

CONFIDENTIAL

**Institutional Audit External Review Panel Report
of
Avid College
17th September – 5th December 2017**

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Institutional Review Report of Avid College

1. Introduction

This Institutional Review (IR) was conducted as part of the Maldives Qualification Authority's (MQA) effort to promote quality assurance in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in the Maldives. The main purposes of the Institutional Audit is to recognize the strengths of HEIs operations and academic quality, and to further strengthen operations and academic quality by making relevant recommendations for future improvement. The review was conducted by a panel of external reviewers, selected by the MQA from those who had undergone MQA institutional review training. The review process was guided by the "Manual for conducting Institutional Audit" (MIA) prepared by the MQA by a team of external consultants.

1.1 Key activities of the review

MQA informed Avid College to prepare its Self-Evaluation Report (SER) on 01st March 2017. Avid College submitted their completed SER to MQA on 30th August 2017. The details of the panel of external reviewers were communicated with Avid College on 30th August 2017 and were given the opportunity to convey any concerns regarding the panel. Concurrence of Avid College regarding panel was obtained.

The review took place from 17th September to 5th December 2017. The review commenced with the initiation meeting held at MQA on 17th September 2017. At the initiation meeting, the panel chair and lead report writer were identified. A tentative plan was formulated that included targets for desk evaluation, site visit, and report writing. MQA shared the SER of Avid College with each member of the panel for their individual desk evaluation.

MQA forwarded the site visit activities schedule to Avid College for their concurrence which was soon received. The site visit took place from 26th to 27th September 2017. During the site visit, the review panel had focus group discussions with the management, staff and students selected by Avid College. The team also observed 2 class lessons. Reviewers checked documents to verify the evidence provided by Avid College and inspected physical facilities and infrastructure. Detailed schedule of activities carried out by the panel are included in the Appendices.

1.2 Brief history and overview of Avid College

Avid College started as a training institute in 2005. The institute which gained college status in 2013 offers a wide range of programmes from Advanced Diploma to Master's Degree in three discipline areas namely Education, Business and Management and Human Development. In 2016, Avid College added another key area of study with the establishment of the Faculty of Information Technology which has not yet become fully operational. The first programme in the Information Technology discipline, Bachelor of Information Technology in Software Engineering (3 years), is placed under the Faculty of Business and Management as there is no enrolment yet.

As can be observed from Table 1, enrolment in Avid College has increased at an average annual growth of 49% since 2013. As of 2017, Avid College has 30 programmes from Foundation studies to Master's Degree. Avid College's enrolment is focused on early childhood education, educational management and business management.

Table1: Number of students by Faculty

Name of Faculty	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Faculty of Education	156	165	200	275	304
Faculty of Business Management	46	28	62	144	446
Faculty of Human Development	-	6	10	25	19
Faculty of Information Technology	-	-	-	-	-
Total	202	199	272	444	769

Faculties

Avid College has 4 faculties namely:

- Faculty of Education
- Faculty of Business and Management
- Faculty of Human Development
- Faculty of Information Technology (formed in 2016 but not operational)

The Faculty of Business and Management is the largest faculty with 58% (446) of student enrolment while the Faculty of Education has the next largest enrolment of 304 students (39.5%). Faculty of Human Development has the least students (19) while Faculty of Information Technology is yet to become operational. The solitary bachelor programme (Bachelor of Information Technology) is placed under the Faculty of Business and Management as no students have enrolled in this programme.

International Affiliations

Avid College's strategic plan (2016-2018) has a clearly stated goal (goal no. 6) of seeking international recognition through affiliations with established foreign HEIs. The list of affiliations with international HEIs is listed below.

- Unitar International University, Malaysia
- Lincoln University College, Malaysia
- UCSI University, Malaysia
- Cyberjaya University College of Medical Sciences (CUCMS), Malaysia
- iCOOP College, Malaysia
- Riverbank Academy Sdn. Bhd., Malaysia.

In addition, Avid College has appointed scholars from Malaysian universities to help support the Avid Research and Innovation Centre (ARIC) in providing supervisory, research and publication training to Avid College academic staff.

1.3 General findings of the review

This external audit will enable Avid College to reflect on the present practices in the areas of governance and planning, teaching, learning and research, staffing, facilities and resources, admission, records and student services, and quality assurance.

The existing governance structure consists of several bodies. However, these bodies need to be streamlined to enable clear line of authority and independent decision making and planning.

