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1. Introduction

This topic discusses the training of reviewers with examples of different approaches to training, to fit different circumstances. The topic also provides a set of examples of workshop outlines that can be used by trainers in designing programs.

Objectives: Training of Reviewers

Upon completion of this topic, you should be able to

- identify the need for and purposes of training reviewers
- describe the different approaches to training with reference to the factors that influence them
- discuss ways in which training programs for external reviewers may be tailored for institutional and program reviews

2. Purpose of Training Reviewers

It is often said that quality assurance based on team visits is no better or worse than the quality of the members of the team. Excellent written standards and processes are wasted if team members are not familiar with those standards and trained how to apply them.

It is an underlying principle for external review that the team of reviewers should, collectively, have sufficient knowledge and understanding of the areas covered in the review in order to conduct a professional and effective external review process. In addition, the site visit requires a high level of knowledge and understanding of the purpose and principles of the review process and good practices for conducting site visits. In this regard, it is crucial that reviewers understand the sometimes subtle differences between different QA frameworks applied in different countries or areas To achieve these outcomes, therefore, many quality assurance agencies organise training sessions for their reviewers. In cases where reviewers have been fully trained in other jurisdictions and have the appropriate background and profile the agency generally provides at least a briefing focused on the particular features of its review framework to ensure a common understanding of the scope and processes among all reviewers.

The main purpose of training sessions for reviewers is to ensure that the reviewers have an understanding of the quality assurance approach to be used, including the requirements and rationale for the institutions' self evaluative processes. The reviewers need to understand their roles and responsibilities, the phases of QA and the outcomes of the review process. Training sessions, therefore, typically provide an overview and discussion of the overall QA framework and where the reviewer fits into to process. Many training sessions also have an operational dimension and provide the reviewers with an opportunity to test their skills through analysis of a 'real life' example of a self evaluation document. Training sessions can also include case study and role plays simulating the site visit interviews and thus anticipating the possible situations that reviewers are likely to face when conducting the site visit.

3. Approaches to Training

Training sessions may be organised as induction training for all new reviewers who have been appointed for a specified period of time, for example, to a register of reviewers or auditors. In these cases, training sessions are provided annually or biennially based on needs and the number of reviewers appointed.

An alternative mode of training is to train reviewers as a selected group, typically as a constituted review team where there is likely to be a mix of experienced and less experienced reviewers. This approach allows some focus on the specifics of the institution or program to be reviewed and easy sharing of expertise by the more experienced reviewers.

Training is often provided by a mix of agency staff and/or agency board members as they are well equipped to provide the information on the agency's approach and requirements. In some cases agencies invite experienced reviewers or QA consultants to conduct the training. In designing the training activities, the agencies benefit from the inclusion of reviewers with experience who can ensure that topics are examined with a real-life perspective. This can add more credibility to the process than in cases where the training is provided by agency staff alone.

In most cases, the training sessions are organised for reviewers only but there are also examples where training sessions are open to the institutions which are the subject of review or to colleagues from other countries. These additional perspectives can be very beneficial. (Participation of institutional representatives would not be appropriate in situations where a team was being trained for a specific review).

The length and intensity of training will depend on the situation in a country or region and the nature of the review or audit to be undertaken. In Australia, although individuals on the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) register of auditors are senior people who have participated in various forms of quality review, they may not have experience of the AUQA quality audit model. For this reason, AUQA requires auditors to complete an induction training session as a condition of their appointment. Australian-based auditors attend, at AUQA's expense, a two-day session led by AUQA staff and other auditors. For pragmatic reasons, overseas auditors do not attend these sessions, but are provided with written training materials.

U.S. institutional accreditors train volunteers before they serve on teams. An example is the current practice of the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE). Like other agencies, MSCHE tries to change and improve its training every year as it recognises there is not one "right way" to train, although there are key subject areas that should be addressed in all training.

MSCHE requires that all team members and chairs who have not been trained within the last three years attend training sessions. All of the costs of attending the sessions are borne by MSCHE, because volunteers are not paid for the time they spend on visits or training. This is one reason that evaluators are usually not offered training until they have been assigned to a team, even though they have volunteered to be included in the database of available volunteers. Nonetheless, special training sessions are offered during the annual MSCHE meeting for those who are interested but have not been assigned to team.

It is difficult, however, to enforce a requirement that all team members be trained in situations where members withdraw from teams after training sessions are over - usually at the last minute – and substitutes must be found on short notice. Offering training sessions throughout the year helps to ensure that evaluators are able to attend a session, even if they have a conflict on one of the dates.

