Procedural Guidelines
for Initial Licensure

2011

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Licensure in the United Arab Emirates is institutional (as distinguished from programmatic) in nature and applies to the entire institution of higher education. It is the process by which an institution is recognized and authorized to provide regular, theoretical, practical or applied curricula of one academic year or longer beyond the UAE Secondary School Certification (or the equivalent) that leads to a certificate, a diploma, or an academic degree (associate, baccalaureate, graduate).   Without licensure and authorization from the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (Ministry), an institution cannot award certificates, diplomas or academic degrees.

All of the institutional and programmatic policies of the Commission for Academic Accreditation (referred to as the CAA or the Commission) operate on the principle of integrity.   Integrity in the accreditation context is best understood as involving an open process of peer review, including that of applying professional judgment and the conscientious application of the *Standards for Licensure and Accreditation*. An institution is expected to be transparent in all of its transactions with the Commission, and with students, the academic and larger communities served, and all its stakeholders. Evidence of withholding information, providing inaccurate information, failing to provide timely and accurate information to the Commission, and other similar practices, will be seen as the lack of full commitment to integrity. Evidence of submitting material that is not substantially original to the institution and the work of the institution's officers or employees (including contract employees), shows a lack of commitment to integrity. Failure of an institution to adhere to the principle of integrity may result in a denial of the application for Initial Licensure.

The licensure process is managed, on behalf of the Ministry, by the Commission for Academic Accreditation. More information on the CAA is found on the website: (http://www.caa.ae). The flowchart in *Figure 1* of this document outlines the Initial Licensure process.

Throughout the process of applying for Initial Licensure, institutions are encouraged to work with the Commission staff. After initial contact with the Commission, the Director will designate a Commissioner who will serve as liaison through the process. While the Commission can assist an institution with the licensure process, the burden of fulfilling the requirements for Initial Licensure falls on the applicant institution.

The licensure process includes both Initial Licensure and Renewal of Licensure. Although both Initial Licensure and Renewal of Licensure have the goal of licensure for an institution, the processes require different documentation as support for the application. The *Procedural Guidelines* (*Guidelines)* in this document are for Initial Licensure only. For the Renewal of Licensure, please consult the *Procedural Guidelines for Renewal of Licensure*. Once Initial Licensure is approved, the CAA will establish a timetable for subsequent Renewal of Licensure with applicable deadlines.

The licensure process is only one of the ways through which the CAA and the Ministry provide Quality Assurance for post-secondary education in the UAE. The standards, policies, and procedures adopted by the Commission which enable Higher Education Institutions to be established and to operate are designed to promote high quality institutions and to assure prospective students, their families, employers, and other interested parties that licensed institutions meet standards of quality consistent with current international practice and professional judgment.

Licensed institutions are expected to demonstrate that they adhere to standards of performance covering all aspects of institutional operations, including academic life and student life, and follow principles of evidence-based continuous improvement including evidence of student learning.

In order to be licensed, the institution must submit appropriate documentation which covers all major institutional activities. A discussion of these documents is included below in Appendix A.   The Initial Licensure process, by its nature, requires an institution to document that it has the capacity to offer quality programs of study.

In addition to Initial Licensure or the Renewal of Licensure, processes which are applicable to entire institutions and which involve institution-wide issues, the CAA also accredits individual degree programs. *Procedural Guidelines* for Initial Accreditation and the Renewal of the Accreditation of programs are published separately. Only after being granted Initial Licensure, may an institution apply for Initial Accreditation of an academic program. Initial Accreditation of an academic program **must** be obtained before the institution may advertise that program and recruit and enroll students.

The rules and regulations governing both institutional licensure and program accreditation operate in the context of published *Standards for Licensure and Accreditation [2011 edition]*. For a copy of the latest edition of the *Standards for Licensure and Accreditation*, consult the CAA website (http://www.caa.ae) or contact the Commission for Academic Accreditation at P.O. Box 45133, Abu Dhabi, UAE.

