دليل المعايير والإجراءات

AUTHORIZATION OF SUBSTANTIVE CHANGES AT HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN ABU DHABI

Standards & Procedure Manual **– 2023**

| Foreword

This procedure manual presents the 2023 edition of the Abu Dhabi Department of Education and Knowledge (ADEK) standards and procedures for obtaining a "No Objection Letter" (NOL) to implement a substantive change and continue operating as a higher education institution (HEI) in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi.

This NOL is a prerequisite to undertake any change defined as substantive in this manual and is mandatory for application to the Ministry of Education (MoE) Commission for Academic Accreditation (CAA) or any other government authority to request approval of substantive changes.

The ADEK standards and procedures for authorization of substantive changes of HEIs are developed based on the contextual and strategic needs of the higher education system in Abu Dhabi. They were benchmarked with international best practices to promote enhancement and excellence in higher education provisions and obtain recognition regionally and internationally. They also underwent a broad stakeholder consultation in the Emirate, harnessing valuable insights from higher education providers, policymakers, and educationalists at large.

This procedure manual applies to all HEIs in Abu Dhabi – federal, Abu Dhabi government-funded, inbound and outbound cross-border higher education providers, and private HEIs. This manual is subject to regular revisions to ensure its lasting value, validity, and relevance to socioeconomic and cultural needs.

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I.   Introduction

The Abu Dhabi higher education ecosystem is governed by the External Quality Assurance Framework (EQAF), which requires a two-phased approach in which higher education provisions in Abu Dhabi must be authorized by ADEK prior to proceeding with MoE licensure, accreditation, and substantive change approval at the federal level.

The EQAF is composed of two phases:

Phase 1 covers the following key procedures under ADEK's jurisdiction:

- Authorization of new HEIs
- Re-authorization of HEIs
- Authorization of new higher education programs
- Authorization of substantive changes

This phase and procedures serve the purpose to ensure *fitness-of-purpose*, through which a higher education institutional performance is evaluated based on its alignment with Abu Dhabi's strategic priorities and its fitness to serve the socio-economic and cultural needs of Abu Dhabi.

Phase 2 covers the following key procedures under the MoE CAA jurisdiction:

- Initial Institutional Licensure for new HEIs
- Licensure and Renewal of Licensure for existing HEIs
- Initial Program Accreditation
- Accreditation and Renewal of Accreditation for existing programs

On the other hand, this phase and procedures serve the purpose to ensure *fitness-for-purpose*, whereby an institution is evaluated per the extent to which it and/or its program(s) are fit for the *purpose/mission* it has been established for.

While distinctive in nature, both the ADEK and CAA procedures are complementary, ensuring a holistic approach to QA in Abu Dhabi.

II. Evaluation Framework for Authorization of Substantive Changes of HEIs

ADEK's authorization is necessary for any significant modifications or expansions to the existing structure and functions of a higher education institution. This includes changes that affect the nature and scope of the institution's operations.

The evaluation framework for substantive changes consists of the following interrelated elements:

- Definition of Substantive Changes
- Requirements for Application
- Modules & Standards
- Judgments
- Procedure for Authorization of Substantive Changes
- Appeal Procedure

Definition of Substantive Changes:

Substantive changes are defined as follows:

i. **Location:** ADEK's approval is specific to each site. Operations that are authorized in one location cannot expand or relocate to another area without additional approval from ADEK. If a branch campus is being established, it needs to be authorized by ADEK. Additionally, closing or suspending an additional location or branch campus for more than one semester requires further approval from ADEK.

ii. **Changing or proposing new partnerships:** ADEK's approvals are specific to the partnerships mentioned during the application process. HEIs cannot modify or end existing partnerships without prior application to and approval from ADEK. This manual outlines the procedure to obtain a NOL for any new partnership before the HEI, partner, or joint entity can start an activity in Abu Dhabi. A partnership between an HEI and its partners involves collaboration and sharing of resources, knowledge, and expertise to achieve common goals. When substantial changes occur, partnerships that affect the issued qualification require prior approval from ADEK.

iii. **Merger of two or more HEIs:** A merger is a dynamic process of organizational transformation in which two or more separate HEIs are combined, with overall management control coming under a single governing body and a single chief executive. As a consequence, at least one HEI must cease to exist as a legal entity, being incorporated into either a new or an existing institution. Similarly, all assets, liabilities, and responsibilities of involved institutions are transferred to either a continuing HEI or a new HEI. Once the merger is complete, the new HEI is to undergo a full institutional authorization by ADEK, prior to consideration of the entity for a Risk-Based-Review approach.

iv. **Acquisition:** Acquisition is a dynamic process of organizational change in which an HEI acquires another HEI and retains its name, identity, and assets. As a consequence, the acquired HEI continues to operate under the title of the acquiring entity.

v. **Changing nomenclature and modality:** ADEK's approval is valid for the nomenclature appropriate at the time of application and for the category in which the authorized institution operates. HEIs that seek to change the name, legal status, ownership, category, mission, functions and purposes, modes of delivery other than the authorized ones must be authorized according to the nomenclature (refer to Appendix C) and categories put forward by ADEK and evaluated based on the standards and procedure outlined in this manual.

Application Prerequisites:

◉ **Prior consultation with the ADEK HE Regulation and Licensing Division** (if needed).
◉ **Clear presentation of the substantive change request** along with the potential impacts.
◉ **Submission of a self-evaluation report that analyzes planned changes across relevant standards and supportive evidence.**

Standards:

The substantive change is evaluated against critical dimensions of HEI functions related to the change request. The HEI planning a substantive change as defined in this manual must respond to the relevant standards that are affected by the change. The standards are broken down into the following Modules:

❋ **Module A:** Generic standards that refer to all types of HEIs regardless of their status **(mandatory for all)**

❋ **Module B:** Standards mandatory for only those HEIs that offer blended/fully online elements

❋ **Module C:** Standards mandatory only for cross-border HEIs

Table 1: Modules & Standards

MODULE A **Generic**	MODULE B **Online Provisions**	MODULE C **Cross-Border Provisions**
Mandatory to all types of HE programs	Additional and mandatory only to HEIs aiming to establish and offer blended/fully online elements	Additional and mandatory only to HEIs intending to offer cross-border provisions (inbound or outbound)
This encompasses: • Alignment with Abu Dhabi's strategic priorities • Governance & administration • Programs • Research, innovation & development • Service to the society • Resources • Access & inclusion • Internal QA Transparency & academic integrity • International visibility & recognition	This encompasses: • Online provisions • Quality of student experience • Resources	This encompasses: • The CBHE provision • Quality of student experience • Culture & context alignment

These standards are measured against pre-defined measurement metrics.

