Students at the Heart: Quality Assurance at Maritime Universities

Defining the MPHEC's Approach to Quality

January 2013

This paper is intended to generate discussion in Maritime universities and to lead to the identification of the features of the Commission's second cycle of monitoring of institutional quality assurance processes. While the main audience for this discussion paper is clearly the universities in the region, input is also sought from other key PSE stakeholders in the region, including students and governments.

Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission

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Defining the MPHEC's Approach to Quality

I. Overview

How does one know that "programs are of optimum length and best quality"? That "the best possible services to students" are offered? That university teaching is of high quality? That programs are continuously improving? The 2005 MPHEC Act states that the Commission is to take measures and report on such dimensions. The Commission has identified as its first priority an enhanced focus on student learning.

The issue of academic quality is fundamental to any university, but it is also one of the most elusive dimensions to measure by any numerical factor. In recognition of this challenge, the Commission's quality assurance program includes the assessment of new and modified academic programs prior to implementation as well as monitoring to verify that institutions assess their existing programs and activities with a focus on students and learning. In addition, the Commission monitors students' participation and progression through their education, as well as graduate outcomes.

These quality assessment instruments are designed to allow the Commission to support the continuous improvement of the institutions as well as to demonstrate that institutions are taking appropriate actions to ensure the quality of programs and services offered to students.

The instruments are also based on two major considerations. First, that universities are autonomous and responsible to their boards for designing and implementing quality programs for their clients. Second, that stakeholders (governments, students, taxpayers, etc.) have a legitimate need for assurances about the quality and cost-effectiveness of institutional programs and services that they use and for which they help pay.

Since it began in 1973, and since it approved its first quality assurance framework in 1999, the Commission has developed standards, processes, protocols and procedures which seek to ensure quality

> ### *Students at the heart*
> #### of the MPHEC's mandate
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> According to the 2005 MPHEC Act, in the area of quality, the Commission must:
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> - Give first consideration to improving and maintaining the best possible service to students.
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> - Take measures intended to ensure programs are of optimum length and best quality.
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> - Promote smooth transitions between learning and work.
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> - Take measures intended to ensure teaching quality.
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> - Undertake measures to ensure continuous improvement in the quality of academic programs and of teaching at institutions, which … may include the review of institutional programs and practices…
>
> - Establish public reporting requirements and produce public reports.

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Students at the heart
Maritime Universities' Missions
(edited to focus on statements related to students and learning)

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The **University of Prince Edward Island** … is a community of scholars whose primary tasks are to teach and to learn, to engage in scholarship and research, and to offer service for the benefit of our Island and beyond.

Cape Breton University: Create a synergy of high quality university education and research that engages and inspires our learners and partners…

Mount Saint Vincent University: … We will be the national leader in creating the best university experience for all members of our community… and in developing thoughtful, engaged citizens who make a positive impact on their world.

The **Nova Scotia College of Art and Design** is dedicated to providing the best possible conditions for the study, practice, research and teaching of art, craft and design.

St. Francis Xavier University has upheld a commitment to the intellectual and spiritual development of its students.

****L'Université Sainte-Anne** uses a personalized approach to offer a quality education in French to its Acadian, Francophone, and Anglophone students in an environment that promotes their personal and professional growth and prepares them for higher education and the labour market.

Atlantic School of Theology cultivates excellence in graduate-level theological education and research, creative and faithful formation for lay and ordained ministries, and understanding among communities of faith.

*Translated from French by the MPHEC

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at the institutional-level through:

➢ Rigorous program development and appropriate peer review of program proposals, linked to a qualifications framework;
➢ Periodic program review, including peer review, once a program has been offered for a number of years;
➢ Rigorous review of program changes; and
➢ The development of a framework for program evaluation with some reference to teaching quality.

While the Commission clearly exercised leadership in setting up much of the above, as dictated by its legislated mandate, these standards, processes, protocols and procedures were devised through extensive consultation and collaboration with the universities, and then later implemented through committees jointly established with the Atlantic Association of Universities.

The Commission recently completed, after a year-long consultation process, an update to its policy on program assessment, through which it assesses new and modified programs developed by the universities prior to their implementation.

It is now turning its attention to the monitoring process, which involves the validation by the Commission of the universities' quality assurance policies and procedures against collaboratively defined Standards.

The Commission **has completed a first cycle of this process with 12 universities**[1] and expects to have completed it with the remaining institutions by the end of the year. The first cycle of the monitoring process focused on ensuring that all institutions had an implemented policy to support on-going quality assessment and improvement. This goal has largely been achieved but there are remaining gaps if the Commission is to discharge its legislated mandate properly; these gaps, discussed in greater detail in the following section, point to the fact that, while institutions may have quality assurance processes in place, students and learning are too often at the periphery of these processes.

Given that the first cycle of the monitoring process, was successful in ensuring the development and enhancement of QA programs (as indicated by several institutions as well as by the Commission's own assessment), and in light of the Commission's legislated mandate, and of the institutions' own mandate and

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[1] The first cycle of the monitoring process means the first round of this validation process, which used as a basis the *Guidelines for institutional quality assurance policies and procedures* collaboratively devised with the universities and released in 1999.

mission, undertaking a second cycle of the monitoring process appears the best approach to address the remaining gaps.

Purpose of the Paper

This paper is meant to stimulate a dialogue focused on the challenges at hand in the area of quality assurance. It is hoped that it will facilitate stakeholders' feedback on the shape of the second cycle and in developing a process that is in line with stakeholders' needs and expectations, as well as the Commission's mandate in the area of quality assurance.

Structure of the Paper

The next section of the paper, *How are we faring in terms of student-centred academic quality assurance, or, why is a second cycle of the monitoring process required?*, is meant to both provide a rationale for the second cycle and its proposed focus, the student, while outlining the progress made since the inception of the monitoring process. Section III of the paper, *How will we ensure that institutional quality assurance frameworks focus on students and learning?*, presents the key elements of the proposed process: revised *Standards for Institutional Quality Assurance Policies* designed to address the gaps identified in the first cycle as well as the objectives and main steps of the monitoring process. Specific questions are raised along the way to both guide the reader's reflection and elicit input.

Consultation Process

While the main audience for this discussion paper is clearly the universities in the region, input is also sought from other key PSE stakeholders in the region, including students and governments. Input from this wider group is desirable given the implication of what is being proposed herein on the Commission's (and the universities') future workplan and resource allocation.

This discussion paper includes a number of specific questions to guide the reader's reflection. As a first step however, the Commission would like to obtain written responses by **February 15, 2013** to the main questions identified on the next page. Following receipt of responses, the Commission intends to hold a regional forum (March 2013) with all interested groups to provide an opportunity for greater dialogue. In parallel, individual meetings with any institution that wishes to address questions/concerns regarding their specific challenges in moving forward will be held. Meetings with other groups may also be held by request. Following this, the Commission's approach to the second cycle of the monitoring process will be finalized, and an implementation plan defined.

Students at the heart
Maritime Universities' Missions
(edited to focus on statements related to students and learning)
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The mission of **Acadia University** is to provide a personalized and rigorous liberal education; promote a robust and respectful scholarly community; and inspire a diversity of students to become critical thinkers, lifelong learners, engaged citizens, and responsible global leaders.