Application for Initial Licensure: Outline of Content

The following items are expected as part of the Application for Initial Licensure:

- A letter of application [usually from the Chief Executive, President or Chancellor or his/her designee] requesting licensure through the Commission for Academic Accreditation. The Commission considers only one campus of a proposed multi-campus institution at a time and requires a period of at least one year between the opening of two separate locations

- Documentation that the proposed institution has the approval of the relevant authority in the Emirate in which the institution is to be located. This might, for example, be issued from the Abu Dhabi Education Council or a comparable body from one of the other Emirates, but specifically from the Emirate in which the campus will be located

- Documentation of security clearance

- Application form for Initial Licensure [available on the CAA website]

- Four hard and electronic copies of the following documents:

  - Feasibility Study including a statement of financial resources
  - Financial Guarantee
  - By-Laws of the Governing Organization [unless included in the *Policies and Procedures Manual*]
  - Site approval and architectural plan
  - Timed Action Plan
  - Organization Chart
  - Policies and Procedures Manual comprising all institutional policies
  - Quality Assurance Manual
  - Catalog
  - Student Handbook
  - Faculty/Staff Handbook

Note: See Appendix A for descriptions of the documents required by the CAA. Incomplete applications or applications without the required documentation will be returned without comment by the Commission.

Deadlines for the Submission of Applications for Initial Licensure

An institution applying for Initial Licensure should be aware of the following timetable for review of an application:

- Applications must be submitted at least nine months prior to the intended start of an accredited program; the Commission will typically initiate the initial licensure review as soon as possible after the receipt of an application.

- Given that there are often required responses after an initial licensure review, the total amount of time from application to the completion of licensure may be extended depending on the speed with which the institution responds to any follow up queries. Typically the initial review may take two months.

- The institution is responsible for monitoring deadlines related to initial licensure.

Procedure for Submission of the Application

- The institution should meet with a member of the Commission staff.

- The institution should submit any additional documentation required by the Commission and/or submit revised versions of the basic documents such that all documentation conforms to the *Standards.*

- The institution should arrange, with the Commissioner assigned to assist with the licensure, for an on-site inspection of the temporary or permanent facility for the proposed institution. The on-site inspection should include offices, classrooms, laboratories, the library and any spaces which the institution will use to offer instruction and to serve students. If the initial site is temporary and if plans for a permanent site are underway, the institution should involve the architect commissioned to design the permanent site in the visit.

Tips for the Submission of Applications

- Submit materials in spiral bound or hard bound format. Do not send notebooks.

- Be sure to number pages.

- Include a Table of Contents for each document.

- Electronic copies may be either a CD or a flash drive.

- Electronic copies should be hyper-linked.

- Be sure that you have included all documents and that all are properly labeled.

Financial Commitments of Initial Licensure

- Costs for Initial Licensure, whether handled by the Commission, itself, or also involving an external consultant, are covered by the institution.

- The applicant institution is responsible for paying costs associated with the visit of the Commission to a proposed site.

- The Ministry reserves the right to charge fees for licensure.

Review Process

- The review of applications for Initial Licensure is handled by the Commission staff and may, at the discretion of the Commission, involve the use of an external consultant.

- The review process may include the necessity of obtaining more information or seeking clarification on particular aspects of the licensure application. Institutions are urged to respond quickly to queries for additional information or clarification so as not to impede the process of review and ultimate Initial Licensure.

- At the conclusion of the review by the Commission, the institution will be sent a "Report on the Application for Initial Licensure."

Responding to the Report of the Commission

- Reports received from the CAA have a consistent format to them in that reports for all processes are aligned with the *Standards* and present summary statements of compliance and/or non-compliance with the *Standards*.

- In those instances where the report has a Recommendation or a Suggestion, the reasons for the Recommendation or Suggestion will be delineated in a narrative. The institution must respond to all Recommendations with a narrative statement of response and supporting documentation, usually presented in an Appendix. The institution must address all Suggestions, although the institution is not required to comply with Suggestions.

- Unless otherwise specified, an institution has up to 60 days to respond to the report. Extensions to the deadline may be granted; institutions should request extensions through an e-mail and/or letter to the CAA Director. Given that Initial Licensure must precede the submission of an application for Initial Accreditation, it is best for an institution to respond quickly to any Recommendations or Suggestions contained in the Report of the Commission.

- If the Commission does not receive a response to a report on Initial Licensure by the approved deadline, the application for Initial Licensure will be considered void and the Institution will be required to submit a new application.