Judgments

ADEK's decision on the authorization of substantive changes is carried out on a three-point scale. The following interpretation of the three-point scale underpins the logic of external evaluation:

- **Meets the standard:** The application is justified and provides the necessary analysis and evidence (from a content and technical perspective) that complies with all relevant standards and guidelines and demonstrates added value and relevance to the socioeconomic and cultural needs of Abu Dhabi.

- **Partially meets the standard:** The application clearly states the socioeconomic, cultural and market needs and the HEI's added value and impact are explicit. However, administrative and technical issues are still to be addressed to meet all standards and guidelines.

- **Does not meet the standard:** The submission indicates clear deficiencies, including but not limited to the application and supporting documents, and fails to justify the impact, socioeconomic, cultural and market needs, as well as the necessary capacity to offer educational provisions and modalities.

Depending on the nature of the change, ADEK might form an external review panel to conduct the review and provide judgments and recommendations to ADEK's Higher Education Authorization Committee (HEAC).
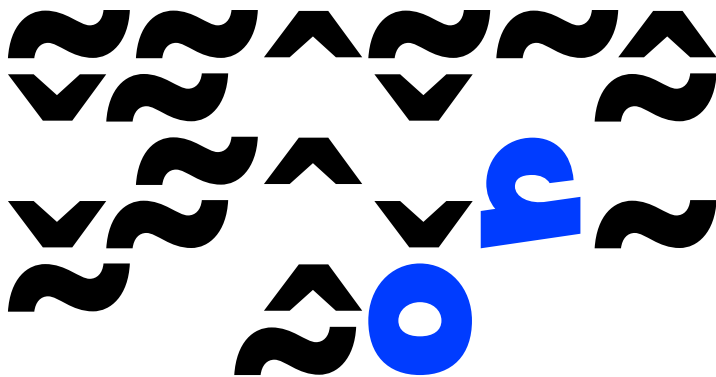
III.   The Procedure

This section outlines stages 1 and 2 of the authorization of substantive changes:

Stage 1		
Step 1 **Application Preparation & Request Submission**	Description:	In line with this manual, the HEI notifies ADEK in advance of any changes and seeks ADEK's approval prior to their initiation. If an HEI is unclear whether a change is substantive in nature or not, it should contact the ADEK HE Regulation & Licensing Division for consultation. The HEI then files an application through the ADEK Higher Education Authorization Portal based on the standards specified in this manual. The application should include an analytical self-evaluation report (SER) that adheres to relevant standards. The HEI's contact person collaborates with the ADEK HE Regulation & Licensing Division to ensure corresponding procedures and processes are completed on time to support the substantive change documentation submitted to ADEK. All inquiries about the nature of the proposed substantive change or interpretation of this procedure should be directed to the ADEK HERL Division.
	Responsability:	HEI
	Inputs:	ADEK application package for authorization of substantive changes
	Outputs:	• Filled and submitted ADEK application package for authorization of substantive changes • SER, if needed
	Timeline:	Six months prior to the date on which substantive change is intended to be implemented

Step 2 **Technical Review**	Description:	The HERL Division Director assigns an ADEK Procedure Coordinator, who receives and reviews the application and the required supporting documents for technical compliance.
	Responsability:	• ADEK HERL Division Director • ADEK Head of QC • ADEK Procedure Coordinator
	Inputs:	• ADEK application package for authorization of substantive changes • SER
	Outputs:	ADEK Technical Compliance Report or ADEK Technical Non-Compliance Report
	Timeline:	Two weeks after receiving the application
Step 3 **Revision of Application** **(if needed)**	Description:	In case of any non-compliances, the applicant needs to revise and resubmit the application to ADEK within two weeks of receiving the ADEK Technical Non-Compliance Report. This deadline may be extended by a maximum of two additional weeks, provided ADEK receives a clear justification and evidence for the extension request in writing prior to the initial deadline expiry.
	Responsability:	HEI
	Inputs:	ADEK Technical Non-Compliance Report
	Outputs:	Revised application submitted to ADEK
	Timeline:	Two weeks after the receipt of the ADEK Technical Non-Compliance Report

Step 4 **Decision Taking**	Description:	The ADEK Procedure Coordinator reviews the application along with the required supporting documents. If needed, the ADEK Procedure Coordinator coordinates additional internal approvals (e.g., with the ADEK Infrastructure and Facilities Division to proceed with the location grant request). After reviewing and validating the application, the ADEK Procedure Coordinator prepares the report and the respective ADEK letter (i.e., NOL, NAL, Revise, Resubmit, or Recommendation). The ADEK Procedure Coordinator presents the report to the HEAC for decision-taking, after which the ADEK HEAC Chairperson signs the letter which outlines the grounds for the decision and status **(meets, partially meets, does not meet the standards).**
	Responsability:	• ADEK HEAC Chairperson • ADEK HERL Division Director • ADEK Procedure Coordinator
	Inputs:	ADEK NOL/NAL
	Outputs:	ADEK NOL/NAL
	Timeline:	Within one month after the receipt of the application

		Steps 11 and 12 follow after the ADEK NOL/NAL is issued.
		Stage 2
Step 5 **Selection & Appointment of External Reviewers**	Description:	In case of the necessity to conduct an external review for the approval of the substantive change, ADEK sets up an external review panel (ERP) to conduct the assessment. If an ERP is formed, the ADEK Procedure Coordinator identifies potential external reviewers and submits the list for approval to the HERL Division Director and ADEK HEAC Chairperson. External reviewers are contracted and sign the required documents (see inputs below).
	Responsability:	• ADEK HEAC Chairperson • ADEK HERL Division Director • ADEK Procedure Coordinator
	Inputs:	• ADEK policy and procedure for external reviewer selection • Shortlist of external reviewers • ADEK non-disclosure/confidentiality statements • ADEK conflict of interest statement • External reviewer's service commitment statement • ADEK internal memo template for appointing external reviewers
	Outputs:	• Approved ADEK internal memo (letter) appointing external reviewers • ADEK agreement with external reviewers • Signed ADEK non-disclosure/confidentiality statement • Signed ADEK conflict of interest statement • Signed external reviewer's service commitment statement • ADEK internal memo (letter) appointing external reviewers
	Timeline:	One week after the submission of the shortlist to the ADEK HEAC, the ERP is appointed