Teaching and learning is in line with MQA requirements. Avid Research and Innovation Center has been established to spearhead research and supervisory capacity building. The panel observed that all degree programs are inclusive of research components. Evidence of international involvement in research is limited. Students are selected as per MQA requirements.

The academic staff meets the MQA prescribed requirements. However there is no documented policy and procedure addressing staff workload and work distribution.

The students and staff are satisfied with the facilities provided. All classrooms are equipped with computers and projectors and meets the minimum requirements of Department of Higher Education. The online resources of the library need to include refereed journals and resources in key programme areas.

Student application documents and admission records are maintained in hardcopy format. Student results are maintained in Microsoft Excel sheets. It was observed that results of levels five, six and seven were entered into three separate sheets.

Internal quality audits conducted in 2013 and 2015, and the recent student satisfaction survey conducted in September 2017 shows Avid College's commitment to quality.

1.4 Performance in relation to the Institutional Audit Criteria

Performance is reviewed against the six Institutional Audit (IA) criteria proposed in the MIA;

Criterion 1: Governance & Planning

Criterion 2: Teaching, Learning & Research

Criterion 3: Staffing

Criterion 4: Facilities & Resources

Criterion 5: Admission, Records & Student Services

Criterion 6: Quality Assurance

Each criterion was evaluated based on the SER and evidence provided by the HEI. Every effort is made to maintain objectivity so that the purpose of the review may be achieved.

The main observations inclusive of the strengths, weaknesses and commendations are provided in the remaining text of this report. Recommendations of the panel are also included at the end of each criterion.

2. Criterion One: Governance & Planning

2.1 Planning

Vision

Avid College has a simple, clear and well publicized vision “to be a leading higher education provider in Maldives”. This vision is communicated to staff and students through the induction sessions for new staff and orientation for new students. All communication materials on Avid College’s programmes including its website, provide this corporate information to all interested parties.

Mission

Avid College’s stated mission is to “enhance the academic and professional lives through advanced technology, adaptable learning environment, and research and innovation...” From the information in the SER, evidence provided during on-site visit and directly observed by the panel, Avid College provides opportunities for knowledge and skills enhancement to qualified Maldivians through its various programmes of study but the panel did not see systematic evidence of how lives of students have changed through enhanced employability, higher income, greater and promotional prospects.

The panel observed that courses are scheduled and taught in the evening and weekends through the modular arrangements to cater to the needs of the working adults and those coming from the other islands. On advanced technology, Avid College has

developed an online Learning Management System (LMS) which is under technical review and provides reasonable audiovisual aids for teaching. The research and innovation strategy is poised to start through international assistance. It will take years before it can become a strong means of mission fulfillment.

In summary, not all strategies i.e. advanced technology, adaptable learning environment, and research and innovation have progressed equally. Research and innovation is the least developed strategy for mission fulfillment.

Guiding Pillars, Values and Graduate Attributes

Avid College's core values of student first, quality, integrity, innovation and Islamic values articulate the belief system of the College. These are compatible with its vision and mission. These values must be readily understood in terms of its governance, management, and academic operations. It is the panel's view that a statement of Avid College's unique graduate attributes will be a helpful complement to the stated core values. Avid College is already highlighting the field or industry exposure of its students as a distinctive characteristic of its delivery.

Strategic Plan

Avid College has developed an appropriate (research, new branches, new programmes, staff recruitment and development, internationalization, industrial exposure, and better governance and management) and achievable strategic plan for the 2016-2018 period. The 10 goals have been expanded into clear and potentially measurable objectives which are supported by an action plan. Although the panel was informed and observed evidence of progress in implementing the strategic plan, no documented system for evaluation of the strategic plan and action plans was in evidence.

Staff interviewed had some knowledge of the contents of the plan but no evidence was available on discussion with or presentation of the strategic plan to the staff. The plan was developed by the top management and shared with the key staff responsible for implementation.

Internal Audit Reports

Strictly speaking, there is no clearly established structure and process for internal audits for either assessing adherence to internal management policies and procedures or to ascertain that academic quality requirements are met. The 2017 SER was the third internal audit conducted by Avid College while the first two IQA were conducted in 2013 and 2015. The SER followed the format provided by the Maldives Qualifications Authority (MQA). The self-evaluation describes all the college processes and with findings and recommendations. It is imperative that the SER document be examined carefully for its comprehensiveness and accuracy. It would have been more helpful if the SER was fully descriptive (included all areas of operation) analytical (examined practices against policies and internal standards using data where appropriate), evaluative (state clear judgments of the extent of adherence or effectiveness) and mitigative (identify areas of improvements).