Dalhousie University: Learning, discovery and innovation, and social engagement (with our students, the university and the world).

The mission of **Saint Mary's University** is to offer undergraduate, graduate, and continuing education programs; to engage in research and disseminate its results; and to serve the community from the local to the international level.

***L'Université de Moncton** ... recognized in Acadie and the Francophonie for excellence in teaching and research and for its contribution to the development of Acadian and global society...

Mount Alison University: The creation and dissemination of knowledge in a community of higher learning centred on the undergraduate student and delivered in an intimate and harmonious environment.

The liberal arts, and the principles of liberal education, stand at the core of **St. Thomas University**. Finding new and more effective ways of studying the liberal arts is a priority. We contend that one of the roles of the University is to help people put ideas and values into action.

University of New Brunswick: Our mission is to create the premier university environment for our students, faculty and staff in which to learn, work and live.

*Translated from French by the MPHEC

Main Questions When Considering the Proposed Second Cycle of the Monitoring Process

1. How relevant and applicable are the proposed *Standards?*

   - Are there alternative mechanisms? Are there omissions?
   - Are corrections or clarifications required?
   - Should a greater variety of assessment mechanisms/processes be considered? Which ones?
   - More specifically, there is an expectation that all units and functions of a university be assessed, in particular as they pertain to the students' experience. Is the proposed approach relevant and effective when it comes to such units? What changes should be considered?

2. Will the implementation of the revised Standards for Institutional Quality Assurance Policies allow the gaps identified in the first cycle to be addressed?

3. To what extent could one conclude that institutions are achieving quality if they have addressed each of these Standards?

4. Will the proposed monitoring process, through which the Commission would validate (and report on) the extent to which each institution has successfully implemented the Standards, satisfy stakeholders that university education in the region is of high quality? Are there specific changes the Commission should consider making to the proposed approach? Or are there more effective alternatives to the monitoring process to reach the objectives outlined in the paper?

5. How closely aligned are the universities' QA frameworks with the proposed *Standards*? What changes might be required to improve the alignment?

6. How else could the Commission provide assistance to institutions to build a culture of quality in all aspects of their operations, and more specifically as it pertains to student learning, outcomes and success?

7. How else could the Commission, and institutions, provide the public with assurances as to the quality of education in this region's universities?

II. How are we faring in terms of student-centred academic quality assurance, or, why is a second cycle of the monitoring process required?

Devised with the universities in the region, the concept behind the Commission's approach to deliver on its mandate, while respecting institutional autonomy and academic freedom, is simple: the Commission assesses programs prior to their implementation and institutions assess their programs at regular intervals once implemented. Such assessments include all aspects of institutional activity, and more specifically as these activities impact students' experiences. To this end, the Commission released in 1999 *Guidelines for institutional quality assurance procedures* and then proceeded to validate, with a view to assist the institutions, the extent to which the universities were indeed following these *Guidelines*. The validation process is called the monitoring process, of which a first cycle has been completed.

What did we learn from the first cycle of the Commission's monitoring process?

Maritime Universities are at various stages in the implementation of their quality assurance policies
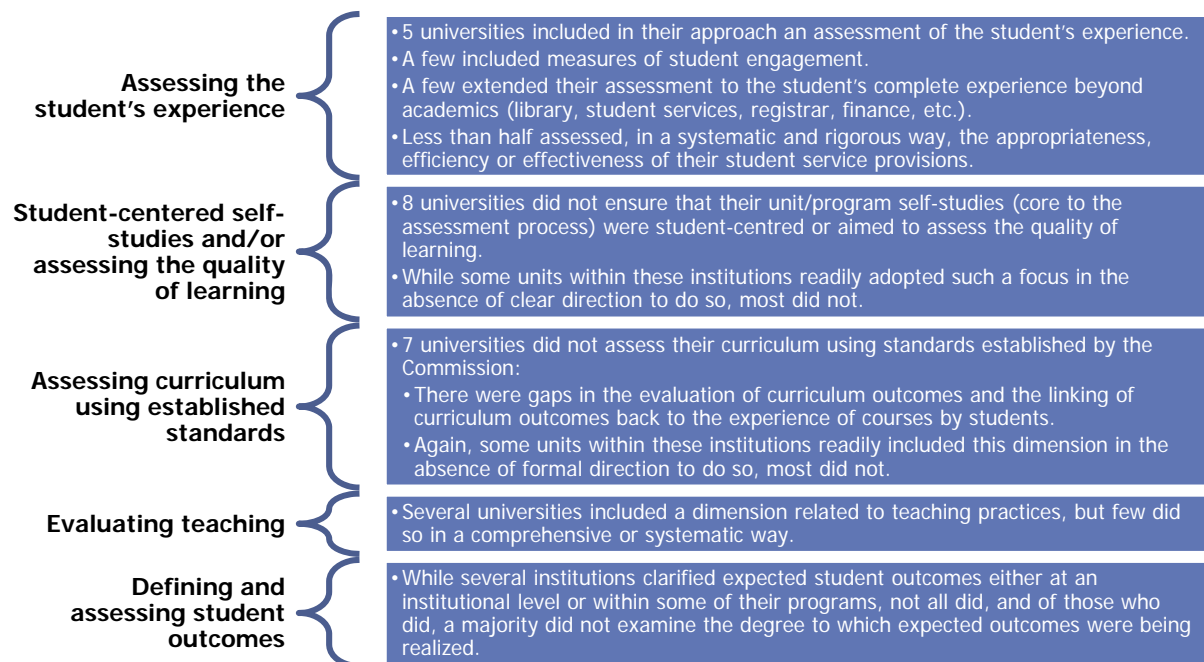
- They fall into three broad groups: those just beginning their first cycle of reviews, those who are fully into their first cycle and those into their second or third cycle.
- Some of the universities have a long history of quality assurance activities, although they vary in focus and scope.
- Several universities did not have a quality assurance policy at the outset, but developed one in response to the Commission's monitoring process.
- Universities are actively working to improve their policies and closely monitor their implementation.

Yet, there are significant gaps

- Most policies tend to focus on faculty and resources.
- The process often fails to yield significant follow-up action.
- **Quality of teaching, learning, and the student's overall experience, are not at the center of the process for most institutions**.

Plainly, **remarkable progress has been made** since the initial survey conducted by the Commission in the early 1990s[2], and significant progress has also been made by many institutions between their individual assessment report and their final action plans submitted in response to the report. While lengthy, spanning a decade, the first cycle of the monitoring process has helped sustain the focus on assessment over that period. By the end of the process, nearly all institutions had implemented a policy and were reviewing programs, involving external experts in the assessment process[3].

Yet, just as plainly, important gaps remain. With the caveat that much of the monitoring process was conducted at different times with different institutions, and that quality assurance is somewhat of a moving target as universities evolve, adapt and improve their approaches, the following illustrates some of these gap areas more specifically:

Assessing the student's experience
- 5 universities included in their approach an assessment of the student's experience.
- A few included measures of student engagement.
- A few extended their assessment to the student's complete experience beyond academics (library, student services, registrar, finance, etc.).
- Less than half assessed, in a systematic and rigorous way, the appropriateness, efficiency or effectiveness of their student service provisions.