Some agencies also organise ad hoc training sessions in special areas for brush-up of knowledge or skills or if the agency has included new elements in its processes. For example, in countries that have introduced a national qualifications framework (NQF) and quality assurance procedures to underpin the framework, the external quality agencies are often required to train the reviewers in how to determine if learning outcomes of a program are in compliance with the level descriptors.

Reviewers who might have a close relationship with the agency are also in some cases invited to attend seminars and workshops organised for the agency staff or for the institutions. This ensures that all parties involved in a review process have a common level of information and understanding of the review processes and other related subjects.

In some jurisdictions, special training is organised for team chairs. The rationale for special training is that the chairs hold a range of responsibilities in addition to other members and often have to attend a broader scope of activities. Examples of additional topics to be covered with chairs are

- how to chair the sessions;
- how to organise for the preparation of the feedback session at the end of the site visit and how to present this oral feedback; and
- how to resolve conflicts in the team and organise the discussion processes effectively.

The review team chair may also have to attend pre-meetings prior to the site visit and, subsequent to the completion of the review, liaise with the institution for post review activities such as follow-up on conditions or requirements. If the chair is also charged with the responsibility of writing a report, special attention may also be given to provide training in report writing to meet agency requirements.

4. Content of Training Programs

This topic includes examples of programs for training reviewers, but generally speaking the topics typically covered in the induction training include:

- the background to the review system;
- overview of the review process;
- responsibilities of team members including the emphasis on peer review;
- current pressures, directions and changes in the higher education sector;
- external reference points for quality audit of the country's higher education institutions;
- institution/agency quality frameworks;
- analysing the self-study report;

- using performance measures and evaluating evidence;
- effective information-gathering;
- reviewing specialist aspects as required by local circumstances such as
  - auditing transnational activities;
  - auditing non self-accrediting institutions.

Sessions are generally interactive and provide the opportunity for auditors to practice techniques required. There should also be ample opportunity for sharing of expertise as it is very likely that participants are both very experienced in higher education and have involved in a range of reviews such as professional accreditation or reviews in other countries.

Practice sessions prepare reviewers for site visits and typically cover:
- do's and don'ts at the site visit;
- how to break the ice and create an atmosphere of engagement;
- how to listen;
- how to question;
- how to take notes;
- how to handle opposition from the interviewees;
- how to work together as a review team, including how to handle possible conflicts and disagreements; and
- how to come to joint conclusions.

The information below is an example of a one-day training program for a US accrediting agency.

One-day Training - Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE)

One-day Training - Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE)

'Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE training lasts approximately one day for team members. Team chairs and evaluators attend the same sessions, and additional training sessions are offered to chairs that address their special responsibilities. Training includes plenary sessions for all chairs and evaluators and "break-out sessions" in which evaluators are assigned to a small group based on the type of institution they will be visiting (e.g. research universities, two year community colleges, four year liberal arts colleges).

Before the training date, each group receives excerpts from the actual self-study and team report for a recently visited institution of the specific type to be considered in its break-out group. Members also receive hypothetical situations and relevant MSCHE publications. The small group discussions use these examples to apply the principles that they learned in plenary sessions. A small group member who has been assigned to chair a visiting team may lead the break-out session, treating the small group as a "team." A staff member is included in each group.

Team Preparation and Conduct: Training starts with general advice from an experienced evaluator about the team experience and requirements for individuals serving on teams. For example: adequate preparation before the visit, how to conduct interviews without preaching, how to handle specific types of difficult situations at the visited institution, and how to cooperate as a team.

A common complaint about individual team members that is addressed in training is the need to evaluate each institution within the context of its own mission and goals

– not to lecture the institution about how matters are handled at the evaluator's own institution. The institution being visited has spent considerable time and effort addressing not only compliance, but also its individually tailored plans for improvement. In the U.S., where most institutions have been accredited and reviewed many times, it is not likely that an institution will lose its accreditation. Therefore, expert peer advice about the institution's plans for itself is a valuable contribution of the visiting team.

In the breakout session that follows, the group practices for an evaluation visit by simulating the team meeting that occurs at the beginning of a visit by analysing how the institution used the "mission" standard that requires an institution to be guided by a clear mission and goals. The group is asked what major issues can be identified based on the excerpt from the sample self-study, which institutional representatives it wishes to interview based on those issues, and what questions each evaluator would ask in his/her area of assigned responsibility.