2.2 Governance

As already described and commented upon in Section 2.1 Planning, Avid College, notwithstanding the recommendations for improvement, has stated its strategic purpose and direction. The panel observed that the constitution and functioning of governing bodies were not comprehensively documented, approved and records maintained. The Executive Board, QAB and Examination Boards were not featured in the Organisational Chart provided with the SER. The Organisational Chart was amended on the basis of panel's comments to the top management. While the panel lauds the responsiveness and readiness of the College to improve the governance, governance changes must be properly executed after review and endorsement by the governance body (which is the Chairman in Avid College). It is therefore, the panel's view that the governance i.e. a system through which the top management controls and directs the operations of the college, is observed to be in need of urgent improvements in several respects as outlined in the recommendations 7 to 10 below.

2.3 Recommendations

1. Consider stipulating a clear time frame for the achieving the vision of becoming a leading college. Such a timeline will provide greater focus to the strategic and annual action plans, enable better monitoring of the progress and recalibration of actions by Avid College as it marches towards its proclaimed vision.
2. Consider stating a position e.g. top 3, in Maldivian higher education to provide a measurable objective in developing and assessing its plans.
3. Establish a documented process to regularly review the progress and, if need be, adjust the objectives or actions or both in realizing the strategic goals and objectives, and in mitigating risks that come with rapid growth.
4. The responsibilities (scope of one's work, job, function or role), authority (the extent of power to decide and direct action) and accountability (to whom will this body report or account to for its actions) of each body, position must be clearly stated and endorsed by the highest governance body. Further, any changes to the terms of these bodies must go through the same process of endorsement. Organogram could be developed to depict the functional division and hierarchical arrangement of the various positions and bodies.

3. Criterion Two: Teaching, Learning & Research

3.1 Academic Programme Development and Review

Academic Management

Avid College's academic and institutional policies are formulated by the Executive Board involving the Chairman, Vice Rector, Director General Academic, DG (Corporate Affairs), Registrar, and endorsed by the College Council. To Avid College's credit, it has documented several of these policies beginning 2016 in keeping with MQA requirements

and guidelines. The minutes of meetings of key bodies were not provided to the panel and one set of minutes provided was minimal providing little information on agenda, discussion and decisions (QAB meeting minutes, August 2017).

Programme Development & Review

Based on SER, and interviews with members of QAB and Executive Board, new academic programmes are developed by an ad hoc committee consisting of academic staff and in consultation with QAB and Executive Board.

The process as ascertained through the SER and interviews involves detailed discussions in Executive Board and QAB. Once finalized, the new programme is handed over to QAB to be dispatched to MQA for approval. Although it is stated in the SER that new programmes are designed based on existing market demands, there is also no evidence of a formalized means to examine market demands for new programmes. According to the interviews with the members of the Senior Management Team and consultation with students, potential students were a reason for the commencement of some programmes.

Avid College offers programmes ranging from MNQF Level 3 to Level 9. This includes:

- 2 Certificate level 3 programmes
- 3 Foundation Studies programmes
- 7 Diploma programmes
- 7 Advanced Diploma programmes
- 7 Bachelor's Degree programmes
- 1 Post Graduate Diploma Programme
- 5 Masters by Coursework Programmes

3.2 Teaching, Learning & Research

Programme Information

As stated in SER, programme information, entry criteria and programme fees, are provided to prospective students and other stakeholders including parents and industry personnel through printed materials (leaflets, booklets, flyers) as well as through College website (www.avidcollege.edu.mv.) The panel was provided with materials including booklets and leaflets containing programme information including module names and programme duration.

Student Orientation

Panel observed that students are provided information at the beginning of each module about programme / module objectives/ learning outcomes schedule of topics, methods of teaching, the type of assessments, weightage of assessments, timeline for assessments and issuing results. SER states that students are informed of regulations and procedures at the beginning of each module. The focus group interviews with the Deans and Academic Director showed that orientation was conducted for new students. This practice was also corroborated by postgraduate and undergraduate students and

therefore Avid College's efforts in this area should contribute to smooth running of Avid College programmes.