Outline for Response Reports

Institutional responses to CAA reports should follow the following outline:

- **Introduction:** Use this section to summarize the institution, the nature of the report as sent by the CAA and the nature of the response.

- **Responses:** As in the examples below, the institution should re-state the Recommendation (including number) and then offer its response. Responses should be accompanied by supporting documentation as appropriate. Documentation may be presented either in the text of the response or as appendices to the response.

Examples of Responses

> ***Recommendation 1:*** [Name of Institution] is required to …

> **Institutional Response:** [Name of Institution] accepts this recommendation and has taken the following steps to address the concern of the Commission.

> The outcome of this review and follow-up on this recommendation is documented in Appendix 1 of this report.

> ***Suggestion 1:*** The Commission suggests that [Name of Institution] …

> **Institutional Response:** [Name of Institution] found this suggestion most helpful (or not) and is undertaking the following steps…

> **Note:** Institutions are not required to adopt suggestions. It is expected, however, that institutions indicate whether or not the suggestion is adopted.

Tips for Responses to Initial Licensure Reports

- Be sure to respond to each Recommendation and each Suggestion.

- Supply appropriate documentation and clearly identify which documentation supports which institutional response.

- Contact the assigned Commissioner if you have questions along the way.

- Be aware of deadlines.

- Submit both a hard (paper) and an electronic copy of the report.

- Direct the response to the CAA Director.

Evaluation of the Response

The Commission's evaluation of the response will be organized in terms of the Recommendations and Suggestions. Those recommendations which are satisfactorily addressed will be indicated as "Recommendation met." Those that are not satisfactorily addressed will be indicated as "not met" or "partially met" with a narrative or action statement to indicate what is still needed. Suggestions which have been addressed will be indicated as "Suggestion adopted" or "Suggestion not adopted."

Action by the Commission

After review of the application, the Commission may recommend to the Minister either of the following:

Approval

Initial Licensure is granted for up to five years and the institution is permitted to offer programs in the UAE after their Initial Accreditation by the CAA. The concept of "approval" encompasses the following:

- If the institution fails to offer programs and enroll students within two years of obtaining licensure, the Commission will revoke its license.

- The institution may receive unscheduled visits from the staff of the Commission to ensure that it meets the requirements of the *Standards*. Failure to meet the *Standards* may result in loss of licensure, as determined by the Minister.

- As the period for Initial Licensure comes to an end, the institution must then apply for Licensure before the Initial Licensure expires. (See *Procedural Guidelines for Renewal of Licensure*)

- Once the official license is sent by the Ministry to the institution, the "licensed status" will be noted on the CAA website (http://www.caa.ae).

- A licensed institution is required to identify its status as licensed by the Ministry in all documents and advertising.

- A licensed institution is required to comply with the Commission's requirement for reporting data on a semi-annual basis, and any other requested reports typically on an annual basis.

- Representation of Licensed Status: The Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (the Ministry) recognizes only licensed institutions. The Ministry makes known to the public, government agencies, and interested international parties those institutions that are licensed in the UAE, and publishes their names on its website. Institutions placed on probation or denied licensure may not state or imply in any of their materials, official or unofficial, that they are licensed by the Ministry. In its publications and advertisements only a licensed institution may state or imply that it is recognized in the United Arab Emirates by the Ministry. When an institution's licensure is approved, it may refer to its status as "licensed" by the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research. It must note its status in the catalog, prospectus, and other publications intended for the public, using this statement:
  [Name of Institution] located in the Emirate(s) of [insert name(s)], is officially licensed from [day, month, year] to [day, month, year] by the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research of the United Arab Emirates to award degrees/qualifications in higher education.

Denial

The institution is denied Initial Licensure. Those seeking Initial Licensure may not resubmit an application under the same institutional name or another name for at least one year from the date of the official letter of denial.

Appeal

An institution may challenge a negative action regarding Initial Licensure by directing its appeal to the Director of the Commission for Academic Accreditation. Appeals are limited to issues of process.

Appendix A

Documents Required for Initial Licensure

The Commission requires that an application for Initial Licensure include all of the following documents. While, for purposes of Initial Licensure, these documents may be submitted in draft form, they should nevertheless be complete documents addressing, to the extent possible, all of the required areas as described below.   The Commission further anticipates that these documents, with the exception of financial information, will, when complete and approved, be public in nature and will be available through normal means of distribution including website access or printed publication (as appropriate).