Student-centered self-studies and/or assessing the quality of learning
- 8 universities did not ensure that their unit/program self-studies (core to the assessment process) were student-centred or aimed to assess the quality of learning.
- While some units within these institutions readily adopted such a focus in the absence of clear direction to do so, most did not.

Assessing curriculum using established standards
- 7 universities did not assess their curriculum using standards established by the Commission:
  - There were gaps in the evaluation of curriculum outcomes and the linking of curriculum outcomes back to the experience of courses by students.
  - Again, some units within these institutions readily included this dimension in the absence of formal direction to do so, most did not.

Evaluating teaching
- Several universities included a dimension related to teaching practices, but few did so in a comprehensive or systematic way.

Defining and assessing student outcomes
- While several institutions clarified expected student outcomes either at an institutional level or within some of their programs, not all did, and of those who did, a majority did not examine the degree to which expected outcomes were being realized.

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[2] Perhaps most notably, the Role and Planned Capacity Statements project (1993) which led to formal recommendations regarding the establishment of quality assurance systems by each institution, and that such systems be systematic, periodic and include an external review component.
[3] *Quality Assurance Policies and Procedures at Maritime Universities* (2010) identifies best practices and proposed possible revisions to the MPHEC's 1999 Guidelines for Institutional Quality Assurance Policies in response to the challenge put forth by the institutions to provide more specific guidance. The report also provides details on Maritime universities' performance against the 1999 Guidelines.

As referenced earlier, the Commission's approach to quality assurance involves the assessment of academic programs prior to their implementation; once approved, the Commission requires that the institutions review these programs after one or two cohorts have graduated.

Over the last three years, the Commission has assessed over 160 program proposals prior to their implementation. While some were stellar, and most were more than adequate, some clearly fell short of expectations, particularly as it pertained to students and learning[4]. Most of these proposals were either withdrawn or were approved following an iterative process whereby the institution and the Commission, through its joint AAU-MPHEC Academic Advisory Committee, found ways to modify the proposed program to ensure it met the Commission's standards. Nonetheless, such proposals suggest that the areas of gap identified in terms of the institution's approach to quality assurance, related to students' achievement of outcomes, may also exist in the initial program development stages. This further substantiates the need for an assessment process centered on students.

Furthermore, given that program approval is granted on the condition that programs be assessed by the institutions, the Commission asked institutions to provide information as to the Status of Institutional Reviews of MPHEC Approved-Programs (SIRMAP) in the Spring and Summer of 2012. Not surprisingly, universities that fared well in the first cycle ("fared well" defined as having a policy in place, including an established schedule, and generally a longer tradition of program reviews) also fared well in terms of having reviewed specific programs in a timely way. Also not surprisingly, universities that had only just begun to conduct such assessments lagged significantly behind in terms of assessing targeted programs. This further substantiates the impact of the first cycle of the monitoring process and the work that remains to be done. One other factor that seems to affect whether programs are reviewed is institutional size: the larger the institution (in terms of program offerings and total enrolments), the more likely programs are being reviewed (and reviews, completed). **A more in-depth process – the second cycle of the monitoring process – is required to confirm whether these reviews are appropriately student or learning centered, and to ensure that all programs, at all universities, are indeed assessed.**

III.   How will we ensure that institutional quality assurance frameworks focus on students and learning?

Proposed Features of the Second Cycle of the Monitoring Process

How can the Commission provide more assistance and support to institutions to build a culture of quality in all aspects of their operation, particularly as it pertains to the quality of the student's learning experience? How can the second cycle of the monitoring process support a sustained focus on the need for on-going, systematic, and regular assessment processes applied across the entire range of institutional activities, at least to the extent that it affects the student's experience? How can the Commission's second cycle of the monitoring process focus more intently on quality of teaching and learning – and the policies supporting their enhancement, than may have been the case in the first cycle?

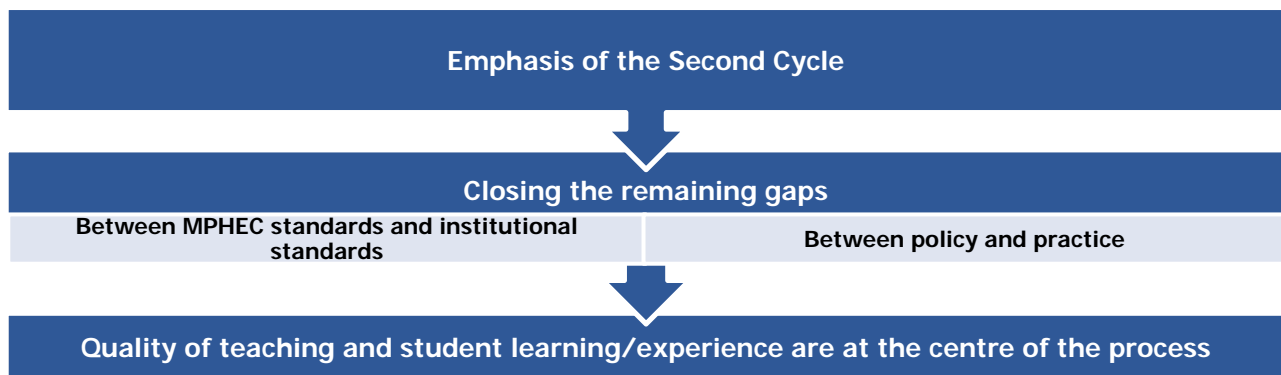[4] A sampling of proposals that did not meet key standards in significant ways include:
- Several proposals where the program's main objective was defined as an institutional objective (faculty retention or alignment with faculty research interests; objectives defined within an institution's strategic plan, for example) rather than learning objectives or even graduates' outcomes.
- Six proposals for four-year bachelor's degree programs required less than 18 credits at the 3rd/4th year levels (that is, a degree program was proposed in which a student could graduate having completed 85% of his or her program with courses at the 1000 or 2000 level).
- A proposal for a major in the context of a double major with only one faculty member to support the program.
- A proposal for a new major where the only resources required were an administrative position and some office supplies, and no impact on existing programs identified.
- A proposal for a certificate that did not include university-level course content.
- A proposal for a new major where courses directly related to the area of specialization were optional, and where the required courses could lead to the completion of an alternate major.

The Commission's (MPHEC) Quality Assurance Monitoring process was developed following extensive consultation with the region's institutions, governments and other stakeholders. This consultation also led to the (new) 2005 MPHEC Act and the MPHEC's revised mandate.

The **monitoring process** has **two objectives**. The first is **to provide (third-party) evidence** to stakeholders and the general public, through public reporting, **that Maritime universities are have suitable quality assurance policies and mechanisms in place to ensure the ongoing quality of their activities, with a focus on student learning**. The second objective of the process **is to assist each institution in enhancing (or, in some cases, implement) its quality assurance frameworks** through a formative process that combines on-going dialogue and detailed advice, including recommendations and suggestions.