Teaching

According to the interviews with members of QAB and Executive Board, and module outlines, a variety of methods and approaches are used for teaching at Avid College. These methods include lecture, tutorial, practical demonstrations, role plays and field activities. According to interviews and Avid College action plan 2017, students are provided opportunities for industrial experiences during academic programs. Based on the evaluation of classroom teaching of Panel, (1 observation), participatory methods are used in teaching which provide opportunities for students to work in pairs to solve problems and do presentations.

According to SER and interviews with QAB and Executive Board, all methods of teaching and learning conducted at Avid College are evaluated and monitored by peers or students. Panel was able to examine documents related to student evaluation of teaching while no records of peer evaluation was seen.

According to SER and interviews with the Senior Management Team, QAB and Executive Board, and recruitment policy, programme modules are taught by academic staff who are qualified and meet the minimum requirements of MQA. Recruitment records that the panel examined showed that both part-time and full-time academic staff meets the minimum requirement of MQA.

Although assessment and feedback are domains of teaching, they have been explained in a separate section of this report.

Assessments

Formative and summative assessments are conducted for each module. Records pertaining to assessments of modules were provided during the review. Panel members examined assessment guidelines, marking criteria, as well as marked assignments and examination papers. Based on the information in SER and interviews with members of QAB and Executive Board, assessment process is observed and reviewed at various levels including QAB, Academic Director, Deans and coordinators and the review ensures completion of requirements of each module before the final examination.

A question bank for each module is established by the lecturers; and QAB prepares examination papers in consultation with the Academic Director and once examinations are conducted, papers are handed over to the lecturers for grading based on a pre-prepared marking scheme.

The marking process is monitored and supervised by the Academic Director, QAB and Deans; and examinations are invigilated by the lecturers under the supervision of QAB and Academic Director. According to SER and interviews with QAB and Executive Board, any breach of examination rules are investigated and disciplinary actions are taken by QAB.

The marks obtained by students are reviewed by the Academic Director for accuracy and reliability. According to records of MQA and Avid College, academic records of students are monitored by MQA to ensure the eligibility of students for graduation.

The disciplinary procedures including rules and action for plagiarism are provided and communicated with students during orientation and all through the teaching of modules. The assignment guidelines contained information on plagiarism and other misconducts pertaining to assessments. Records related to disciplinary actions were made available to the panel.

Student Feedback and Additional Support

According to interviews with members of QAB, Executive Board and coordinators as well as students, feedback is provided to students regularly and as an on-going process by lecturers. According to the Academic Policy, marks of assignments are to be provided within 30 days of submission as per SER. Furthermore, the SER stated that feedback for assignments are provided to students of “Executive Programmes” from 2016.

Records of continuous feedback were not available; therefore, it was not possible to conclude that students are provided with feedback prior to a final mark of the assignment or final examination.

Research Support

According to SER and interviews with the Senior Management Team, College gives high priority for research. Therefore, Avid College Research and Innovation Center (ARIC) was established with the assistance of overseas academic support; and ARIC process is monitored and facilitated by different universities from Malaysia. The panel observed that all degree level programmes are inclusive of research components.

3.3 Recommendations

1. Develop written policies and procedures on programme development and review.
2. Maintain records of all activities related to monitoring and evaluation of teaching at all levels.
3. Provides a format for planning teaching sessions to all lecturers so that session plans would have similar information.
4. It is also recommended that, coordinators’ reports, minutes of marks endorsement meetings and graduate finalisation meetings be maintained.
5. Develop a procedure for providing formative and summative feedback including the maintenance of records.

4. Criterion Three: Staffing

4.1 Staffing

According to Avid College data, there are 14 full-time and 18 part time academic staff. Although the student-academic staff ratio stated in Avid College policies for staff recruitment is 35:1, the college presently accommodates a student-full time academic staff ratio of 57:1.

Basic institutional policies are written and documented some of which were only recently documented. These policies pertain to staff appraisal, leave, recognition, grievance, and code of conduct. Although there is no qualifications requirement to appoint academic staff, it was observed that the Avid College practices were in line with MQA requirement i.e. staff possess qualifications one level higher than the level of the programme they are assigned to conduct.

All staff, both full-time and part-time are contracted as per the Maldives Employment Act. The staff contract is inclusive of the time staff should spend at Avid College which does not specifically reflect on teaching workload arrangements and how workload is interpreted. The academic staff teaching workload ranges between two to four subjects this semester.