All documents should be clear, factually accurate, and current. Although they primarily serve to meet the specific needs of the institution's constituencies and its distinct mission, each must also include the policies, procedures, topics, or specific information required by the Commission, as noted in the relevant sections.

All documents should be specific to the applicant institution. The documents called for in this appendix are common to almost all institutions of higher education. It is often the case that an institution will incorporate ideas from a parent or collaborating campus or from another institution (i.e. the parent institution's *Faculty Handbook*, the *Student Handbook* or the *Catalog*).   In such cases the source of information should be acknowledged. It is important, however, that the submitted documents be reflective of the institution as it is proposed to operate in the UAE.

1.   FEASIBILITY STUDY

In determining whether to grant Initial Licensure to a new institution, among the most important questions for reviewers and the Commission are whether the mission and programs proposed by the institution meet a need in the community and the UAE, and whether a sufficient number of prospective students is interested in those programs and available to sustain them. A well-designed feasibility study, often conducted by a professional entity, is therefore a key document in the proposal for Initial Licensure. At the very least the study should provide evidence in the form of market data and other studies that respond to the following questions:

- What is the need for the institution, based on market survey of prospective students and of prospective employers of graduates?

- Who will the students be? The study includes projected numbers, backgrounds, and other pertinent information.

- Where will they come from?

- Which are the competing institutions offering comparable programs in the same geographic area?

- Why will students select the proposed institution rather than its competitors?

- What is the employment market for the graduates of the proposed institution?

2. FINANCIAL ANALYSIS AND FINANCIAL GUARANTEE

Another major consideration in licensing new institutions is whether the institution has the financial resources to sustain the institution over time, particularly should the forecast of student numbers prove overly optimistic. The proposing institution submits documentation of how it will provide the required financial guarantee – in escrow account or bank guarantee. The guarantee must be equivalent to the average annual operating expenditures of the institution for the first four years of operation, assuming all proposed programs are offered with the maximum number of projected students, and including the costs of meeting licensure and accreditation requirements, capital costs, operating costs, personnel expenses, and a contingency fund. Sufficient detail must be included so that the basis for the calculation of each item is clear.

The analysis should offer at least two different revenue forecasts -- optimal and minimal -- based on student intake, which in turn should be based on the analysis of the potential market and the competition within it.

If the applicant institution is receiving support from another institution, a sponsor, a government entity or from another source, the document should include a statement (usually in the form of a letter) indicating the source and the amount of funding to be provided on a year to year basis.

3. BY-LAWS OF THE GOVERNING BODY

The governing body (the board) is responsible for the By-Laws of the institution. The By-Laws of the governing body regulate its responsibilities and procedures. A clear distinction is drawn between the policy-making and fiduciary functions of the board and the responsibility of the administration and faculty to administer and implement policy and to manage the institution on a day-to-day basis; this distinction must be evident both in the By-Laws and in the operation of the board.

These By-Laws should be written in accord with the *Standards*, particularly *Standard* 1.3 and *Stipulation* 3: *By-Laws*.

Some institutions choose to make their By-Laws a part of the *Policies and Procedures Manual* in which case the institution need not make a separate submission. Others make the By-Laws a separate publication.

4. SITE APPROVAL AND ARCHITECTURAL PLAN

It is important for the Commission to evaluate the site and proposed facilities (buildings, grounds, classrooms, laboratories, offices, etc.) where the programs will be offered. At the point of an application for Initial Licensure, it is often the case that the site of the institution is temporary or under construction.

The site approval document should:

- Identify the spaces which are in use or will be used as the institution begins operations, along with architectural drawings or floor plans. Minimal descriptive information should include the number of offices and the functions of those offices, the number of classrooms including their capacity, the provisions for library services, and the provisions for support services including student services, information technology (labs), specialized laboratories, etc.

- If a more permanent site is already planned, this document should include enough detail on the permanent site in the form of a site plan and floor plans, such that the Commission can determine the viability of the proposed permanent location for the purposes envisioned in the proposed mission and the initial licensure documents of the institution. If the location of the permanent site or campus is already determined, that should be indicated in this document.