Throughout the first cycle, most institutions were very receptive to the process, and indeed many challenged the Commission to provide specific guidance on ways to enhance their current quality assurance practices as well as to provide insight into the successes and challenges experienced by other universities in the region.

Emphasis of the Second Cycle

Closing the remaining gaps

Between MPHEC standards and institutional standards	Between policy and practice

Quality of teaching and student learning/experience are at the centre of the process

1. Revised *Standards for Institutional Quality Assurance Policies*

In 1999, the Commission released its first *Guidelines for Institutional Quality Assurance Policies* to assist the institutions in establishing or improving their policies and processes, and to support the Commission when assessing the policies and processes in place. The evidence gathered through the first cycle of the monitoring process clearly demonstrates that these *Guidelines* remain as relevant today as they were at the outset. However, in response to the challenge put forth by the institutions to provide more specific guidance, the Commission is proposing revisions to the guidelines first devised in 1999, drawing on the experience of institutions in implementing their quality assurance frameworks as well as on the knowledge gained through the first cycle. **The revisions proposed herein aim to enhance the focus on learning, and the student's experience, while maintaining the key features of a peer-review based process.**

Since 1999, there has been an expectation that all functions and programs would be assessed. Few institutions have extended their activities beyond academic units and programs. This leaves many areas of activity that affect the students' experience outside of an assessment process; many of these processes and services (registrar functions, credit transfer process and support, IT, to name only a few) are vital to the students' ability to succeed. **The revised *Standards* present the same expectation. However, input is being sought on whether an approach different from the one used to assess academic units and programs should be devised, and the form that approach might take.**

The revised *Standards for Institutional Quality Assurance Policies* follow in the next pages (Appendix 1 presents a comparison between the 1999 Guidelines and the new proposed Standards). We are now seeking input on these S*tandards.*

Standards for Institutional Quality Assurance Policies

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I. PURPOSE OF THE STANDARDS

The aim of these standards is to assist institutions in establishing or improving their policies and processes and to support the Commission when assessing the policies and processes in place.

II. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

All institutions should have a quality assurance policy documented and implemented.

A successful institutional quality assurance policy is guided by:
- The pursuit of continuous improvement
- A focus on learning
- The necessity of encompassing all functions and units of an institution
- Accountability and transparency

III. SCOPE OF THE INSTITUTIONAL QUALITY ASSURANCE POLICY

An institutional quality assurance policy reflects the institution's mission and values, and accounts for the full range of its offerings and activities. It is linked to the institution's strategic and other plans. The policy includes provisions to cover all of the functions and units of the institution (research, administration, community service, etc.) and applies to the full spectrum of a student's university experience.

IV. OBJECTIVE OF THE INSTITUTIONAL QUALITY ASSURANCE POLICY

The institutional policy's objectives are, at a minimum, to improve the quality of programs and to ensure that stated student outcomes can be realized.

The purpose of each assessment is to answer the following two questions: first, "How well is the unit or the program achieving what it set out to accomplish?" and second, "Is it doing what it should be doing?" In so doing, it should examine both inputs and outputs.

Specific Questions

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3.1 Are the *Standards* meeting their intended purpose?

3.2 Are different policies or approaches required to assess <u>non-academic units and programs</u>? What would the main features of these approaches be?

3.3 Should all non-academic units and programs be assessed? Which ones should be assessed? Which ones should not be and on what basis?

3.4 What other standards/ processes, other than those presented herein, do universities rely on to ensure educational quality/ the quality of the student's experience?

3.5 What changes or alternatives should be considered?

Standards for Institutional Quality Assurance Policies

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V. COMPONENTS OF AN INSTITUTIONAL QUALITY ASSURANCE POLICY

In addition to reflecting the institutional mission and values, an effective institutional quality assurance policy is comprehensive and applies to all programs and units. It would also, at a minimum:

1. Identify the coordinating or administrative unit responsible for the overall management of the quality assurance process. This unit should be located at a higher echelon (e.g. vice-president) of the institution's administrative structure, and be accountable to the institution's leaders (e.g. President and Senate, and Board.)
2. Assign and distribute responsibility for the various components of the policy (deans, unit heads, committees, etc.)
3. Define the assessment standards (see section VI).
4. Require a self-study component, involving faculty and students participating in the program or unit. The self-study should be student-centred as it would aim, in most cases, to assess the student experience and, in the case of academic programs, to assess the quality of learning and teaching. The self-study should be structured according to the defined assessment criteria, and be both descriptive and analytical. When and where appropriate, the results of accreditation processes may be included, and/or substituted for this component, or a portion thereof; however, accreditation processes cannot and should not replace the entire institutional assessment process.
5. Require an external review component, with a sufficiently comprehensive site visit and written report, carried out by at least two experts external to the institution, with at least one coming from outside Atlantic Canada. The external reviewers' team should also include a senior faculty member from the institution to assist the external reviewers in the process and provide clarifications on the institution's context. As appropriate, the results of accreditation may be included, and/or substituted for this component, or a portion thereof; however, accreditation processes cannot and should not replace the entire institutional assessment process.
6. Enable the participation of students through: membership on committees dealing with program review and quality assurance; participation in surveys designed to collect data on a number of student and graduate outcomes; and mandatory student course evaluations.
7. Incorporate the participation of faculty not directly involved in the reviewed program (or discipline or unit).
8. Enable the participation of the wider network of stakeholders, such as employers, graduates, professional associations, the local community, etc.
9. Define the follow-up mechanisms, which, at a minimum, should include the procedures, areas of responsibility and expected timelines, along with provisions for follow-up monitoring of progress (usually involving the Senate).
10. Establish the assessment cycle and related schedule which should not exceed five to seven years.
11. Assess newly established programs or units after the first cohort has graduated.
12. Document the normal timeline for individual reviews, from the preparation of the self-study through to Senate approval of recommendations, normally 12 to 16 months.
13. Include a communication strategy to inform the university community (students, faculty, staff, etc.) and the general public about a university's quality assurance policy as well as significant changes brought about by quality assurance activities. The communication strategy should include activities to inform faculty, staff and heads of units about the policy, its objectives, assessment criteria, and follow-up processes.
14. Define the provisions to review the policy periodically, normally at the end of each cycle. The report resulting from the periodic review of the policy should be tabled with the Senate. The institution's policy should be tabled with the MPHEC as the body responsible for overseeing quality assurance.

Specific Questions

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3.6 How relevant and applicable are the proposed components of an institutional quality assurance policy?

3.7 Are these components equally appropriate for the review of non-academic units and programs as for the review of academic units and programs?

3.8 Most assessment processes are centered on the unit or discipline. Are degrees (B.A., B. Sc., M.A., etc.) reviewed? Would the proposed approach work equally well for the review of degrees?

3.9 What changes or alternatives should be considered?

Standards for Institutional Quality Assurance Policies

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VI.   PROGRAM OR UNIT ASSESSMENT STANDARDS

The assessment standards should be published in the institutional quality assurance policy; they should have a strong focus on students and reflect institutional mission and values. The assessment standards should be comprehensive in their range and in their use across all programs and units, whether offered off or on campus..