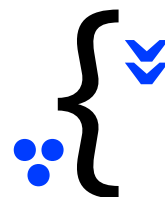|		
Step 6 **Submission of Application for External Desk Review (if needed)**	Description:	The full application package is submitted to the external reviewers for desk review.
	Responsability:	ADEK Procedure Coordinator
	Inputs:	• The application package • ADEK external reviewer's template and guidelines
	Outputs:	The application package assigned to the ERP
	Timeline:	Within one week of the ERP appointment

Step 7 **External Desk Review (if needed)**	Description:	The ERP conducts the desk review. The closure meeting is jointly led by the ADEK Head of QC and ADEK Procedure Coordinator and joined by local and international reviewers
	Responsability:	• ERP • ADEK Procedure Coordinator • ADEK Head of QC
	Inputs:	N/A
	Outputs:	• Individual external reviewer reports • Joint draft report with major findings, including a summary table with external review results, areas to be further explored, comments, and recommendations
	Timeline:	Four weeks after receiving the application package

Step 8 **Site Visit (optional & based on external reviewers' request)**	Description:	Led by the ADEK Procedure Coordinator, the ERP undertakes a site visit (either physically or online) to verify and scrutinize provided application data, meet stakeholders, and further investigate areas that are not clearly covered in the application package
	Responsability:	• ERP • ADEK Procedure Coordinator • ADEK QC Section Manager
	Inputs:	Individual external reviewer reports
	Outputs:	Joint draft report with major findings, including a summary table with external review results, areas to be further explored, comments, and recommendations
	Timeline:	Up to five working days

Step 9 **Joint Report Preparation (if deemed necessary)**	Description:	The ERP Chair prepares a joint report and submits it to the HE Authorization Portal after circulating it to all external reviewers for confirmation.
	Responsability:	• ERP Chair • ADEK Procedure Coordinator • ADEK Head of QC • ADEK HERL Division Director
	Inputs:	Joint report template
	Outputs:	Joint draft report with major findings, including a summary table with external review results, areas to be further explored, comments, and recommendations
	Timeline:	Within two weeks after the site visit (if any)

Step 10 **Decision Taking**	Description:	The final joint report is submitted to the ADEK HEAC for decision-making.
	Responsability:	• ADEK HEAC • ADEK HEAC Secretary • ADEK HERL Division Director
	Inputs:	The joint report
	Outputs:	Session minutes and decisions (i.e., NOL/NAL to be issued/Revise & Resubmit letter)
	Timeline:	Within one month of submitting the joint report
Step 11 **Applicant Notification**	Description:	The respective ADEK letter (i.e., NOL, NAL, Revise/Resubmit,) is issued, signed by the ADEK HEAC Chairperson and sent to the applicant. It will specify the grounds for the decision and reflect the status **(meets, partially meets, does not meet the standards)**
	Responsability:	• ADEK HEAC Chairperson • ADEK HERL Division Director • ADEK Head of QC • ADEK Procedure Coordinator
	Inputs:	ADEK NOL/NAL/Revise & Resubmit letter template
	Outputs:	ADEK NOL/NAL/Revise & Resubmit letter (if applicable)
	Timeline:	Within one week of the decision-making
Step 12 **CAA Notification**	Description:	Once the decision is taken, ADEK informs the CAA of the results for their consideration
	Responsability:	• ADEK HEAC Secretary • ADEK Procedure Coordinator
	Inputs:	• CAA sample letter • NOL/NAL template/Revise & Resubmit letter template
	Outputs:	• Letter to the CAA • ADEK NOL/NAL • Letter of recommendation and follow-up (if applicable)
	Timeline:	Within one week of the decision-making

IV. Standards

Module A: Generic Standards

Heading	Standards
1. **Alignment with Abu Dhabi Strategic Priorities**	1. **Positioning in the HE system:** The HEI demonstrates a justified, well-grounded and feasible plan of operations that ensures steady growth leading to tangible and trustworthy outcomes, outputs (quality and/or quantity), and developmental impact on society at large. The new HEI demonstrates solid plans that ensure the visibility of Abu Dhabi HE provisions at national, regional and international levels. 2. **Alignment with the Abu Dhabi cultural and socio-economic needs:** The new HEI adds value within its chosen sector(s) and has a strong potential for contributing to Abu Dhabi's strategic, economic, social and cultural development priorities and needs.
2. **Governance and Administration**	1. **Mission, vision, values, and strategy:** The HEI's vision, mission, values, objectives, and strategic priorities are in line with the Abu Dhabi strategic, economic, social, and cultural priorities and needs. 2. **Nomenclature:** The HEI presents solid evidence that the nomenclature of the HEI reflects its capabilities and functions. 3. **Governance, administration, and structure:** The governance model is based on robust accountability and autonomy approaches. The HEI ensures independent decision-making and efficiency in administration, management, and operations. 4. **The Governing Board:** The Governing Board ensures a meaningful and beneficial stakeholder engagement that leads to smooth steering of the strategies and independent decision-making. 5. **Integrity:** The HEI has a robust policy and related procedures to underpin integrity in its functions and operations and ensure adherence to the highest standards of integrity in governance, administration, and management. 6. **Transparency:** The HEI operates transparently and ensures that all decision-making processes underpin the transparency principle; transparency mechanisms and tools are integral parts of the institution's governance model.

