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Gap Analysis towards Harmonisation of the MQA Code of Practice for Programme Accreditation with the Quality Management System of MS ISO 9001:2008

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Abstract

The academic programmes at UKM are managed by various faculties, institutes and centres through the Quality Management System (QMS) of MS ISO 9001:2008 for Management of Undergraduate and Postgraduate Studies. This system ensures that all processes are conducted smoothly and in accordance with the requirements of the standards which encompass the design of an academic programme up till the management of examinations and graduation. The efficiency and effectiveness of the system is monitored through a series of scheduled internal audits, third party audits by the certifying body and also through the annual Management Review Meeting. In addition, in its efforts to obtain the status of a Self-Accrediting Institution, UKM mandated that all the academic programmes complied with the standards stipulated in the Code of Practice for Programme Accreditation (COPPA) produced by the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA). As both these standards have different approaches in quality assurance of an academic programme, it is necessary to align and harmonise both systems such that they complement each other. Therefore, this paper presents the gap analysis consequent to a mapping between the requirements of COPPA with the QMS document. The results showed that 80% of the COPPA requirements are already covered in the QMS, whereas coverage with the remaining 20% requires amendments in specific clauses in the QMS document and other policies such as the Policy on Teaching and Learning, Policy on Bridging of Academic Programmes and Policy on Information Communication Technology. The findings of the study can be used to ensure full compliance with COPPA if the processes described in the modified QMS and policies are implemented in totality.

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1. Introduction

Institutions of higher learning in Malaysia have always focused on teaching and learning as one of their main core business. While quality was always important, more recently, there has been increasing emphasis on a formal approach to quality, standards, outcomes and their measurement in teaching and learning. Compliance with international quality standards such as that of the International of Standards Organisation (ISO) standards and accreditation of health facilities by international agencies such as International Joint Commission (IJC) and Malaysian Society for Quality in Health (MSQH) have gained prominence in recent years. Applications for ISO certification were previously primarily for the manufacturing and service industries but in 2002 UKM obtained ISO 9001:2000 certification for the Quality Management System (QMS) for the Management of Undergraduate Programmes and in 2006 for the Postgraduate Programmes. In 2009, both system had been merged into a single QMS for the Management of Undergraduate and Postgraduate Studies. Audits are carried out by the certification bodies every year.

The use of ISO 9000 standards in developing a QMS for managing selected business in universities has been in practice since the introduction of the standards (Karapetrovic, et al. 1998). In many mega universities like UKM, it is essential to have a centralised QMS to co-ordinate and oversee the implementation of quality assurance activity university-wide based on policies and guidelines formulated by related boards or committees (Jung 2005) and many Malaysian universities adopted ISO 9000 based standards when developing the QMS for managing academic programmes and faculties, for example as reported by Fatimah Hashim and Halimah Awang (2005) for University of Malaya, Malaysia.

The Malaysian government in its efforts to benchmark our education system against the best in the world passed the Malaysian Qualifications Agency Act in 2007. This Act provided for the setting up of the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) which was entrusted with the tasks of ensuring the implementation of the Malaysian Qualifications Framework (MQF) (MQA, 2007) and the accreditation of all educational programmes and institutions in the country. In addition, the Act also provided authority for MQA to maintain the Malaysian Qualifications Register (MQR) database which contains the list of accredited programmes. The standards required for accreditation are prescribed in the Code of Practice for Programme Accreditation (COPPA) and Code of Practice for Institutional Audit (COPIA) (MQA 2008; MQA 2009). In 2009, UKM was invited by the Minister of Higher Education to apply for the status of Self-Accrediting Institution (SAI). In April 2010, after the evaluation of its written submission (UKM, 2009) and followed by the accreditation visit in March 2010 by a panel of eminent educationists, UKM was awarded the status of SAI. Although this status was bestowed without any stipulation of duration, UKM will be subjected to periodic review of its compliance with MQF and SAI terms and conditions.

The approach and emphasis of the ISO and MQF processes are different and the exercise for ISO certification and audit for SAI status each year involves a great deal of documentation and evidence of compliance with stated/prescribed processes. In an effort to streamline the two quality assurance processes, this study was carried out to identify the gaps between the COPPA requirements and the provisions in UKM's ISO Quality Document such that each would complement the other. It was hoped that the findings of this study and the recommendations would make all processes related to teaching and learning in UKM comply with both ISO and COPPA requirements.

2. Methodology

The COPPA document is divided into 9 areas and within each area there are benchmarked standards and enhanced standards. The areas are Vision, Mission, Educational Goals and Learning Outcomes; Curriculum Design and Delivery; Assessment of Students; Student Selection and Support Services; Academic Staff; Educational Resources; Programme Monitoring and Review; Leadership, Governance and Administration and Continual Quality Improvement. There are a total of 100 benchmarked standards and 59 enhanced standards. These standards were tabulated and each one was assessed as to whether it was covered in UKM's Quality Document and other supporting documents/policies related to teaching and learning such as the Teaching and Learning Policy, Policy on Bridging of Academic Programmes and Policy on Information Communication Technology.

Gap analysis is a mechanism to identify the gap between the Quality Document and COPPA, which also includes MQF. It involves determining, analysing and evaluating variations between both documents. For each standard in

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