In the case of **academic units and programs**, the following standards should at a minimum be identified in the policy:

1.   **The continuing appropriateness of the program's structure, method of delivery and curriculum for the program's educational goals and the degree level expectations**

2.   **The achievement by students and graduates of the learning outcomes in light of the program's stated goals, the degree level expectations, and, where relevant, the standards of any relevant regulatory, accrediting or professional body**

3.   **The continuing appropriateness and effectiveness of the methods used for the evaluation of student progress and achievement in light of the degree level expectations**

4.   **The capacity of the faculty and staff to deliver the program and the quality of education necessary for the students to achieve the stated learning outcomes, and to meet the demands of the existing and anticipated student enrolments**

5.   **The continuing performance of the faculty, including the quality of teaching and supervision, and their continuing progress and achievement in research, scholarship or creative activity, and professional activity in light of the program under review**

6.   **The appropriateness of the support provided to the learning environment, including but not limited to library and learning resources**

7.   **The effectiveness and appropriateness of the use made of the existing human, physical, technological and financial resources**

8.   **The continuing appropriateness of the academic policies (including admission, promotion and graduation requirements; requests for transfer credit and advanced standing; and appeals) and of the governing and decision-making structures of the academic unit; and**

9.   **The definition of indicators that provide evidence of quality, including, where appropriate, graduation rates, time-to-completion of degree(s), graduate employment rates, student satisfaction level, and employer satisfaction level.**

Specific Questions

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3.10   **How relevant and applicable are the revised assessment standards for <u>academic programs and units?</u>**

3.11   **Are there omissions? Are corrections or clarifications required?**

3.12   **Are there other standards institutions rely on to assess learning and the student's experience? If so, what are they and how are they used for improvement?**

3.13   **What role do institutions play in evaluating the quality of teaching and learning?**

Standards for Institutional Quality Assurance Policies

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VI.   PROGRAM OR UNIT ASSESSMENT STANDARDS (continued)

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The great diversity of **non-academic units and programs** makes it much more difficult to offer a similar prescription of assessment standards. However, the following standards at a minimum should appear in the policy:

1.   **The continuing appropriateness and effectiveness of the service or support provided to the academic programs, students and faculty;**

2.   **The capacity of the unit or program to deliver the service or support which its mandate defines;**

3.   **The effectiveness and appropriateness of the use made of the existing human, physical, technological and financial resources; and**

4.   **The contribution of the unit or program to other aspects of the institution's mission and to the student experience.**

APPENDICES TO THE (INSTITUTION'S) POLICY

Standardization and documentation of processes and procedures support two goals: a common and transparent process and shorter timelines. To this end, institutions should make availablethe following templates and standards, usually as appendices to the Policy:

- GUIDELINES FOR THE PREPARATION OF THE SELF-STUDY
- GENERIC TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR EXTERNAL REVIEWERS
- COMMON STUDENT COURSE EVALUATION FORM
- TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR RELEVANT COMMITTEE(S)
- GUIDELINES FOR THE REVIEW OF PROGRAMS THAT ARE ALSO SUBJECT TO ACCREDITATION

Specific Questions

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3.14 **How relevant and applicable are the assessment standards for the** review of non-academic units and programs**?**

3.15 **Are there omissions? Are corrections or clarifications required?**

3.16 **What other assessment standards should be considered? To what extent can the quality of very diverse units and services be assessed through common standards?**

2.   The Second Cycle of the MPHEC's Monitoring Process

The Commission is proposing that the universities in the region implement the proposed *Standards for Institutional Quality Assurance Policies.* The *Standards* would provide the analytical framework of the monitoring process by defining the anticipated scope of the institutions' approach to quality, as well as to the Commission's expectations. **The Commission would then validate this implementation through a second cycle of the monitoring process, in continuity with the first cycle. The assumption is that the implementation of these** *Standards,* **and validation of their implementation, would allow an external observer to conclude that the universities in the region are focussed on quality student learning.**

The **monitoring process is designed to support a sustained attention** on regular, on-going, and systematic assessment processes applied across the entire range of institutional activities in support of the academic core and learning. It has **two objectives**:

1.   To **provide (third-party) assurances** to stakeholders and the general public, through public reporting, **that Maritime universities are have suitable quality assurance policies and mechanisms in place to ensure the ongoing quality of their activities, and more particularly with respect to students and learning**. While the process **involves a summative component**, it is **intended to be formative,** providing assistance to institutions.

2. **To assist each institution in enhancing (or, in some cases, implementing) its quality assurance frameworks** through a formative process that combines on-going dialogue and detailed advice, including recommendations and suggestions. The process will nonetheless include a summative component.

The second cycle will emphasize a shift towards the quality of teaching and learning aims while addressing the gaps that remained at the end of the first cycle. The following would guide the monitoring process and resulting reporting:

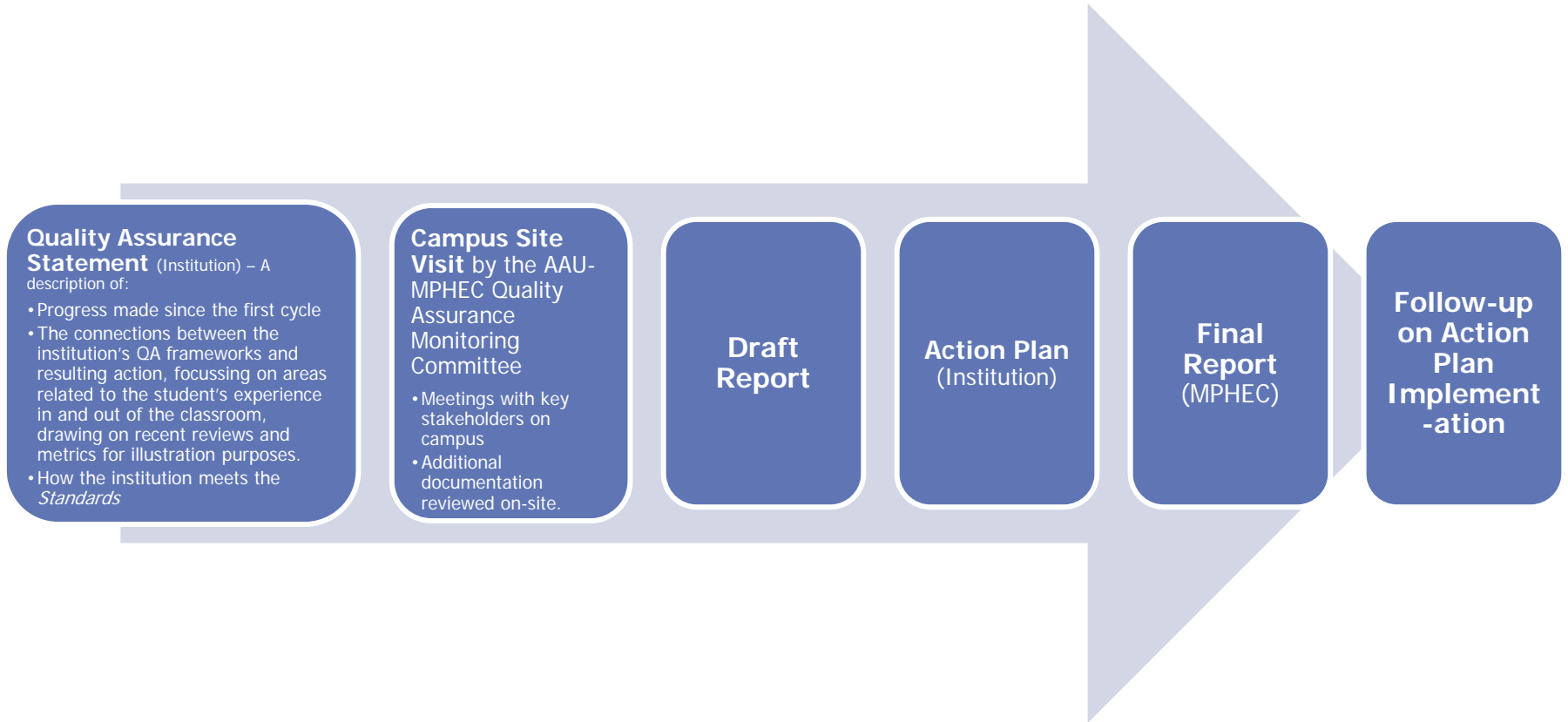|	
Questions Guiding the Monitoring Process and Resulting Reporting	1. **How well is the institution ensuring on-going quality assessment and improvement across its range of programs and activities?**
	2. **How effective are the institution's policies and practices in terms of assessing and promoting the quality of teaching and learning, and in terms of improving the student's experience in the areas of learning, outcomes, and success?**
	3. **How does the institution's approach to quality assurance reflect the Commission's *Standards* in this area? This component would likely be more summative in terms of reporting.**
	4. **Institution-specific questions addressing the specific gaps remaining at the end of the first cycle would be developed.**

