present, or how will we ascertain that they are not present)</p>
<p>Activities:</p> <p>Tasks to be carried out to produce outputs</p>	<p>Inputs:</p> <p>These are the resources that the project "consumes" in the course of undertaking the activities. Typically they will be human resources, money,</p>	<p>Report:</p> <p>Final report as agreed in grant agreement</p>	<p>Activities to outputs:</p> <p>Factors out of project control which, if present, could restrict progress from activities to achieving project outputs.</p> <p>(How will we make sure</p>

	materials, equipment, and time.		that the activities will lead to proposed outputs)
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Section B.3 (Contents of the projects) contains a description of the way in which the actual written proposal should be presented.

ii. An example

In the following section, an example of a filled in matrix is provided.

Narrative summary	Objectively verifiable indicators:	Means of verification	External factors:
Goal: Improve the quality of management in Palestinian TE	Evidence of information based decision making at different levels of institutional leadership	Reports and minutes from decision making instances Institutional strategic plans Information from AQAC on the implementation of information based decision making processes	Goal: Incentives must be provided to institutional managers to maintain their interest in a professionalized managerial capacity. The quality of management must be considered a significant aspect of institutional accreditation
Purpose: Develop a management information system for the institution on teaching and learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ One senior academic appointed in charge of institutional research activities ▪ Two academic staff trained in IR processes ▪ Quick and effective availability of consistent information on teaching and learning to institutional leaders; ▪ Required information provided in previously determined reasonable times 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Record of training and appointments ▪ Report on training of staff ▪ Statistics on requests and provision of information ▪ Reports from institutional leaders ▪ Minutes or reports from IR unit 	Purpose to goal: Managers must be involved in the development of quality criteria, and technical support must be provided to TEIs in order to be able to develop adequate information systems Need to develop a culture of information based decision making
Outputs: Have completed, compatible databases on the teaching and learning process, useable for decision making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A clear set of performance indicators on teaching and learning, with common, agreed upon definitions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reports from IR department ▪ Evidence on the existence and use of the database 	Output to purpose: Work must be carried out within the TE system in order to agree on the definitions for significant performance indicators. National statistics must be

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Compatible databases on register and admissions, human resources and finance •Databases with information from the last three years on the selected indicators 		provided in order to feed the database with relevant data Resources for maintenance and support of the databases
Activities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Identify the main stakeholders that will be involved in the project ▪ Work with stakeholders in the identification of significant performance indicators ▪ Gather information from the TE system on the definition of main indicators ▪ Gather relevant information on the last three years ▪ Build the database ▪ Feed the database 	Inputs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Training on IR for the staff ▪ Technical staff ▪ Software / hardware ▪ Training for technical staff 	Report:	Activities to outputs: Delays in getting relevant indicators from the different academic units within the institution Lack of technical staff to work on the design of the database

B. TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR PRESENTING PROPOSALS¹⁵

1. Categories for funding

Applications presented by TEIs should adhere to one or more of the following categories:

1. Increase the institutional capacity for self assessment and/or strategic planning
2. Organize and develop institutional self assessment processes leading to the identification of the main aspects that should be taken into consideration in a strategic planning exercise
3. Develop a strategic planning exercise based on the outcomes of a self assessment process
4. Address the main weaknesses or areas for development identified through the self assessment or strategic planning processes

¹⁵ The following are general Terms of Reference. AQAC will provide institutions with specific ToR for each category for funding.

5. Implement the main strategies or actions designed to achieve the institution's goals established through the strategic planning processes.

The contents in each category may be derived from the Guidelines for Self Assessment and Strategic Planning developed for this program.

As may be inferred, these categories follow a certain sequence: Category 1 is intended to help institutions develop conditions that will make it possible for them to carry out self assessment exercises or be involved in a strategic planning process. Categories 2 and 3 are meant to support the actual development of these processes within TEIs; in order to apply for these categories, institutions should have in place some of the basic conditions mentioned in the guidelines for carrying out viable self assessment exercises or strategic planning processes.

Categories 4 and 5 are reserved for those institutions which have already carried out either self assessment or strategic planning processes, and they must provide evidence of their outcomes and the way in which they underlie the project.