Interpreting and Applying Standards: Another plenary session reviews the standards; how they relate to one another (e.g. how the outcomes assessment standards apply to each of the other standards); and how to interpret and apply them as a whole rather than as a checklist. It emphasised the need for every team member to be familiar with the entire self-study, and not just one or two assigned sections. It emphasises the self-evident – but not always fulfilled – need to be thoroughly familiar with the standards and policies before the visit.

The type of evidence that should be expected is described. It is important to ensure that team members are not given any "secret" advice of which the institutions to be visited are not aware. If the evaluators have a checklist of what types of evidence must be demonstrated for a specific standard, then the institution should be given the same information before it enters self-study.

This plenary discussion also includes the type of MSCHE action that teams should recommend based on the nature of their findings. Peer reviewers may be disinclined to recommend non-compliance actions (such as warning or probation) for action, even for institutions that fail to comply with one or more standards.

Writing the Report: A plenary session addresses content and strategies for writing the team report.

Drawing Conclusions, Recommending Action, and Offering Counsel to the Institution: At the end of the day, each break-out group decides what action it would recommend to the MSCHE for the same hypothetical examples given to all attendees. These materials address standards that are particularly difficult to apply, such as planning, assessing student learning, and reviewing branch campuses and distance education’.

Finally, a general session is held to share the conclusions and reasoning of each group. This session emphasises that accreditation is an art as well as a science, and also provides evaluators 'benchmarking' examples. Evaluators ask final questions, and they are encouraged to contact staff with further questions.

MSCHE is considering whether training can be successfully offered 'on-line' DETC, a U.S. QAA that accredits only on-line institutions, offers on-line training that includes exercises as well as information.

Learning goals are specified in advance for each portion of the training, and attendees are surveyed afterwards to determine whether those goals were achieved.

Given below is an example of a training program, including the schedule, goals and some pre-workshop exercises for participants, from one of these sessions.

Training for Accreditation Reviews

Training for Accreditation Reviews

Section 1: Workshop Goals

Workshop for Team Chairs and Evaluators

Workshop Goals

This workshop is designed to prepare you to be an effective member of a Middle States evaluation team that recommends appropriate, consistent, rigorous, and defensible accreditation actions to the Middle States Commission on Higher Education. This workshop will specifically prepare you to:

- Understand the overall accreditation process, including what happens after the evaluation team completes its work on the campus;
- Understand the team visit process and your responsibilities as an evaluation team chair or team member;
- Understand and interpret appropriately Middle States' accreditation standards, and apply them within the context of a particular institution's mission;
- Determine what types and levels of evidence are sufficient to demonstrate compliance with the standards;
- Critically analyse a self-study for content, thoroughness and evidence of compliance with the standards;
- Use the visit effectively to obtain additional information through interviews and document reviews;
- Prepare an evaluation team report that meets Commission expectations for format and content, all supported by findings and documentation;
- Work effectively with team colleagues to discuss, deliberate and reach consensus on recommendations for accreditation actions that correspond appropriately to the team's findings.

Section 2: Workshop Program

Workshop for Team Chairs and Evaluators Agenda

Day 1
(Team Chairs Only)

5:45 – 6:20 pm	**Reception for New Chairs**
5:45 – 6:20	**Reception for New Chairs**

6:20 – 6:30 pm	**Welcome**
6:30 – 7:15 pm	**Dinner**
7:15 – 8:30 pm	**Presentation & Discussion: Strategies for Team Chairs**

This session gives an overview of the team chair's responsibilities and offers strategies for organising the team and conducting a successful evaluation visit. A question and answer period will follow the presentation.

Day2
(Team Chairs and Evaluators)

7:30 - 8:20 am	**Registration and Continental Breakfast**
8:20 – 8:30 am	**Welcome**
8:30 - 9:15 am	**Presentation**: **Making the Most Out of the Accreditation Team Experience** The speaker provides an overview of the roles of team chair and team members and describes the agency's expectations for these volunteers.
9:30 - 10:15 am	**Breakout Exercise**: **Understanding and Analysing the Self-Study** Facilitators: Agency Staff Participants will practise preparing for an evaluation team visit by simulating the team meeting that occurs at the beginning of a visit. They will discuss their pre-workshop exercise, in which they analysed self-study excerpts pertaining to Standard 1 (Mission and Goals). They will then discuss how they would use time during their visit to obtain additional information on the institution's compliance with Standard 1.
10:15 – 10:30 am	**Break**
10:30-11:45 am	**Panel Discussion**: **Interpreting and Applying the Standards: An Overview**

After an overview by the moderator on the organisation of the standards, types of findings and possible agency actions, the presenters will speak on the processes they have followed in interpreting, applying and evaluating their assigned standards. They will offer suggestions on developing findings; differentiating between suggestions, recommendations and requirements and arriving at appropriate recommendations for agency actions. An opportunity for questions and answers will follow the presentations.