The next page presents an overview of the key steps of the monitoring process as currently envisaged by the Commission. The anticipated timeline for the monitoring process with each institution is 12-to-18 months. The process culminates with the publication of a report which would include a fairly detailed action plan developed by the institution to address the recommendation. The Commission expects to complete the process with all institutions in approximately four years (resource-dependant).

Specific Questions

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3.17 Are the objectives, emphasis, and key steps of the monitoring process appropriate and attainable?

3.18 What would make the monitoring process more likely to achieve its stated goal? Why?

3.19 Which considerations or questions should guide the reporting?

Snapshot of the Proposed MPHEC Monitoring Process

(Occurs over a 12- to 18-month period with each institution)

Quality Assurance Statement (Institution) – A description of:
- Progress made since the first cycle
- The connections between the institution's QA frameworks and resulting action, focussing on areas related to the student's experience in and out of the classroom, drawing on recent reviews and metrics for illustration purposes.
- How the institution meets the *Standards*

Campus Site Visit by the AAU-MPHEC Quality Assurance Monitoring Committee
- Meetings with key stakeholders on campus
- Additional documentation reviewed on-site.

Draft Report

Action Plan (Institution)

Final Report (MPHEC)

Follow-up on Action Plan Implement-ation

Students at the Heart: Quality Assurance at Maritime Universities

IV. The way forward

Modern universities are complex organizations that play multiple roles, with a wide range of stakeholders. With roles ranging from education to scholarship to research to creative activity to knowledge translation to community service, understandably, institutional quality assurance frameworks attempt to address these varied expectations. Too often however, in terms of quality assurance, the intersection of these activities with the learning experience remains peripheral. Nonetheless, universities do continue to see their educational mission as core and the Commission's mandate and focus is clear: student learning. Calls for increased accountability generally stem at least in part from a similar focus. The Commission believes that it is the very diversity of learning options proposed by the universities that is at the heart of the Maritime university system. However, the Commission must be in a position to discharge its mandate and provide assurances as to the quality of university education in the region.

Consultation Process

Input on the proposed *Standards* and their potential application during a second cycle of the monitoring process is being sought from all key PSE stakeholders: the universities, students, governments. Input from this wider group is desirable given the potential impact of what is being proposed herein on the Commission's (and the universities') future workplan and resource allocation. The Commission is seeking written responses to the following questions (as already outlined in page 4) by February 15, 2013:

Main Questions When Considering the Proposed Second Cycle of the Monitoring Process

1. How relevant and applicable are the proposed *Standards*?

- Are there alternative mechanisms? Are there omissions?
- Are corrections or clarifications required?
- Should a greater variety of assessment mechanisms/processes be considered? Which ones?
- More specifically, there is an expectation that all units and functions of a university be assessed, in particular as they pertain to the students' experience. Is the proposed approach relevant and effective when it comes to such units? What changes should be considered?

2. Will the implementation of the revised Standards for Institutional Quality Assurance Policies allow the gaps identified in the first cycle to be addressed?

3. To what extent could one conclude that institutions are achieving quality if they have addressed each of these Standards?

4. Will the proposed monitoring process, through which the Commission would validate (and report on) the extent to which each institution has successfully implemented the Standards, satisfy stakeholders that university education in the region is of high quality? Are there specific changes the Commission should consider making to the proposed approach? Or are there more effective alternatives to the monitoring process to reach the objectives outlined in the paper?

5. How closely aligned are the universities' QA frameworks with the proposed *Standards*? What changes might be required to improve the alignment?

6. How else could the Commission provide assistance to institutions to build a culture of quality in all aspects of their operations, and more specifically as it pertains to student learning,outcomes and success?

7. How else could the Commission, and institutions, provide the public with assurances as to the quality of education in this region's universities?

A primary audience for this discussion paper is clearly the universities in the region. The specific questions provided with each component of the Standards and the proposed process are most intended for this specialized audience, as it considers how the Standards might be implemented, and how to best address each elements. These specific questions will be addressed over the course of the consultation process. Responses are welcomed.

Following receipt of responses, the Commission intends to hold a regional forum **(March 2013)** with all interested groups to provide an opportunity for greater dialogue. In parallel, individual meetings with any institution that wishes to address questions or concerns regarding its specific challenges in moving forward will be organized. Meetings with other groups would also be held by request. Following this, the Commission's approach to the second cycle of the monitoring process will be finalized, and an implementation plan defined.

How else could the Commission, and institutions, provide the public with assurances as to the quality of education in this region's universities?

The Commission's instruments designed to support academic quality (program assessment prior to implementation and the quality assurance monitoring process, after) address the key concepts of academic quality and its improvement, based on approaches grounded on the very principles on which universities were built, including collegiality, autonomy, academic freedom. However, these instruments may not fully address the many other perspectives key PSE stakeholders may use to define quality, such as efficiency, effectiveness, and value-for-money. That is at least partly why stakeholders outside the university often ask for "measures", "indicators", and "measures of quality". Clearly, the types of questions that are central to quality and quality assurance are enormously difficult to "measure." However, identifying key issues to monitor and factors to measure should not be avoided. To that end, the Commission is currently exploring the potential of its databases in this regard and will soon be considering the possible development of a framework for consulting with its stakeholders.

We very much look forward to your feedback.