The staff recruitment policy addresses only the full-time staff. Since the college depends heavily on part time academic staff, the scope of this policy must be extended to include part time staff recruitment

Staff development policies are documented but shared verbally. There is no evidence of formal and written communications of staff development plans, or programmes conducted. The staff development programmes are conducted, in an ad hoc manner and these programmes are not necessarily based on a need analysis.

Lack of distinct staff policies for academic staff and administrative staff was observed when the working hours and the type of work done by academic and administrative staff varied immensely.

Written evidence of two different appraisal forms were obtained, one from a full-time academic and the other from a part-time academic. Although these forms are filled on a regular basis there was not enough evidence to conclude that the appraisal forms were used to give a feedback for further improvement or used in promotions but rather it was more of a requirement made compulsory by law.

It is worth noting that all staff showed dedication and willingness to work. The work distribution is verbally communicated with broad roles in their job descriptions. For example, the many roles of the Registrar appear to be implicit and overloaded requiring additional support to fulfill all her duties. It is a good management practice to develop, document and provide specific job descriptions which explicitly defines the roles and responsibilities.

4.2 Recommendations

1. Plan staff development programmes based on a need analysis and in a more organised manner giving priority to increase staff knowledge and expertise in teaching and learning. Evidence of planning and implementation of such programmes should be retained for internal and external review and reference.
2. Formulate policies covering both full-time and part-time staff.
3. Develop and implement a policy on teaching workload.

5. Criterion Four: Facilities & Resources

5.1 Physical Facilities

At the time of this audit, Avid College operations were being conducted in two campuses in Male', the capital island of Maldives. Namely, Diamond Campus and Ruby Campus. The physical facilities the college stated in the College Proforma for proposal to Department of Higher Education (DHE) in 2013 exists.

Avid College Diamond campus, located in G. Jawaahiru Asseyri, Ameenee Magu, is the central operation of the college. The campus includes 6 classrooms, a meeting room, an administrative office, a front office, a library, a canteen, 2 toilets, a store room and a prayer room which are accessible to all students during college hours. The campus can accommodate around 163 students at any given time. A student sitting area is allocated for students' use near the front office. Sofas were placed giving the place a comforting feel. A group study table with chairs placed around was also placed in the mid of the space, which the panel observed was at the time of review being used by a student who was getting ready for her dissertation presentation. The Front Office staff members (3 seated at time of facilities check) were observed to be very student friendly and able to guide students / prospective students on their programmes and services.

Ruby Campus of Avid College, located in G.Ranfehi, Faashanakilege Magu has 02 classrooms, a computer lab, a front office, 02 toilets and other basic utilities which are accessible to students during class times. The campus can accommodate around 155 students at any given time. The front office is staffed by two officers providing a range of services for students.

A random check of the physical facilities reveals that they are functional, safe and conducive for teaching and learning. All classrooms are air-conditioned and fitted with multi-media projectors and computer systems. Wi-Fi is available in both campuses for students and staff. Lecturers are provided with their own workstations equipped with desktop computers and Internet facility. The college has put in place safety measures like access to fire extinguishers and first aid kits in both campuses. A staff with training in first aid and health care is employed in the college. However, there is no evidence to show that health care service is provided to students in both campuses simultaneously during session times by a trained official.

Since permanent classrooms are limited lecture halls are rented as and when the need arises, to cater for large lectures. Due to limitation of space, students and staff share a small canteen which is a source of complaints by students. A relatively bigger canteen is under construction on the 2nd floor facility of Diamond Campus.

The library of Avid College is in the Diamond Campus. The space can seat about 8 students at any given time. Students are provided three computer stations with internet connectivity in the library. The library stocks 983 textbooks and reference materials in physical format and 510 textbooks in electronic format. Students also have access to online resources through an online library portal. Several open access resources (books, journals and databases) are available through the online library facility. All students are given a username and a password to use the online facility at the time of enrolment.

Evidence shows that Avid College evaluates the physical facilities and maintenance is carried out accordingly, but no records are maintained. Meetings with staff confirmed that there are regular checks on the facilities and that maintenance is done as and when required. It is evident from the development work that a considerable planning and finance has been allocated for the development of the college. The panel also notes that all the staff members and students interviewed seemed pleased with the facilities made available to them.