	7. Partnerships: The [HEI](#) has secured a trustworthy and well-reputed partner, if any, to support its formation and sustain feasible functions in Abu Dhabi. The partner engagement is meaningful and ensures trust and credibility in the short and long terms of the [HEI](#) provisions.
	8. Management Information System: The [HEI](#) deploys a robust data collection and management system and supports data-driven decision-making.
3. Programs	**1. Program design:** The [HEI](#) has policies and procedures for the design, approval, monitoring, and review of programs and courses in line with the Qualifications Framework for the Emirates (QFEmirates).
	2. Relevance of learning outcomes and qualifications offered: The [HEI](#) clearly articulates intended learning outcomes for its programs, which are relevant to the socioeconomic and cultural needs and strategic priorities of Abu Dhabi.
	3. Recognition of the awarded qualifications: The [HEI](#) has robust policies and procedures to ensure the recognition of awarded qualifications at national, regional, and international levels. The policy is supported and driven by a robust [QA](#) mechanism.
	4. Recognition of Prior Learning: The [HEI](#) has robust policies and procedures in place for the recognition of prior learning. The policy is supported and driven by a robust [QA](#) mechanism.
4. Research, Innovation, and Development	**1. Promotion of research, innovation, and development:** The [HEI](#) deploys mechanisms and processes that support research profiles and activities, enhance research quality and productivity, and promote innovation and development.
	2. Research outputs and outcomes: The [HEI](#) deploys mechanisms and processes that ensure the research outputs and outcomes are visible and impactful at the national, regional, and international levels.
5. Service to the Society	**1. General community service:** The [HEI](#) sets community service as one of its strategic priorities. It allocates relevant financial and human resources to deliver those services.
	2. Charity and volunteer work: The [HEI](#) promotes charity and volunteering activities to benefit society at large.

6. Resources	1. **Faculty and staff:** The HEI has distinct policies and procedures to employ qualified and sufficient faculty and staff to deliver its programs and ensure competent instruction and competitive research. The policies address faculty and staff appraisals and professional development. The HEI also deploys faculty and staff appraisals and professional development mechanisms.
	2. **Learning resources:** The HEI secures student access to learning/information resources (e.g., library, laboratories, including resources to support accessibility for Students of Determination (SoD) where required) to ensure the achievement of learning outcomes and the attainment level of curriculum delivery.
	3. **Student services:** The HEI secures access to student support services necessary to ensure the learning expected of its students and promote their career aspirations and wellbeing. Student support services should also know how to support and guide SoD in their career aspirations.
	4. **Physical campus and facilities:** The HEI has a purpose-built campus and facilities with adequate and relevant physical resources to ensure a constructive and accessible learning environment for students and faculty members.
	5. **Financial capacity:** The HEI presents solid evidence that it can fulfill its commitments to program delivery in the longer term and demonstrates long-term financial viability.
7. Access & Inclusion	1. **Broadening access:** The HEI is committed to broadening access to and inclusion in higher education.
	2. **Support for disadvantaged students and SoD:** The HEI allocates human and financial resources to support disadvantaged and/or students of determination.
8. Internal Quality Assurance	1. **Internal quality assurance system:** The HEI ensures a robust internal quality assurance system (IQAS) which is an integral part of the HEI's life and enables data-driven decision-making and governance. The IQAS incorporates a continually updated data management system.
	2. **Quality assurance scope:** The HEI ensures that the QA scope covers all qualification levels offered and awarded by the HEI, research activities, and service to society.

	3. Relevance of and trust in quality assurance: The HEI ensures that the IQAS is regularly revised to ensure relevance and trust in provisions and has approved the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP). **4. Risk and crisis management:** The HEI ensures that the IQAS embeds robust processes and procedures to proactively identify, manage, and mitigate possible disruptions, potential threats, unanticipated events, and other risks and their consequences at an institutional level and in situation-based circumstances.
9. Transparency and Academic Integrity	**1. Academic integrity:** The HEI has a robust policy, related procedures, monitoring, and review mechanisms to underpin academic integrity, including admission, teaching and learning, and research integrity in all modes of delivery. **2. Transparency:** The HEI ensures key information regarding teaching and learning, research and service to society is publicly available, including strategies, annual reports, and external reports.
10. International Visibility & Recognition	**1. International accreditation:** The HEI establishes QA mechanisms to pursue international accreditation of its programs, if applicable. **2. International visibility:** The HEI has robust mechanisms and processes in place that steadily lead to international visibility (e.g., through such instruments as global rankings). **3. Recognition:** The HEI has policies, procedures, and feasible plans in place to ensure its outcomes and outputs (teaching and learning, research, and service to society) are recognized nationally, regionally, and internationally.

Module B: Online / Blended Provisions

Heading	Standards
1. **Online Provisions**	1. **Alignment with the mission:** The HEI has policies, procedures, and feasible plans to ensure blended/fully online modality is a strategic endeavor of the HEI, aligned with the mission and vision of the HEI, and supported by respective and relevant governance structures to oversee the design, implementation, and evaluation of the blended/ fully online modality. 2. **Quality assurance:** The HEI has the necessary QA measures to safeguard its blended/ fully online learning provision and the reputation of education in Abu Dhabi. The IQAS also enables an institution-wide culture of continual educational enhancement. 3. **Curriculum:** The HEI ensures that the curriculum content is current, research-informed specifically developed blended/ fully online modality and contextualized to the society at large and the strategic needs of Abu Dhabi. 4. **Academic integrity:** The HEI has robust policies and procedures in place to ensure that the implementation of blended/ fully online learning upholds the virtues of academic integrity and honesty. 5. **Awarded qualifications:** The HEI ensures robust policies and procedures are in place to recognize the awarded qualifications at national, regional, and international levels.
2. **Quality Student Experiences**	1. **Student learning:** The HEI ensures that all students' blended/ fully online educational experiences are enriching, and participatory and lead to the achievement of the intended learning outcomes. 2. **Student support:** The HEI provides adequate student support services for blended/ fully online delivery to ensure learning experiences that instill confidence.

3. Resources	1. **Learning environments/technology:** The [HEI](#) ensures that the learning environment(s) and associated technologies facilitate blended/ fully online modality and ensure inclusive teaching, learning, and assessment practices. 2. **Faculty capacity:** The [HEI](#) ensures that faculty teaching blended/ fully online learning courses/programs are subject-matter experts, master the pedagogical aspects of blended/ fully online learning, and provide scholarly methods in creating, enabling, and evaluating meaningful blended/ fully online learning interactions. 3. **Finances:** The [HEI](#) ensures special financial provisions to support its blended/ fully online learning mission meaningfully and is suitable to maintain and enhance its current blended/ fully online learning provision.