Institutions may submit proposals that cover more than one category; in order to do so, they must explain clearly the way in which these categories are linked and their ability to carry out the processes involved.

2. Eligibility of the projects

All tertiary institutions (including universities and technical & university colleges) in the West Bank and Gaza which are licensed and accredited by the MOEHE are eligible to present projects, but only the projects that meet the conditions stated below are eligible to receive funds under this program.

- Projects must be presented within the general framework of institutional development plans, which must include (i) an institutional mission statement; (ii) a management improvement plan; (iii) enrolment and staffing projections; and (iv) Statements of past and projections of future financial performance.
- Projects may be presented by one institution on its own, or by a group of institutions. Joint projects are encouraged when dealing with issues where economies of scale are present (such as training processes, the development of information systems, the hiring of foreign consultants), where joint efforts provide better opportunities for success or where the development of collaborative practices among TEIs is one of the expected outcomes.

In addition, institutions must fulfill the following conditions:

- Have a focal point for quality assurance purposes and for both internal coordination and external liaison relative to quality assessment and improvement activities, including institutional and program accreditation, as stated in the eligibility requirements for the QIF. They must also show explicit commitment with the implementation of quality assurance policies and mechanisms within the institution.
- Have in place the necessary mechanisms to provide the Ministry of Education and Higher Education with basic academic information regarding their programs and activities, and to monitor the implementation of the proposed project.
- Have in place or be willing to establish (through the project or other initiatives) adequate self assessment and strategic planning mechanisms.
- Appoint the Directors of the projects and their deputies.
- In the case of joint projects, appoint an Executive Committee who will be responsible for the inter-institutional decisions on the main implementation policies and the use of the funds allocated to the project.
- It is highly recommended that institutions appoint an advisory board with members external to the institution, to provide technical support and global orientations on the issues covered by the project.
- Assure the effective operation of an Institutional Coordination Unit¹⁶, charged with the administration of the project(s), the timely and adequate coordination between the institution(s) and the Ministry of Higher Education, and the implementation of administrative procedures for procurement, financial statements, monitoring and evaluation of progress and achievements of the project(s) and contribute to the adequate follow up of the projects by the MoHE.
- Provide in their institutional websites an updated report on the progress of the project(s), in order to ensure appropriate transparency and follow up.

3. Contents of the projects

Projects presented under this component may refer to the establishment of the necessary conditions for self assessment (such as training of academic and administrative staff, the implementation of information systems, the development of an institutional research capability), to the implementation of institutional self assessment exercises, to the development of strategic planning within the institution, to the implementation of specific portions of the strategic planning process or to the implementation of improvement

¹⁶ These institutional coordinating units may be a special function of the Quality Units already existing in all universities and most colleges. In this case, they will probably need to be supported in terms of human and financial resources in order to carry out these tasks.

actions or strategies identified through the self assessment and/or the strategic planning exercises.

They may also present proposals that combine different contents, provided they meet the requirements mentioned in section B.1 (Categories for funding).

Projects presented for categories 1, 4 and 5 should be completed in six months; nevertheless, in special cases, institutions may present proposals for a longer period of time, providing appropriate justification, and not exceeding nine months. Projects under categories 2 and 3 should be completed in one year, and extensions up to 15 months may be granted, if appropriately justified.

Project applications must include the following information:

1. Formal acceptance of the terms of reference and conditions for the application
2. Narrative summary of the project, which translates the logical framework matrix into a text. Sections in this text should consider at least:
 - Identification of the Director of the project and his/her deputy, the institutional coordinating unit (quality unit) and the advisory board when appropriate.
 - An explanation of the goals, purposes and outputs, indicating the rationale that links them and the underlying hypotheses. This provides the justification for the project.
 - A description of the objectively verifiable indicators that will be used, and the sources or means of verification for the indicators. A word of caution here: Indicators stated in the matrix have to be achieved if the project is to be considered satisfactory. It is important to be realistic, and work towards a definition of useful and viable indicators, that effectively point towards the achievement of the respective goal, purpose or output. The means of verification must also be clear, so that indicators are readily available once the project has been completed.
 - An analysis of the external factors that may put the success of the project at risk. This means taking into account the external factors that may affect the satisfactory completion of the project, and also the assumptions or the measures that the design team envisions to counteract them.
3. A description of the activities of the project. These should include the methodology that will be followed, the inputs required for the effective implementation of the project and the required resources. For most of these aspects, the funding agency will provide specific forms.
4. Work plan, specifying intermediate goals and timetable of the project
5. A detailed budget for the project, clearly identifying institutional counterpart funds, project funding and, when necessary, other sources of funding.
6. The logical framework matrix.
7. A description of the management and coordination units of the project, stating the respective obligations and responsibilities of the different parties. In the case of joint projects, this description extends to all partners, as well as the project coordinator.