- For those campuses in a temporary site, the target date to move into a permanent campus should be presented.

Note: If an institution is located in temporary quarters during the initial licensure process, and if licensure is granted before the permanent site is completed, the Commission may well choose to visit the permanent site as it is progressing toward completion and prior to any application for Licensure. While such visits may well occur in the context of an Initial Accreditation process, such visits may also be unannounced which is in keeping with the *Standards.*

5. TIMED ACTION PLAN

Applicants for initial licensure submit a timed action plan, which is a plan that documents step-by-step—with dates and deadlines—everything necessary to realize the institution's mission and the delivery of its proposed programs. The "Timed Action Plan" should cover the first three years of operation. The plan includes:

- Each faculty and staff position required to plan, organize, and operate the campus and its programs

- The dates of planned appointments

- A listing of all academic programs the institution intends to offer in the first five years of its operation, and programs to be offered at the time the campus initiates operations. These programs must be accredited before they can be offered

- Deadlines for submitting academic programs for initial accreditation

- Each of the steps to be taken such that the necessary facilities, infrastructure, programs, library, equipment, instructional technology, services, and other resources are in place prior to the intended date of enrolling students

6. ORGANIZATION CHART

Organization charts provide a convenient way to visualize and understand the official relationships within an organization in terms of rank. A good organization chart outlines the reporting structure of the institution's major units and offices—for example, the board, the offices of the chief executive officer, the chief academic officer, the chief student affairs officer, the chief finance officer, the deans, and the department chairs.

The organization chart indicates hierarchical relationships and lateral relationships between different departments. The organization chart should identify all offices and personnel responsible for the major activities of the institution, such as the office responsible for quality assurance. An organization chart is,

however, most effective as a tool when it is not too cluttered with detail and enables those unfamiliar with the institution to understand readily who is responsible for which functions.

7. POLICIES AND PROCEDURES MANUAL

The institution must maintain a *Policies and Procedures Manual* that contains **all** of the official policies, procedures, and regulations of the institution. The *Manual* contains policies required by the Commission for all institutions of higher education and others the institution deems necessary to fulfill its mission. The institution is expected to operate in accordance with its policies, procedures, and regulations at all times. It must also adhere to all Ministry and Commission requirements as indicated in the *Standards*. See *Stipulation* 1A: *Policies and Procedures Manual*.

The policies, procedures and regulations must be clearly written and consistent with good practice in institutions of higher education, and they must be approved by the appropriate institutional bodies, usually the Board. When these policies, procedures, and regulations are worded for a specific audience, for example, as published in the *Faculty Handbook* or in the *Student Handbook*, they are consistent and complete. All policies are expected to be distributed, either electronically or in print, to those affected by them.

Depending on the size of the institution and the nature of institutional programs, several of these policies might appear as one in a *Policies and Procedures Manual* and/or in separate publications. What is most important is not so much the format in which these are published but the fact that the institution has the full range of policies in place, has received approval from the governing board for these policies, and has disseminated the policies to the appropriate stakeholders/ constituents of the institution.

The Commission understands that at the time of Initial Licensure, some policies will still be in draft form; it remains important, however, that the policies be as complete as possible because having policies in place (even though they may be amended based on actual experience of the institution) is an important determinant of the capacity of the institution and its ultimate success.

For a complete listing of required policies and procedures, see *Stipulation* 1A: *Policies and Procedures Manual*

8. QUALITY ASSURANCE MANUAL

Quality Assurance (QA) or Institutional Effectiveness is essential to maintaining and improving institutional quality. The Commission therefore requires institutions to have an organized, ongoing process for assessment that is documented in a written *Quality Assurance Manual*. See *Stipulation* 1B: *Quality Assurance Manual*.

The *Quality Assurance Manual* describes the quality assurance system and defines what is to be assessed, by whom, when, and how. For each area of the institution, it describes the type of evidence to be collected and analyzed to evaluate effectiveness, the instruments to be used to collect that data, and the ways in which the results will be evaluated and incorporated in institutional and program enhancement.