5.2 Technological Facilities

A specification document of a Learning Management System was shared with the Audit Team. A Learning Management System existed in the college from 2015 onwards. However, it has not been operational due to technical glitches which are being attended to by a new vendor as the old one is unresponsive to the system's difficulties faced by the college. The college expects to put the system in place within October 2017.

As of now the learning resources like reading materials and articles are emailed to the students to their combined email address for the whole class. Communication is also carried out via class viber groups. Students also have access to online resources through the college website. Three computers are provided in the Library situated in the Diamond Campus and 22 Computers are provided in the computer lab at Ruby Campus of the college. A computer lab is being developed in the second floor of Diamond Campus which can accommodate around 20 computers for teaching and learning. All computers are connected to the internet. Wi-Fi is also available inside both campuses of the college. An administrative staff for IT and an IT consultant is employed by the college to ensure smooth functioning of the facilities.

The college uses an SMS service for official communication with students. Viber is used by the college to communicate and share learning related discussions within the class students and lecturers. Printing, photocopying, and scanning facilities were available for staff and students. Students and staff mentioned that the facilities provided to them were sufficient and training sessions were conducted to familiarize them with any new technology introduced. However, it seems students do not frequently utilize important resources like online library. Interviews with management and staff reveal that prior to the beginning of every semester the technological resources of Avid College are reviewed. However, records of the reviews and measures taken are not documented.

5.3 Financial Resources

The Finance Department is headed by the Director General - Corporate Affairs who is assisted by an Administration and Human Resource Officer. The financial statements of Avid College comply with Maldives Inland Revenue Authority (MIRA) requirements. Evidence of regular internal monthly reports and external audits being carried out was presented. All financial documents are stored securely. The financial records show that Avid College has maintained a steady growth in terms of revenue generation which can support the college's programme delivery.

A multi-year financial plan exists in the College proposal proforma submitted to Department of Higher Education (DHE) in 2013. It covers a five year period from 2013 to 2017. No annual budget document exists. However, budgetary requirements and available financial resources are discussed in the college Executive Board, and shared with the College Council every semester. Financial Resources are provided to all departments and to both campuses based on need and financial availability.

It is important that surveys are carried out at appropriate intervals to examine students' experience with facilities and resources so that planning and procurement of facilities is informed by good data and feedback.

5.4 Recommendations

1. Ensure at least one staff with first aid training exists in the campus whenever classes are ongoing.
2. Develop a written plan to regularly evaluate utilization and effectiveness of College's facilities and resources and document all findings and actions taken in a report or similar document.
3. Motivate students to actively and independently utilize the college's online reference material available through the online library.
4. Review the technological facilities on a regular basis and document the review process, findings and actions taken.
5. Develop a written annual budget and conduct annual internal financial audit and document the findings as an annual internal financial audit report.
6. Acquire membership of the Maldives Library Association to collaborate and strengthen the college library.

6. Criterion Five: Admission, Records & Student Services

6.1 Admission

The guiding document for student admission is the Avid College Academic Policy. The main criteria for admission are consistent with minimum entry requirements stated by MQA. An Applications and Admission process document also exists in guiding the process. Entry conditions required to join Avid College programmes are communicated to prospective students via social media, other marketing activities, flyers and leaflets available at front office of college and college website. Additionally, some students interviewed stated that they knew about the College from advertisements on walls of Male'. To the credit of the college, it has to be noted that 02 students mentioned that they joined the college as a result of positive experiences of their friends.

A process flow chart for executive programmes (fulltime programme attended by working executives) from application to completion of a module and eventually completion of programme is available for inspection.

The fees charged for the programmes are stated in the brochures and flyers. Details of fees are also stated in the offer letters. All Financial obligations and refund procedures are clearly mentioned in the acceptance form. The students appreciated the flexibility in

payment and scholarship opportunities provided by the College. This information is also published on the website.

Student applications are maintained in hard copy format. Twenty three (23) files of students (2 from each level) were checked. Students' files checked show that all of them meet the MQA prescribed entry requirements. The Avid College Academic Policy states the policy for credit transfer. All records of credit transfer are maintained in soft format in the college server.

Orientation programmes are conducted for students at the beginning of the semester. Agenda of past orientation events were viewed by the panel. During orientation students are briefed on financial procedures and requirements, academic policies, admission and student related procedures. Post Graduate students are also guided on referencing literature and plagiarism issues. Undergraduate, Diploma and Certificate students are also guided on study skills and referencing.