Module C: Cross-Border Provisions

Heading	Standards
1. **The CBHE Provision**	1. **The CBHE Provision:** The CBHE provider ensures that it is a legally recognized provider in the home country and that its provisions are quality assured per the home country regulations. 2. **The content:** The CBHE provider ensures that the proposed CBHE provision is of comparable standards to those in its home country and across its delivery modalities (face-to-face, blended/ fully online). 3. **The delivery:** The CBHE provider ensures that the admission, student assessment, and graduation requirements are comparable to the home country and across all modalities and ensure achievement of the intended learning outcomes. 4. **Awarded qualifications:** The CBHE provider deploys robust policies and procedures to ensure the awarded qualifications are recognized at national, regional, and international levels.
2. **Quality of the Student Experience**	1. **Learner experience:** The CBHE provider ensures the student learning experience is comparable to that of the home country in terms of exposure to the faculty qualifications, a body of knowledge, resources for learning achievement of intended learning outcomes, and application of knowledge and internships. 2. **Quality assurance:** The CBHE provider ensures that robust QA procedures and mechanisms are in place to attest to the effectiveness of the student's experience.
3. **Culture and Context Alignment**	1. **Culture and context:** The CBHE provider considers the socioeconomic needs and cultural peculiarities in teaching and learning, research, and service to society. The CBHE provider is guided by Abu Dhabi's strategic priorities.

V.   ADEK Register

The ADEK Register of Authorized HEIs is a database of authorized educational programs in the jurisdiction of Abu Dhabi. The ADEK Register will be updated based on the results of the ADEK review of substantive changes and the HEAC decision.

VI. Related Expenses

If the substantive change review is conducted internally at ADEK, the following expenses apply and must be covered by the applicant:

◉ Application handling fees (depending on the nature and extent of the substantive change, these are determined by the ADEK HE Regulation & Licensing Division Director)

If an external review is required, the following expenses apply and must be covered by the the applicant:

◉ Application handling fees
◉ External reviewer fees
◉ Local and international travel expenses for experts in case a site visit is required

Each review will be calculated individually, with costs varying depending on the nature of the procedure and the number of external reviewers.

VII. External Reviewers

Composition of the External Review Panel

Depending on the nature of the substantive change, ADEK may arrange an external review. The ERP is assisted by the ADEK Procedure Coordinator, who is assigned once the application is filed.

External reviewers must meet the following requirements:

◉ The panel should include at least three members - local and international.
◉ The panel should possess the following complementary skills and competencies:
   • Expertise in recent developments in higher education
   • International expertise and practical experience in the field of higher education governance and administration
   • Experience in teaching and learning
   • Skills in developing study programs
   • Good knowledge of student-centered approaches
   • Expertise in QA (i.e., conducting audits)
◉ Panel members should have complementarity skills and competencies.
◉ The panel should be chaired by one of the panel members based on an internal agreement between them or the chair appointed by ADEK's Procedure Coordinator.
◉ The panel's independence is guided by the ADEK Conflict of Interest Policy. ERP members must sign a declaration of independence/conflict of interests and confidentiality prior to commencing the review process.

External Reviewer Qualifications

External reviewers, both national and international, must possess the following qualifications to be eligible for ERP selection:

Administrators & managers:

- A Ph.D. in the related field of study
- A proven track record of experience in higher education management
- At least 5 years of teaching (desirable)
- Experience in developing study/academic programs
- Experience in review and QA (desirable)
- Fluency in English is mandatory, fluency in Arabic is preferred

Faculty members:

- A Ph.D. in the related field of study
- A proven track record of research conducted in the respective field of study
- At least 10 years of teaching experience
- Experience in developing study/academic programs
- Experience in review and QA (desirable)
- Fluency in English is mandatory, fluency in Arabic is preferred

Conflict of Interest Policy and Confidentiality

A conflict of interest occurs when an external reviewer is involved in an activity, commitment, or interest that could negatively affect, compromise, or be incompatible with their obligations as an ADEK external reviewer:

- ***A conflict of time commitment*** occurs when the external reviewer is involved in and committed to unauthorized activities that interfere with their obligations to ADEK, thus delaying the review procedure.

- ***A conflict of relationship interest*** occurs when an external reviewer has a relative (up to a second degree) that is employed by the HEI under scrutiny, which might restrict or impair the reviewer's ability to perform the external evaluation of the case objectively and independently.

- ***A conflict of financial interest*** occurs when an external reviewer is either employed or has been employed by the HEI for the last five years or financially benefits (either directly or indirectly) from the HEI under scrutiny.

- ***A conflict of competitor interest*** occurs when the external reviewer has an interest in producing a biased report that might question the objectivity and independence of the review.

- ***A conflict of discipline-specific interest*** occurs when the nature of the external reviewer's discipline could cause situations that, while not implicating one of the conflicts listed above, could question the independence of the review.

The ADEK Head of QC and the ADEK Procedure Coordinator provide verbal and written guidance to external reviewers on ADEK's Conflict of Interest Policy. External reviewers, on the other hand, are obliged to disclose such conflicts and sign a conflict-of-interest statement and a non-disclosure/confidentiality agreement prior to their engagement.

In addition, the final audit report submitted to the ADEK HEAC for decision-taking should declare that the assessment has been carried out independently and that findings may not be disclosed by any other party but ADEK.

External Reviewer Selection Procedure

The expert selection procedure has the following steps:

1. The ADEK HERL Division Director sends a nomination request and the external reviewer qualification requirements to HEIs to nominate professionals in different fields to be assessed and included in the ADEK HE expert pool. For international reviewers, the nomination request is sent to the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE), European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), Asia-Pacific Quality Network (APQN), Arab Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ANQAHE) and other recognized QA entities.

2. Once nominations have been received, ADEK contacts the nominees to submit their Curriculum Vitae (CV) and other relevant documents.

3. The ADEK HERL Division shares the survey link with prospective external reviewers to update/register a profile on the portal and upload their CV, after which the Head of QC arranges for an initial discussion on candidates.

4. Following an initial evaluation, the list of shortlisted candidates is submitted to the ADEK HERL Division Director for approval and inclusion in the ADEK database of external reviewers.