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8. Evidence of any quality assurance processes undergone by the participating institution(s) and of the outcome of other projects funded under this program.
9. Information on the sustainability of the project outcomes.

4. Eligible categories of expense

The program will fund the following categories of expense:

- International consultants and visiting scholars
- Local consultants
- Local internships
- Local training
- Technical assistance¹⁷
- Equipment
- Technical journals and books
- Operations and maintenance

Project funds may not be used for:

- Construction or renovation of buildings
- Paying persons concurrently paid by the government
- Contributing to the endowment or general fund of a tertiary institution
- Student financial aid

5. Evaluation criteria

The main criteria for evaluation will focus on the expected benefits of the projects, and their viability, based on the variables described below.

Benefits will be assessed based on the pertinent variables from the following list:

- Verifiable links of the project with policy guidelines of the MoEHE
- Improvement of the institution's ability to carry out effective self assessment in order to start strategic planning processes.
- Improvement of the institution's ability to develop effective strategic plans to improve their quality and relevance within the Palestinian and regional context
- Effective and efficient implementation of improvement plans derived from self assessment processes

¹⁷ Technical assistance includes but is not limited to consultancy, and therefore, is considered separately. It is meant to strengthen the capacity of TEIs in both human and institutional resources to design and implement programmes for improving quality. It may be provided in a wide variety of ways, including the placement of experts or advisors for limited periods of time, technical and diagnostic studies, training courses, seminars, workshops or on-line advice and support.

- Effective and efficient implementation of the strategies and actions identified through strategic planning processes
- Implementation of institutional conditions necessary for the adequate implementation of self assessment and/or strategic planning processes
- Improvement of the management capacity of institutions
- Consistency of the objectives, activities and outcomes of the project with institutional, national and regional development priorities, and the public interest
- Improvement of academic indicators of effectiveness and efficiency, such as rates of retention, graduation, time to completion of the course of study.
- Introduction and/or promotion of collaborative practices among tertiary education institutions in Palestine
- Replicability of the project in other TEIs
- Establishment of opportunities for coordination, integration or articulation both inside the TEI and with other institutions in the country or abroad

Viability will be assessed on the basis of the pertinent variables in the following list:

- Verifiable links of the project with the institution's mission and goals
- Consistency of the project with program accreditation results and/or institutional self assessment outcomes
- Clarity and adequate definition of objectives
- Consistency between the project objectives and the proposed strategies, actions and use of resources
- Consistency between the project and the existing resources in the institution
- Quality and effectiveness of the monitoring mechanisms for the progress of the project
- Future sustainability of the project
- Adequacy and quality of the proposed outcomes indicators

Projects will be assessed against these criteria. The AQAC Board will review each proposal, and if necessary, will propose amendments to the proposals in order to improve them. In the case of proposals that do not meet these criteria, they will be considered “pre-proposals” and will be assigned specialized support in order to develop them to an acceptable level, and thus be eligible for funding.

6. Project follow up and implementation

Projects will be monitored by the AQAC Board, based on a review of proposed activities, achievement of the project objectives, financial management and procurement procedures.

Follow up will include the review of periodic reports prepared by beneficiary institutions, plus site visits and/or external consultancies if considered necessary.

Institutions must provide at least a mid term report, plus other reports if necessary considering the project schedule.

Disbursement will follow an agreed upon schedule, based on the project proposal. In any case, funding is subject to compliance with the necessary reports or other conditions established in the contract between the MoEHE and the institution. The MoEHE may suspend all disbursements if it considers that the institution is not fulfilling its commitments in a satisfactory and timely manner. This suspension will remain until activities, objectives or deadlines have been re-programmed to the satisfaction of the MoEHE.