Please submit your response to the above questions no later than **February 15, 2013**, by:

Responses to "Students at the Heart: Quality Assurance at Maritime Universities"
MPHEC
82 Westmorland Street, Suite 401
P. O. Box 6000
Fredericton, NB E3B 5H1
CANADA

Email: mphec@mphec.ca
Fax: (506) 453-2106

Online questionnaire: http://www.mphec.ca/resources/Consultation_Questionnaire.docx

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Appendix A

Side-by-side comparison of the 1999 *Guidelines* with the proposed new *Standards*

GUIDELINES FOR INSTITUTIONAL QUALITY ASSURANCE POLICIES (AS IN THE MPHEC QUALITY ASSURANCE POLICY [1999])	STANDARDS FOR INSTITUTIONAL QUALITY ASSURANCE POLICIES* (PROPOSED CHANGES)
I. PURPOSE OF THE GUIDELINES The aim of these guidelines is to assist the institutions in establishing or improving their policies and processes and to support the Commission when assessing the policies and processes in place.	**I. PURPOSE OF THE STANDARDS** The aim of these *standards* is to assist institutions in establishing or improving their policies and processes and to support the Commission when assessing the policies and processes in place. **II. GUIDING PRINCIPLES** *All institutions should have a quality assurance policy documented and implemented.* *A successful institutional quality assurance policy is guided by:* • *The pursuit of continuous improvement* • *A focus on learning* • *The necessity of encompassing all functions and units of an institution* • *Accountability and transparency*
II. FOCUS OF THE INSTITUTIONAL QUALITY ASSURANCE POLICY An institutional quality assurance policy should reflect the institution's mission and values. All institutions should have a quality assurance policy in place. A quality assurance policy should focus on units (academic and other) and/or on programs (or groups of programs). The policy should include provisions to cover all the functions and units of the institution (research, administration, community service, etc.).	**III. SCOPE OF THE INSTITUTIONAL QUALITY ASSURANCE POLICY** An institutional quality assurance policy reflects the institution's mission and values, *and accounts for the full range of its offerings and activities. It is linked to the institution's strategic and other plans.* The policy includes provisions to cover all of the functions and units of the institution (research, administration, community service, etc.) *and applies to the full spectrum of a student's university experience.*
III. OBJECTIVE OF THE INSTITUTIONAL QUALITY ASSURANCE POLICY The institutional policy's objectives should be, at a minimum, to improve the quality of programs and to ensure that stated student outcomes can be realized. The purpose of the assessment itself should be to answer the following two questions: first, "How well is the unit or the program achieving what it set out to accomplish?", and second, "Is it doing what it should be doing?"	**IV. OBJECTIVE OF THE INSTITUTIONAL QUALITY ASSURANCE POLICY** The institutional policy's objectives are, at a minimum, to improve the quality of programs and to ensure that stated student outcomes can be realized. The purpose of each assessment is to answer the following two questions: first, "How well is the unit or the program achieving what it set out to accomplish?" and second, "Is it doing what it should be doing?" *In so doing, it should examine both inputs and outputs.*
IV. COMPONENTS OF AN INSTITUTIONAL QUALITY ASSURANCE POLICY In addition to reflecting institutional mission and values, the institutional quality assurance policy should be comprehensive and apply to all programs and units. It should also, at a minimum, address the following elements: 1. Identify the coordinating or administrative unit responsible for the overall management of the quality assurance process. This unit should be located at a higher echelon of the institution's administrative structure, and be accountable to the institution's leaders.	**V. COMPONENTS OF AN INSTITUTIONAL QUALITY ASSURANCE POLICY** In addition to reflecting the institutional mission and values, an *effective* institutional quality assurance policy is comprehensive and applies to all programs and units. It would also, at a minimum: 1. Identify the coordinating or administrative unit responsible for the overall management of the quality assurance process. This unit should be located at a higher echelon *(e.g. vice-president)* of the institution's administrative structure, and be accountable to the institution's leaders *(e.g. President and Senate, and Board.)*

* Significant proposed changes are in *red italics*

2. Define the assessment criteria (see section V).
3. Require a self-study component, usually involving faculty and students participating in the program or unit. The self-study should be student-centred as it would aim, in most cases to assess the quality of learning. The self-study should be structured according to the defined assessment procedures criteria. When and where appropriate, the results of accreditation may be included and/or substituted for this component, or a portion thereof.

4. Entail an external review component, usually carried out by two experts external to the institution. As appropriate, the results of accreditation may be included and/or substituted for this component, or a portion thereof.

5. Incorporate the participation of faculty not directly involved in the reviewed program (or discipline or unit).
6. Enable the participation of the wider network of stakeholders, such as employers, graduates, professional associations, the local community, etc.
7. Include appropriate mechanisms, that is at a minimum the procedures and areas of responsibility, to ensure a proper follow up to the assessment

8. Establish the assessment cycle, which should not exceed seven years. Newly established programs or units should be assessed once fully implemented, usually at the three- to five-year mark.

9. Include provisions to review the policy periodically

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2. *Assign and distribute responsibility for the various components of the policy (deans, unit heads, committees, etc.*
3. Define the assessment *standards* (see section *VI*).
4. Require a self-study component, involving faculty and students participating in the program or unit. The self-study should be student-centred as it would aim, in most cases, *to assess the student experience and, in the case of academic programs, to assess the quality of learning and teaching.* The self-study should be structured according to the defined assessment criteria, *and be both descriptive and analytical.* When and where appropriate, the results of accreditation processes may be included, and/or substituted for this component, or a portion thereof; *however, accreditation processes cannot and should not replace the entire institutional assessment process.*
5. *Require* an external review component, *with a sufficiently comprehensive site visit and written report,* carried out by at least two experts external to the institution, with at least one coming from outside Atlantic Canada. *The external reviewers' team should also include a senior faculty member from the institution to assist the external reviewers in the process and provide clarifications on the institution's context.* As appropriate, the results of accreditation may be included, and/or substituted for this component, or a portion thereof; *however, accreditation processes cannot and should not replace the entire institutional assessment process.*
6. *Enable the participation of students through: membership on committees dealing with program review and quality assurance; participation in surveys designed to collect data on a number of student and graduate outcomes; and mandatory student course evaluations.*
7. Incorporate the participation of faculty not directly involved in the reviewed program (or discipline or unit).
8. Enable the participation of the wider network of stakeholders, such as employers, graduates, professional associations, the local community, etc.
9. *Define the follow-up mechanisms, which, at a minimum, should include the procedures, areas of responsibility and expected timelines, along with provisions for follow-up monitoring of progress (usually involving the Senate).*
10. Establish the assessment cycle *and related schedule* which should not exceed five to seven years.
11. *Assess newly established programs or units after the first cohort has graduated.*
12. *Document the normal timeline for individual reviews, from the preparation of the self-study through to Senate approval of recommendations, normally 12 to 16 months.*
13. *Include a communication strategy to inform the university community (students, faculty, staff, etc.) and the general public about a university's quality assurance policy as well as significant changes brought about by quality assurance activities. The communication strategy should include activities to inform faculty, staff and heads of units about the policy, its objectives, assessment criteria, and follow-up processes.*
14. Define the provisions to review the policy periodically, normally at the end of each cycle. *The report resulting from the periodic review of the policy should be tabled with the Senate.*

* Significant proposed changes are in *red italics*

The policy should be tabled with the MPHEC as the body responsible for overseeing quality assurance.