5. Upon receiving an external review request/mandate, the ADEK Procedure Coordinator selects the external reviewers based on their qualifications from the ADEK database and conducts a conflict-of-interest check.

6. The list of proposed panel members is first submitted to the ADEK HERL Division Director for approval before sending it to the ADEK HEAC for appointment. If one or several candidates are rejected, replacements will be selected from the same database.

7. Once appointed, external reviewers sign the ADEK agreement/service commitment statement, a conflict-of-interest statement, and a non-disclosure/confidentiality agreement prior to commencing the external review.

VIII. Interventions & Sanctions

If an HEI initiates a substantive change without following the procedures outlined in this manual and without securing ADEK's NOL, a range of sanctions spanning from setting conditions for improvement, to suspending some activities and de-registration from the ADEK Register will be applied.

ADEK will also align its decision and the HEI's status with the respective Federal and Abu Dhabi-level entities.

The following factors will be considered before ADEK takes an intervention decision:

- The nature and extent of the seriousness of the violation
- The potential amount of damage or aggravation the substantive change might cause
- The source through which ADEK became aware of the substantive change
- Any gain (financial or otherwise) made by the HEI EHE as a result of its operations

Voluntary De-Registration

If an HEI voluntarily wishes to exit Abu Dhabi's higher education system, ADEK will request the HEI to submit transitional arrangements in line with the following two options (depending on the HEI's available resources):

- The HEI preserves its registration status and continues its education services for already enrolled students until graduation. Enrollment of new students will not be permitted.

- The HEI submits a teach-out plan for ADEK's approval, which includes the proposed placement of current students with other reliable HEIs. Enrollment of new students will not be permitted.

IX. Appeal Procedure

Decisions about the authorization of substantive changes can be appealed through the ADEK HE Appeals Committee, which is established on a case-by-case basis.

The appeal petition must be submitted in writing to the ADEK HERL Division. It should be filed through the ADEK Higher Education Authorization Portal within 30 calendar days of receiving the HEAC decision.

On average, the appeal process takes up to twelve weeks. Depending on the scope of the appeal, the timeline may vary.

All the expenses related to the appeal procedure are covered by the appellant HEI.

The appeal procedure includes the below-outlined steps:

Step 1: Submit Appeal for Review

Description/ Definition:	• The appeal petition must be submitted in writing to the ADEK HERL Division and should be filed through the ADEK Higher Education Authorization Portal • The letter can be up to five pages long. It should include a detailed justification, substantial evidence, and facts that were available at the time of the review and that substantiate the grounds for the appeal • The basis for the appeal is the initial application submitted by the applicant. Evidence of corrective action taken in response to the findings and recommendations by the external reviewers cannot be included in the appeal process • An appeal is only valid if the review procedure was not correctly adhered to, relevant information provided by the HEI was not considered or adequately interpreted by ADEK staff or ERP, or a judgment was made based on factually inaccurate data. • The appellant can withdraw the appeal at any time during the process. However, if the appeal is withdrawn, the ADEK HE Appeals Committee will not accept a future appeal on the same or substantially similar grounds
Responsible:	Appellant
Inputs:	NAL
Outputs:	N/A
Timeline:	Within 30 calendar days of receiving the letter of rejection

Step 2: Receive and Review Appeal

Description/ Definition:	• The ADEK HERL Division Director receives and reviews the appeal and supporting evidence to determine its validity • If the appeal is justified, the ADEK Procedure Coordinator is assigned to launch the appeal • If the appeal is found not to be valid (justified), the appellant will either be notified and provided a justification or requested to elaborate on their concerns and provide further evidence within three days. The case will automatically be closed within five days if the appellant does not respond
Responsible:	ADEK HERL Division Director
Inputs:	• Appeals petition
Outputs:	N/A
Timeline:	Within one week of submitting the application

Step 3: Register Appeal, Schedule Appeals, and Prepare Response

Description/ Definition:	• The appeal, including all supporting documents and evidence, is registered in the Appeals Register by ADEK Procedure Coordinator • A review schedule is set by ADEK Procedure Coordinator. • The ERP is formed • The ADEK Procedure Coordinator prepares a response letter to the appellant that outlines the review logistics and provides information about any requirements that must be prepared and submitted • The response letter is shared with the ADEK HERL Division Director for review
Responsible:	• ADEK HERL Division Director • ADEK Head of QC • ADEK Procedure Coordinator
Inputs:	Appeals petition
Outputs:	Response letter
Timeline:	Within two weeks of case registration

Step 4: Approve Response

Description/ Definition:	The ADEK HERL Division Director reviews the response letter and either requests changes or approves it to be sent to the appellant
Responsible:	ADEK HERL Division Director
Inputs:	• Response letter • Appeals petition
Outputs:	Response letter
Timeline:	Within one day of receiving the response letter

Step 5: External Review of the Case

Description/ Definition:	The case is submitted to at least three independent external reviewers for evaluation
Responsible:	ERP
Inputs:	Appeals petition with all the supporting documents and evidence
Outputs:	External reviewer reports
Timeline:	Four to six weeks upon appointing the ERP depending on the scope of the appeal

Step 6: Summary of the Report

Description/ Definition:	The ADEK Procedure Coordinator prepares a summary of the external reviewer reports and sends it to ADEK Head of QC
Responsible:	• ADEK Procedure Coordinator • ADEK Head of QC
Inputs:	External reviewer reports
Outputs:	Summary report
Timeline:	Within one week of receiving the external reviewer reports

Step 7: Convention on the Appeal and Final Order

Description/ Definition:	• The ADEK HE Appeals Committee convenes to take a decision on the case • The Committee's secretary takes the meeting minutes and records all decisions • The ADEK HE Appeals Committee renders a written decision that either upholds, amends or overturns the recommendation/decision of the ERP • The Committee secretary prepares the recommendation for initial endorsement to the Committee's Chair and submits it afterward to the HEAC Chairperson for sign-off
Responsible:	HE Appeals Committee
Inputs:	Appeal's case file
Outputs:	Appeal decision
Timeline:	Within two weeks of receiving the summary report. However, in extraordinary circumstances, this timeline may be extended by the Committee's Chair if required