The *Quality Assurance Manual* fully documents the quality assurance system that the institution operates. The QA system relates to institutional planning and the *Manual* identifies the institution's planning leadership, committee structure, and time-frame, and the ways in which the analysis of data from institutional research relates to short-term and long-term planning and the setting of budget priorities. The QA system specifies how analyzed data from all institutional research will be used to further the mission of the institution and improve the student experience, the faculty experience, all units, functions, and services, and how plans will be executed and their implementation is assessed.

A director of institutional research or the QA unit is responsible for the operation, periodic assessment, and revision of the system and is supported by sufficient resources—financial, physical, and human—for efficient and effective operation. The system describes an annual cycle and appropriately phased timetable for all data gathering, assessment, evaluation and planning activities, listing the assessment tools and methods of analysis.

Because a concern for quality assurance is central to maintaining and improving institutional quality, the QA system offers an analysis of the institution from multiple perspectives to determine whether institutional goals, program and course learning outcomes, and the objectives of service and administrative units are being met.

9.   CATALOG

The *Catalog* is the basic reference document about the institution and its programs for prospective and enrolled students, and should be readily available either on-line or in print (or both). The *Catalog* is considered as an implied contract between the institution and its students such that the academic rules, regulations, and degree requirements in effect at the time of a student's initial enrollment remain consistent to graduation, assuming normal, and typically uninterrupted, progress to program completion. The *Catalog* will typically have the elements as listed in *Stipulation* 1F: *Catalog*. Some institutions have a University-wide catalog which is inclusive of all programs, and also College-level bulletins which are specific to only the college programs. For those institutions with graduate programs, there are often separate undergraduate and graduate catalogs.

10.   STUDENT HANDBOOK

Written for and directed to students, the *Student Handbook* comprises information that is essential to them. The institution publishes a *Student Handbook* that includes such material as it deems necessary for its students, but ensures that it covers the rules and regulations governing academic courses and programs and campus life, the opportunities available to students, the support services they can access, the facilities provided—such as the library, learning support centers, computer laboratories, recreation areas, dining services—and the expectations for their academic performance and behavior on campus.

The *Student Handbook* contains information regarding student rights and responsibilities, including academic integrity and a definition of plagiarism, and a clear description of the nature, extent, and availability of all student services, organizations and activities. It details the way in which students may access academic advisors, career counselors and placement services, alumni services, and the health facilities.

The *Student Handbook* often, and should, go beyond the presentation of rules and policies which are applicable to students. *Student Handbooks* are often made more "user friendly" and may take the form

of a calendar for the academic year which will include side bar tips on studying, stress reduction, getting ready for mid-terms, reminders of deadlines and more. For more information, see *Stipulation* 1E: *Student Handbook.*

11. FACULTY HANDBOOK (May be combined with a Staff Handbook)

Written for and directed towards the institution's faculty (and staff when combined), the *Faculty Handbook* compiles information that is essential to the faculty. The institution publishes such material specific to the institution's mission as it deems necessary for its faculty; it also ensures that the handbook covers the rules and regulations, practices, expectations, and responsibilities that pertain to the faculty. The *Faculty Handbook* is most effective when it acknowledges that faculty, like others entering a workplace, need both policy information and "how to do it" information, including everything from accessing electronic resources to receiving mail to ordering supplies to proposing new programs to ordering library materials. The *Faculty Handbook* is distributed to all the institution's faculty members and either the full *Faculty Handbook* or a specially designed part-time faculty handbook should be distributed to all part-time faculty as well. It is typical for a *Faculty Handbook* or a *Staff Handbook* (see below) to incorporate policies that are separately included and published in a *Policies and Procedures Manual.* The inclusion of these policies may be as an Appendix to the Faculty and/or Staff Handbook. For more information see *Stipulation* 1C: *Faculty Handbook.*

12. STAFF HANDBOOK (May be combined with a Faculty Handbook)

When not included in the *Faculty Handbook* or in a *Human Resources Handbook*, information essential for the institution's staff should be compiled into a *Staff Handbook.* Written for and distributed to the staff, the *Handbook* includes those rules and regulations, practices, expectations, and responsibilities that pertain to staff members and is specific to its mission. For more information, see *Stipulation* 1D: *Staff Handbook.*

Figure 1: Institutional Licensure & Program Accreditation Approval Process