12:00 - 1:00 pm	**Luncheon**
1:00 - 1:30 pm	**Writing the Team Report** This session gives an overview of the team report, with special emphasis on content and strategies for writing the report.
1:30 - 1: 45 pm	**Break**
1:45 – 3:15 pm	**Breakout Exercise:** **Drawing Conclusions, Recommending a Commission Action and Offering Counsel to the Institution** Facilitators: Agency Staff Participants will practise drawing conclusions from an evaluation team visit and developing appropriate recommendations for Commission action by simulating the team meeting that occurs on the last evening of a visit. They will discuss excerpts of a fictitious team report on Standards 2, 13 and 14; draft suggestions, recommendations and/or requirements based on the report and craft a recommendation for Commission accreditation action. Breakout "team chairs" will be invited to share some of their group's conclusions and decisions regarding one of the standards discussed during the breakout exercise, along with the group's rationale for its conclusions and decisions. An opportunity for questions and answers will follow.
3:30 pm	**Adjourn**

Section 3: Pre-Workshop Exercise and Breakout Exercises

1. Understanding and Analysing the Self-Study

Resources:

- XXXX College Self-Study Excerpts
- Characteristics of Excellence, especially Standard 1 on pages 1-3

- Team Visits: Conducting and Hosting an Evaluation Visit, especially "Understanding the Self-Study" on pages 20-21

Before the workshop:

A. Read the self-study excerpt.

B. In Characteristics of Excellence, read Standard 1 (Mission and Goals), especially the standard itself and its fundamental elements.

C. Come to the workshop with notes on answers to the following questions:

1. What is your initial impression of this institution's compliance with Standard 1 (Mission and Goals)? Does it appear to be in compliance or not? Or is there insufficient information in the self-study to make this determination?
2. What additional materials would you like to review regarding Standard 1 once you arrive for the team visit? Why?
3. Whom would you like to meet on campus regarding Standard 1? Why?
4. What questions would you like to ask in your meetings? Why?
5. If you do not have time to meet everyone you've identified, which meetings would be most important, deserving scheduling priority?

At the workshop:

A. You will be assigned to a breakout table, where you and your tablemates will simulate the discussion that the evaluation team has upon arrival on campus. One individual at your table will play the role of team chair and lead the group's discussion.

B. Share with your colleagues your answers to the questions above and try to reach consensus on them.

C. Your breakout room facilitator will then ask you to share what you've learned from this exercise regarding preparing for a successful evaluation team visit and working with your colleagues on the evaluation team.

2. Drawing Conclusions, Recommending a Commission Action and Offering Counsel to the Institution

Resources:

- Excerpts from a Fictitious Evaluation Team Report
- Policy Statement: Range of Agency Actions on Accreditation
- Guidelines: Standardised Language for Commission Actions on Accreditation
- Summary of Actions a Team May Take or Recommend to the Commission
- Team Visits: Conducting and Hosting an Evaluation Visit
- Characteristics of Excellence

Before the workshop:

A. Read "Excerpts from a Fictitious Evaluation Team Report".

B. In Team Visits: Conducting and Hosting an Evaluation Visit, read Chapter 5 (The Team Visit and Team Findings), Chapter 6 (The Evaluation Report and the Institutional Response), and Appendix 1 (Assessing Student Learning and Institutional Effectiveness: Understanding Middle States Expectations)

C. Come to the workshop with notes on answers to the questions in "What Might the Commission and its Representatives Look For in Assessment Documentation?" on page 60-61 of Team Visits.

At the workshop:

A. You will rejoin your breakout table, where you and your tablemates will now simulate the discussion that the evaluation team has on the last evening of its visit. One individual at your table will again play the role of team chair and lead the group's discussion.

B. Discuss the following questions and try to reach consensus on your answers to them.

Standard 2: Planning, Resource Allocation, and Institutional Renewal

(Spend no more than 15 minutes answering the following three questions.)