Step 8: Receive Letter Overturning/Upholding Decision

Description/ Definition:	• The appellant receives the final decision made by the ADEK Undersecretary/ADEK HERL Division Director. • The appellant's NOL application proceeds if ADEK's prior decision is overturned • If ADEK's prior decision is upheld, the appeal case file is closed and archived • The decision taken by the ADEK HE Appeals Committee is final and binding
Responsible:	• HE Appeals Committee Chair • ADEK HERL Division Director
Inputs:	• Appeal decision
Outputs:	NOL or NAL
Timeline:	Within one week of the decision-making

ANNEX A: Glossary of Terms

Term	Definition
Higher Education Authorization Committee	The Higher Education Authorization Committee is a decision-making body established within the ADEK Higher Education Sector to take decisions related to the authorization of new HEIs, programs, substantive changes, and re-authorization of existing HEIs. It is comprised of the key stakeholders of the Abu Dhabi higher education system
Academic/ study program	An academic/study program is a combination of courses and/or requirements leading to a degree
Appeal	A procedure in which cases are reviewed in case parties involved in a procedure request a formal change to an official decision. Appeals function both as a process for error correction as well as a process of clarifying and interpreting the decision. Appeal procedures are ADEK internal
Authorization	Authorization is a process whereby a new institution or a new academic/study program is granted a NOL to function in Abu Dhabi. It is a pre-requisite step for programs prior to their submission to the CAA for initial accreditation
Cross-border provision	Cross-border provision of higher education comprises any educational service or higher educational learning activity that offers at least one program and/or course of study and confers higher education qualifications according to the legal provisions in force. Cross-border provision encompasses any arrangement of higher education provision or refers to any entity that delivers higher education service inbound or outbound of Abu Dhabi. Cross-border provision of higher education necessitates the establishment of a physical presence (e.g., a branch campus of the institution) in a cross-border location other than the geographical location of its parent university (e.g., HEI/provider)
External review	The process whereby ADEK HE Regulation & Licensing Division collects data, information, and evidence about an institution, a particular unit or program of a given institution, or a core activity of an institution, to make a statement about its quality. The external review is usually based on a self-evaluation report provided by the institution and can be used as a basis for measurement metrics or as a method of judgment for (external) evaluation in higher education. ADEK provides training programs/induction prior to the evaluation to ensure their mutual understanding and the fair, consistent, appropriate, and smooth implementation of the process

External reviewers	External evaluation is carried out by a team of external experts, peers, or professionals in the field. The external reviewers have strong backgrounds in their respective fields of study and professional experience, therefore, they come from academia for institutional authorization cases, and from academia and the labor market for external review of study/academic programs
External review panel	The external review panel consists of up to 5 external reviewers and up to 5 faculty members, peers, and/or professionals in respective fields in case of study/academic programs. For each procedure ADEK sets an ERP by matching the qualifications of the peers and professionals with the submitted initiatives
Evidence-based evaluation	Evidence-based evaluation is the cornerstone of the culture of evidence. The latter is a HEI-acquired mindset based on clear ethical values, principles, and rules. It consists of the regular and thoughtful self-evaluation of the HEI's learning outcomes, engages the faculty and academic administration, and uses relevant institutional measurement metrics, in order to inform and prove, whenever (and to whomever) necessary, that it is doing well in specific areas (e.g., institutional planning, decision-making, quality, etc.) and for the purpose of improving its learning and teaching outcomes. The culture of evidence requested from the HEI implies that it is encouraged to be able to provide empirical data proving the consistency of its own mission
Fitness-of-purpose	This is a definition of quality in higher education, which guides the principle of evaluation of the extent to which the quality-related intentions of an organization are adequate and are aligned with the priorities set in the country
Fitness-for-purpose	This is a definition of quality in higher education, which judges the quality of a product or service in terms of the extent to which its stated purpose—defined either as meeting customer specifications or conformity with the institutional mission — is met
Follow-up	Follow-up is shorthand for procedures to ensure that outcomes of review processes have been, or are being, addressed and supported by data-driven facts, figures, and evidence
Guidelines	Guidelines provide a general framework of guidance, recommendations, and/or additional instructions on how to achieve a given standard. They are designed to streamline certain processes according to what the best practices are. Guidelines are not mandatory and are provided for further interpretation by HEIs providing flexibility and common sense in different circumstances and conditions, as well as guiding their decisions and achieving rational outcomes

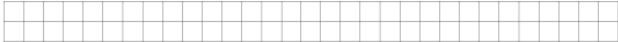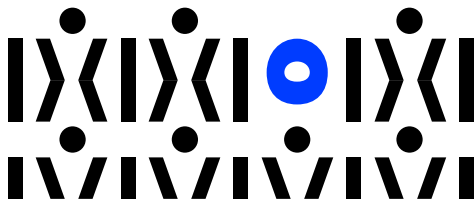|	
Higher Education Institution (HEI)	An education body that carries out higher education activities based on legally approved study programs leading to an undergraduate degree and above. Any higher education institution/provider must follow an external evaluation procedure (authorization) to assess its quality and to acquire the provisional functioning authorization, followed by its official licensure, as well as the accreditation of its study programs. HEIs/providers may differ in size, quality, resources, number of faculty and students, etc
The Internal Quality Assurance System	A scheme that should entail the existence of a quality policy and organizational structure, as well as formal procedures, processes, mechanisms, methods, and resources that provide reliable information on the quality of the HEI's activities. It should also provide guidance and recommendations on how to improve these activities
Procedure	A predefined, fixed, step-by-step sequence of activities or course of action (with definite start and end points) that must be followed in the same order to correctly perform an external evaluation
QFEmirates	The single description, at national level or level of an education system, which is internationally understood and through which all qualifications and other learning achievements in higher education may be described and related to each other in a coherent way and which defines the relationship between higher education qualifications. The QFEmirates Handbook sets out the policies, structures, standards, systems, and procedures for the national qualifications framework for the UAE, known as the QFEmirates. It enables a coherent, consistent, and robust approach to be taken to the design of qualifications for higher education, general education, and technical, vocational, and professional education and training. It sets out criteria for both the accreditation of qualifications and for those organizations in the public and private sectors which are to deliver them. It provides guidance and a reference tool for accreditation and awarding bodies and qualifications designers and developers
Quality Enhancement Plan	This is a multi-year strategic document devised by the institution that focuses on well-defined areas of improvement for attaining educational goals and addresses areas of concerns identified through its ongoing, comprehensive planning, and institutional evaluation processes. The QEP also provides a framework for successful stewardship, continual assessment, and flexible modification of strategic goals and major aspects of students' educational experiences. The QEP should demonstrate broad-based engagement of institutional constituencies in the development and implementation of the QEP