V.   KEY ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

The assessment procedures and criteria should be student-centred, and reflect institutional mission and values. The assessment criteria should be comprehensive (i.e., to include all programs and units) and address the following elements:

1.   Assess intended and delivered curriculum;
2.   Review teaching practices;
3.   Clarify the expected outcomes for students;
4.   Examine the degree to which those outcomes are realized;
5.   Evaluate the appropriateness of support provided to students;
6.   Appraise the research carried out by the academic unit or by faculty involved in the reviewed program;
7.   Value the contribution of the unit or program to other aspects of the institutional mission (community service, for example); and
8.   Value the contribution of the unit or program to the larger community or society in general.

The *institution's* policy should be tabled with the MPHEC as the body responsible for overseeing quality assurance.

VI.   PROGRAM OR UNIT ASSESSMENT STANDARDS

The assessment standards should be published in the institutional quality assurance policy; they should have a strong focus on students and reflect institutional mission and values. The assessment standards should be comprehensive in their range and in their use across all programs and units.

In the case of academic units and programs, the following standards should at a minimum be identified in the policy:

1.   *The continuing appropriateness of the program's structure, method of delivery and curriculum for the program's educational goals and the degree level expectations;*
2.   *The achievement by students and graduates of the learning outcomes in light of the program's stated goals, the degree level expectations, and, where relevant, the standards of any relevant regulatory, accrediting or professional body;*
3.   *The continuing appropriateness and effectiveness of the methods used for the evaluation of student progress and achievement in light of the degree level expectations;*
4.   *The capacity of the faculty and staff to deliver the program and the quality of education necessary for the students to achieve the stated learning outcomes, and to meet the demands of the existing and anticipated student enrolments;*
5.   *The continuing performance of the faculty, including the quality of teaching and supervision, and their continuing progress and achievement in research, scholarship or creative activity, and professional activity in light of the program under review;*
6.   *The appropriateness of the support provided to the learning environment, including but not limited to library and learning resources;*
7.   *The effectiveness and appropriateness of the use made of the existing human, physical, technological and financial resources;*
8.   *The continuing appropriateness of the academic policies (including admission, promotion and graduation requirements; requests for transfer credit and advanced standing; and appeals) and of the governing and decision-making structures of the academic unit; and*
9.   *The definition of indicators that provide evidence of quality, including, where appropriate, graduation rates, time-to-completion of degree(s), graduate employment rates, student satisfaction level, and employer satisfaction level.*

The great diversity of non-academic units and programs makes it much more difficult to offer a similar prescription of assessment standards. However, the following standards at a minimum should appear in the policy:

1.   *The continuing appropriateness and effectiveness of the service or support provided to the academic programs, students and faculty;*
2.   *The capacity of the unit or program to deliver the service or support which its mandate defines;*
3.   *The effectiveness and appropriateness of the use made of the existing human, physical, technological and financial resources; and*
4.   *The contribution of the unit or program to other aspects of the institution's mission and to the student experience.*

* Significant proposed changes are in *red italics*

APPENDICES TO THE POLICY

Standardization and documentation of processes and procedures support two goals: a common and transparent process and shorter timelines. To this end, institutions should make available the following templates and standards, usually as appendices to the Policy:

GUIDELINES FOR THE PREPARATION OF THE SELF-STUDY

GENERIC TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR EXTERNAL REVIEWERS

COMMON STUDENT COURSE EVALUATION FORM

TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR RELEVANT COMMITTEE(S)

GUIDELINES FOR THE REVIEW OF PROGRAMS THAT ARE ALSO SUBJECT TO ACCREDITATION

* Significant proposed changes are in *red italics*

Appendix B
Consultation Questionnaire

(Can be completed online: http://www.mphec.ca/resources/Consultation_Questionnaire.docx)

I.   Main Questions When Considering the Proposed Second Cycle of the Monitoring Process

1. How relevant and applicable are the proposed *Standards?*

2. Will the implementation of the revised *Standards for Institutional Quality Assurance Policies* allow the gaps identified in the first cycle to be addressed?

3. To what extent could one conclude that institutions are achieving quality if they have addressed each of these Standards?

4. Will the proposed monitoring process, through which the Commission would validate (and report on) the extent to which each institution has successfully implemented the Standards, satisfy stakeholders that university education in the region is of high quality? Are there specific changes the Commission should consider making to the proposed approach? Or are there more effective alternatives to the monitoring process to reach the objectives outlined in the paper?

5. How closely aligned are the universities' QA frameworks with the proposed Standards? What changes might be required to improve the alignment?

6. How else could the Commission provide assistance to institutions to build a culture of quality in all aspects of their operations, and more specifically as it pertains to student learning, outcomes and success?

7. How else could the Commission, and institutions, provide the public with assurances as to the quality of education in this region's universities?

II.   Specific Questions

1. Are the Standards meeting their intended purpose?

2. Are different policies or approaches required to assess non-academic units and programs? What would the main features of these approaches be?

3. Should all non-academic units and programs be assessed? Which ones should be assessed? Which ones should not be and on what basis?

4. What other standards/ processes, other than those presented herein, do universities rely on to ensure educational quality/ the quality of the student's experience?

5. What changes or alternatives should be considered?

With regards to section V. - Components of an Institutional Quality Assurance Policy

6. How relevant and applicable are the proposed components of an institutional quality assurance policy?

7. Are these components equally appropriate for the review of non-academic units and programs as for the review of academic units and programs?

8. Most assessment processes are centered on the unit or discipline. Are degrees (B.A., B. Sc., M.A., etc.) reviewed? Would the proposed approach work equally well for the review of degrees?

9. What changes or alternatives should be considered?

With regards to section VI. – Program or Unit Assessment Standards – Academic Units and Programs

10. How relevant and applicable are the revised assessment standards for academic programs and units?

11. Are there omissions? Are corrections or clarifications required?

12. Are there other standards institutions rely on to assess learning and the student's experience? If so, what are they and how are they used for improvement?

13. What role do institutions play in evaluating the quality of teaching and learning?

With regards to section VI. – Program or Unit Assessment Standards – Non-Academic Units and Programs

14. How relevant and applicable are the assessment standards for the review of non-academic units and programs?

15. Are there omissions? Are corrections or clarifications required?

16. What other assessment standards should be considered? To what extent can the quality of very diverse units and services be assessed through common standards?

17. Are the objectives, emphasis, and key steps of the monitoring process appropriate and attainable?

18 What would make the monitoring process more likely to achieve its stated goal? Why?

19. Which considerations or questions should guide the reporting?

Please submit your response to the above questions no later than **February 15, 2013**, by:

Responses to "Students at the Heart: Quality Assurance at Maritime Universities"
MPHEC
82 Westmorland Street, Suite 401
P. O. Box 6000
Fredericton, NB E3B 5H1
CANADA

Email: mphec@mphec.ca
Fax: (506) 453-2106

Online questionnaire: http://www.mphec.ca/resources/Consultation_Questionnaire.docx