According to staff, lecturers and students, academic support and guidance is provided to all needing students. However, the mechanism for provision of support and records of the support provided are not documented.

6.2 Student Records

The responsibility of maintaining student records lies with the Registrar. The information and records are secured through access control. All student records are maintained in Microsoft Excel files. Marks of students doing a bachelor degree (3 years) are kept in 3 different files - the Diploma records in one, Advanced Diploma in another and final year in yet another file. This makes it difficult to view all marks of a particular student on one page. Avid College expects an integrated data management system to be in-place when the Campus Learning Management System is ready for use.

Students interviewed state that undergraduate students are provided feedback on their assignments within a week of submission and post graduate students are provided feedback on their assignments within one month of submission. Though, one PG student interviewed, stated that in her earlier modules it took much longer than the stated time to receive feedback, students mentioned that they are satisfied with the services provided in this regard. The awards are issued to the students upon supervision and audit by Maldives Qualifications Authority. An analysis of enrolment and graduates by year, programme area and gender was provided to the panel.

6.3 Student services

Avid College's prime body representing students is the Student Council. Regular meetings of the Student Council have been held in 2017. Minutes of these meetings are maintained. According to students, several activities have been conducted by the students. These include English club activities, social events like Maahefun, sports events like futsal, handball, volleyball, basketball and religious events like Quran competition. The students have also been involved in celebrating teachers' day, marketing events, celebrating Avid College's anniversary, assisting in graduation

ceremonies and participating in higher education fair. An annual report by the Student Council, on the events planned, activities conducted and objectives achieved was not seen.

Students' representation in the college council ensures that students' voice is passed on to the executives of the college for consideration and action. Though minutes of a college council meeting held in 2016 shows that a student representative was present in the college council in 2016, at the time of review, the student representative's position was vacant. Nonetheless, the President of the Student Council confirmed that it was always very convenient for students to meet any official or staff of the college, be it coordinators and lecturers or the Chairman.

Prior to commencing a programme the Registrar, (who has a Master of Educational Leadership), also in charge of student services, provides academic advising to prospective students mainly at marketing events. However, no records of these are maintained. The Registrar is supported by six staff members in the Front Office. After registration or commencing of a programme the respective Dean of Faculty would provide advice regarding student development and academic success.

Student services are evaluated informally using a suggestion box. The suggestions are discussed in Executive Board meetings. However, no records are maintained. The regular "Coffee with Chairman" sessions are held where students interact with the Chairman to discuss their studies. Issues identified are noted in the Secretary's note book and attended to. However official records were not seen. In 2017, a college wide Student Satisfaction Survey was carried out. Preliminary results show high level of satisfaction with college services. The same sentiment was echoed by the students interviewed by the panel.

6.4 Recommendations

1. Develop a process flowchart for all programmes, as developed for the executive programmes showing all activities involved from enrolment to graduation.
2. Put in writing the support mechanism for students needing additional support and document records of the support provided to students.
3. Maintain student marks in such a way that all records or marks of an individual student could be viewed together.
4. Keep records of activities carried out for students and develop an annual report by the Student Council on the activities planned, conducted and objectives achieved.
5. Ensure that the student representative's position of the College Council is filled and active at all times of Academic Year.
6. Document the process for student support and record the student requests, suggestions and actions taken. An annual report on the services is a useful practice.

7. Criterion Six: Quality Assurance

7.1 Quality Assurance

Understanding QA

Avid College's mission is underpinned by quality as one of its values. Such a belief must give rise to deep interest in and commitment to assuring that the current requirements are being met by all staff and units involved in the academic and related operations, besides a quest to change practices for the better. Quality assurance is about testing systems and practices from time to time and making observations to help in the correction and prevention of unwanted deviations.

IQA Policy and Practice

The SER document presented the Quality Assurance Board (QAB) as the key unit responsible for the QA function with the College. The aims and the principles are outlined in the SER (pg. 28). The membership of QAB is the top management of Avid College. Neither the SER nor other documents have clearly spelled out the responsibilities of QAB. In practice, QAB is utilized as a disciplinary board to mete out punishment for plagiarism, evaluate new programmes, review existing programmes and deal with staff issues. In fact, the QAB acts a clearing house for many academic matters including quality of assessment.

It is the panel's view that the concept of internal quality assurance has not been clearly comprehended even though the principles stated on pg. 28 of the SER. This unit or person ideally must not have responsibility for academic operations. Some distance from academic operation allows the person or unit to objectively evaluate adherence to standards and requirements imposed within or from outside Avid College. The resulting reports must be submitted to the highest academic authority within Avid College for information, action and follow up.