1. Is the institution in compliance with Standard 2? Why or why not? What evidence documents your conclusion?
2. Should the team state a Requirement? If so, what should it be?
3. If appropriate, draft up to two statements of Significant Accomplishments, Significant Progress or Exemplary/Innovative Practices; up to two Recommendations and up to two Suggestions for the institution related to this standard. Why are you offering these Significant Accomplishments, Recommendations and Suggestions?

Standard 13: Related Educational Activities

(Spend no more than 20 minutes answering the following three questions.)

1. Is the institution in compliance with Standard 13? Why or why not? What evidence documents your conclusion?
2. Should the team state a Requirement? If so, what should it be?
3. If appropriate, draft up to two statements of Significant Accomplishments, Significant Progress or Exemplary/Innovative Practices; up to two Recommendations and up to two Suggestions for the institution related to this standard. Why are you offering these Significant Accomplishments, Recommendations and Suggestions?

Standard 14: Assessment of Student Learning

(Spend no more than 20 minutes answering the following three questions.)

1. Is the institution in compliance with Standard 14? Why or why not? What evidence documents your conclusion?
2. Should the team state a Requirement? If so, what should it be?
3. If appropriate, draft up to two statements of Significant Accomplishments, Significant Progress or Exemplary/Innovative Practices; up to two Recommendations and up to two Suggestions for the institution related to this standard. Why are you offering these Significant Accomplishments, Recommendations and Suggestions?

Arriving at an Overall Recommendation to the Commission

(Spend no more than 15 minutes answering the following two questions.)

1. Based on these three standards alone, what accreditation action should the evaluation team recommend to the Commission? Why is that an appropriate action?
2. If the team is recommending any follow-up action, what specific types of follow up are recommended or required?

C. Your breakout room facilitator will then ask you to share what you've learned from this exercise regarding drawing conclusions from the evaluation team visit, recommending a Commission action and offering counsel to the institution.

The following is an example of a part of a training program for auditors by Quality Assurance Council (QAC) of Hong Kong.

Training Program for Auditors – Quality Assurance Council, Hong Kong

Training Program for Auditors – Quality Assurance Council, Hong Kong

'The preparation of auditors for audits conducted by the Quality Assurance Council (QAC) of Hong Kong typically lasts two days: an 'induction' day and a more 'intensive' day. The 'intensive' preparation day may be conducted outside Hong Kong for international auditors if that is more practicable.

Topics include:

- background on QAC and the Hong Kong education system
- purpose and methodology
- overview of process and responsibilities of auditors
- analysis of documents from auditees
- information gathering techniques
- effective interviewing techniques
- assessing the effectiveness of feedback loops
- auditing programs offered outside Hong Kong'

Source: http://www.ugc.edu.hk/eng/doc/qac/publication/auditmanual.pdf

Training sessions are evaluated by participants and results fed into improvement strategies for the program. Feedback for improvement of programs also comes from indirectly from institutions that are reviewed as these are surveyed about the general performance of the visiting team. The chair and members of individual teams also provide feedback after each review and this information assists in fine-tuning of training programs.

5. Discussion

Discussion: Training of Reviewers

1. Think about the role of reviewers in your country and the information about different approaches to training. Then, list the features of an ideal training program for reviewers. If there is an existing program, in what ways might it be improved? (If there is more than one external quality agency, choose the one you with which you are most familiar).
2. Would there be any obvious differences between a training program for institutional review and program review? If the answer is no, please elaborate why not and if the answer is yes, what are the main differences?

   Exemplify your view by developing one training program explaining why it can cover both review types and or two separate training programs which should be able to reflect the differences between the two and thus the need for two separate training programs.

6. Summary

This topic covered the following main points:

- Training is required because review teams need to have sufficient knowledge and understanding of the areas covered in the review to conduct a professional and effective external review process.
- The main purpose of training sessions for reviewers is to ensure that the reviewers have an understanding of
  - the quality assurance approach to be used;
  - their roles and responsibilities; and
  - the outcomes of the review process.
- The approach adopted for conducting and designing a training program depends on a number of factors, including
  - the nature of the review;
  - the situation in which the training is to be conducted; and
  - the experience of the reviewers on the panel.
- The content of a training program focuses on
  - the standards and responsibilities expected of reviewers;
  - the methodology and framework to be adopted;
  - the purpose of site visits and how best to conduct them;
  - the use of performance measures and evaluating evidence
  - the scenario prevailing in the higher education sector in the country in question.