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Re-Authorization	Re-authorization is when an HEI is granted a NOL to function in Abu Dhabi. Re-authorization of HEIs is conducted based on a review of risk areas. It is an annual exercise, risk-preventive and proactive in nature, specifically designed to safeguard students and ensure the enhancement of HE provisions. It is a prerequisite for applying to the CAA for re-licensure
Self-evaluation	The process of self-evaluation consists of the systematic collection of administrative data, the questioning of students and graduates, and the holding of moderated interviews with lecturers and students, resulting in an evaluation report. Self-evaluation is a collective institutional reflection and an opportunity for quality enhancement. The resulting report further serves to provide information for the review team in charge of the external evaluation
Standards	Checkpoints or benchmarks determining the attainment of certain thresholds/requirements. Standards are mandatory for compliance and describe to a certain degree of detail the characteristics of the requirements, conditions, and courses of action to be met. They, therefore, provide the quantitative and qualitative basis on which the attainment of certain thresholds/requirements is measured, and an evaluative conclusion is drawn. Standards comprise technical specifications or other precise criteria designed to be used consistently as a guideline or definition. Standards articulate the minimum thresholds/conditions that are required from any HEI in Abu Dhabi to be in compliance with the performance expectations set by ADEK
Substantive change	Substantive change is any significant modification and expansion of the nature and/or scope of functions and operations of the existing HEI or program, for which current provisions and modalities were initially approved by ADEK. Substantive change also entails the procedure through which ADEK authorizes the proposed changes to be undertaken by the HEI between succeeding cycles of institutional re-authorization. Each substantive change undertaken by the HEI in between the two cycles of authorization must be authorized by ADEK
Technical compliance	The first step in external evaluation by the authorization body whereby the ADEK Procedure Coordinator evaluates the submission for compliance against ADEK standards. The technical check ensures that all standards are addressed in a due manner and all the required evidence to support the statements is in place prior to sending the application to the external reviewers. The application is not sent to external reviewers if it fails to comply with ADEK standards. If the result of the technical review demonstrates that the application is incomplete and/or essential information/evidence is missing, the applicant revises the application, incorporates all recommendations, and resubmits the application within the stipulated deadline, for it to be considered for future eligibility and external review

Wellbeing	Wellbeing encompasses special arrangements and policies that prioritize the physical, mental, and social aspects of students, faculty, and staff and promote optimal bodily health, encouraging participation in sports, extramural activities, and other recreational pursuits. These policies and activities recognize the interconnectedness of all parties involved and aim to foster a harmonious and supportive environment where everyone can flourish in terms of their physical, mental, and social wellbeing. In addressing wellbeing needs, HEIs should strive to create a positive and conducive environment for learning, teaching, and sporting excellence, aligning with the strategic priorities of Abu Dhabi

ANNEX B: List of Acronyms

ADEK	Abu Dhabi Department of Education and Knowledge
CAA	Commission of Academic Accreditation
CBHE	Cross-border Higher Education
ERP	External Review Panel
EQAF	External Quality Assurance Framework
HEAC	Higher Education Authorization Committee
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HERL	Higher Education Regulation & Licensing Division
IQAS	Internal Quality Assurance System
MoE	Ministry of Education
NAL	Non-Approval Letter
NOL	No Objection Letter
QA	Quality Assurance
QC	Quality Control
QEP	Quality Enhancement Plan
QFEmirates	Qualifications Framework for the Emirates
SER	Self-Evaluation Report
SoD	Students of Determination
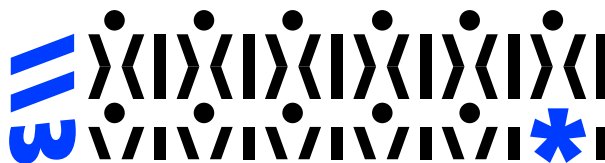
ANNEX C: Nomenclature

There is solid evidence that the nomenclature of the institution reflects its capabilities and functions. HEIs (universities, institutes, colleges, schools, academies, etc.) in Abu Dhabi are differentiated by research, teaching, and application capacities by the following categories, and ADEK seeks to provide approvals to only the leading institutions in each category, or 'best in class institutes'.

University

An institution that normally offers and grants **undergraduate, graduate,** and **doctoral** degrees in a **variety** of subject areas. The institution engages in **high-quality research** across the range of its subject areas which informs its teaching and learning.

Institute

A **research-focused, stand-alone** institution concentrating on **a single or small** range of subject areas, usually of a **technical nature.** The institution engages in **high-quality research** across the range of its subject areas. It may offer and grant degrees in areas **related to its research focus/foci,** at the undergraduate level but more normally at the **graduate** and **doctoral degree** levels.

College or School

An institution that is either **stand-alone** or a **constituent** part of a university. The terms college and school can be used interchangeably.

As a **stand-alone** entity, a college will be **practice-led** and normally offer and grant degrees in **a single or small range of subject areas,** usually at the **undergraduate** and/or **graduate levels.** The institution is expected to engage in a level of **research commensurate** with the level/s of the program/s being offered.

A college as a **constituent** part of a university (sometimes referred to as a university college) adopts the characteristics of the parent institution in **a single or small range of subject areas,** the college's specialism, for example, medicine, law, business, engineering, etc. A college, within an institution, may deliver **undergraduate** and/or **graduate** and/or **doctoral** degrees. The college/school is expected to engage in **a level and type of research commensurate** with the remit of the parent institution and the degrees being delivered by the college across the range of its subject areas. This research will inform the college's teaching and learning.

Academy

A **stand-alone** institution that is **practice-led,** normally offering and granting degrees in **a single subject area.** An academy normally offers and grants **undergraduate and/or graduate** degrees. An academy is expected to engage in **a level of research commensurate** with the level/s of the program/s being offered.