To Avid College's credit, the panel noted 2 previous internal quality audit reports (2013, 2015) in the possession of the Registrar which evaluated academic practices and presented its findings. It is not clear what process was followed and what the outcomes were from the hearing. Avid College should capitalize on its experience to revive the practice along the lines recommended here.

Obtaining Feedback

As part of the process to obtain feedback on its academic activities, Avid College regularly collects student evaluation of academic staff which is used to assess teaching effectiveness. Deans and Deputy Deans carry out observation of teaching. The panel did not see evidence of a systematic process to observe and help teachers improve even though it was referred to by Deans and academic staff. Further, in 2017, the first Student Satisfaction Survey has been conducted involving 180 students. Preliminary results provided to the panel paint a satisfactory to good picture of Avid College performance as a college in the students' eyes. It is imperative that this survey be regularly, scientifically and validly carried out to provide useful information for prioritizing changes and improvements.

Involvement of all parties

The soliciting of feedback primarily involves students as learners and teachers. It is important to Avid College to also invite or seek feedback from graduates, alumni and employers. This will go a long way in ascertaining the extent to which the mission of “enhancing academic and professional lives of students...” has been accomplished.

7.2 Recommendations

1. Clearly and without delay assign the responsibility for regular audits/review/evaluation of all activities which impacts quality of the development, delivery, improvement of programmes and its management, to a unit or person.
2. As soon as is practical develop a policy for review of modules and programmes and the information that must be gathered and considered in the processes.

8. Conclusion and Acknowledgements

Over all Avid College has expanded their programmes within a short period of time providing access to a large number of students to higher education. In order to achieve Avid College’s vision of becoming “the leading higher education provider in the country” the panel strongly advises it to address all areas of improvements identified in this external audit report.

The panel expresses sincere gratitude to the Chairman Mr. Abdulla Musthaq Rashaadh, the Vice Rector Dr. Abdulla Rasheedh Ahmed, the Registrar Ms. Azmeena Abdul Kareem, the Director General Academic Ms. Aishath Ahlam and all staff for their hospitality and assistance. We also like to extend our gratitude to the support staff and students who assisted the panel in the on-site audit by sharing their working and learning experiences respectively.




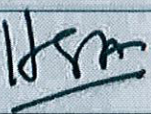
9. Appendices

Site Visit Schedule for Avid College External Review Panel 26th – 27th September 2017

Date	Time	Work plan
Tuesday 26 th September 2017	09:30 - 10:30am	Meeting with SMT – presentation on governance, composition of College Council, organogram, strategic plan and operational plan.
	10:30 – 11:15am	Meeting with Academic Head of Departments
	11:15 – 12:00pm	Meeting with Admin & Finance Head of Departments
	12:00 – 01:00pm	Lunch & Prayer Break
	01:00 – 02:00pm	Panel internal meeting (private space)
	02:00 – 04:00pm	Checking documented evidence (common room)
	04:00 – 04:30pm	Prayer & Tea break
	04:30 – 05:30pm	Panel internal wrap up meeting (private space)

Date	Time	Work plan
Wednesday 27 ^h September 2017	09:30 – 10:30am	Meeting with Academic staff – lecturers and programme coordinators of different programme levels and discipline (at least 3 from each department, other than those already met on day 1)
	10:30 – 11:00am	Meeting with administrative and support staff from each department (inclusive of finance and student services)
	11:00 – 12:00pm	Check physical facilities
	12:00 – 01:00pm	Lunch & prayer break
	01:00 – 02:00pm	Meeting with Undergraduate students Meeting with Postgraduate students (5 students from each discipline, studying at different programme levels)
	02:00 – 03:00pm	Meeting with QA head & representatives of SER writing team
	03:00 – 04:00pm	Panel internal wrap up meeting (private space)
	04:00 – 05:00pm	Meeting with SMT focal persons to share main findings of the Site-Visit

Panel Members

Name	Signature	Date
Zeenaz Fahmee, External Reviewer and Chairperson		05.12.2017
Abdul Wahid Ibrahim, External Reviewer		05.12.2017
Aishath Ahmed Didi, External Reviewer		05.12.2017
Prof. Dr. Hazman Shah Bin Abdullah, External Reviewer		05.12.2017