

Independent Opinion Report

Prepared for
Najran University
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Summary

Najran University (NU) has achieved high level of quality across NCAAA standards and put a lot of effort to achieve that and to provide evidence for Self-Study Report of the Institution (SSRI). This was done through hard work across many years, with high commitment from university leaders and staff to quality. Even with Southern border crisis, NU continued its projects and activities overcoming all challenges. NU was successful in establishing a comprehensive quality system, and involved all stakeholders in NU activities, and measured their satisfaction. Results of evaluation indicated good levels of performance. More work is needed on utilizing results for continuous and sustainable improvement.

Process of evaluation

NU invited the reviewer based on assessment and accreditation experience. The reviewer knows NU and has worked with it long time ago giving them workshops and reviewing their Strategic Plan. The reviewer reviewed all documents in Arabic and English and discussed with quality director major points and evidence of concern, points that needed more explanations, and required evidence as needed. Then the Self Evaluation Sales for Institution (SESI) were filled out and (SSRI) review was written.

General comments:

- NU has progressed dramatically across the few past years implementing a strong and comprehensive strategic plan, with high commitment for quality from its leaders. The new projects, and campuses have added value to the teaching and learning quality. This is evidenced across all standards.
- NU team put a lot of efforts in SSRI and covered all the important details, but it is very long and there are repetitions, especially in data and indicators. It is suggested that SSRI be abbreviated, and any details could be placed in appendices.
- Processes to review standards were repeated in details, the general procedures could be mentioned in the introduction, then within each criterion short steps could be listed. Details should be attached.
- There is evidence that still in Arabic and there should be a summary of its content.
- In the surveys, the ratios of the responses should be added in addition to the mean. The mean does not convert to the ratio of agreement. Ratio of agreement is

the ratio of the responses of agree and agree very much, and it does not calculate neutral like mean.

- Samples for surveys and KPIs data, response rates, and distribution of participants across colleges and gender are unclear.
- There are some evidence of letters, decisions, specifications that are not signed or signed and have no date.
- NU provided different kinds of evidence for each standard. Stronger evidence for closing the loops needs to be provided for the standards.
- SESI needs to be completed, all in English, and comments need to be very short and consistent. High estimation of NU performance (4 stars and above) needs evidence that the performance is with high quality and is followed consistently, indicators of quality are established and plans for improvement have been developed and implemented, progress is regularly monitored and reported on, and that there are closing for loops with evidence to approve that.
- SESI overall assessment of some substandard need to be reviewed. (5-4/ 6-4/ 7-4).
- Some SESI overall assessment has a score which should be removed.

E. Mission, Goals and Strategic Objectives for Quality Improvement

NU mission is appropriate and was implemented through NU strategic plan and its development projects. NU has a quality plan and a strong strategic plan for the university that was implemented, with 12 strategic objectives and performance indicators and benchmarks . Many propjets are being achieved and some are delayed. The Quality Strategic Plan covers all the fields upon which the development process depends and about 90% of the developmental projects of the Quality strategic plan have been implemented. A few points should be addressed:

- More efforts needs to be provided regarding achieving some aspects of mission that seemed not to be achieved well, including commitment to modern technologies in the field of teaching and learning and activate partnerships and cooperation at local, regional and global levels.
- There should be more relations to external community through holding conferences and seminars related to the development and quality and the challenges facing higher education institutions to derive benefit from other universities' expertise and applying them to NU's current situation
- The effect of context on university plan needs to be clear.
- The implementation of the strategic plan projects along with identifying supervisor of each project need to be clear.
- NU needs an electronic system to follow up the projects of the quality strategic plan and results of performance indicators.
- NU has KPIs with a lot of information , but there should be clear data regarding gender and campuses.

Standard 1: Mission, Goals and Objectives (**)**

NU mission is clear and appropriate and guided planning and action in the institution. NU mission involved commitment to modern technologies in the field of teaching and learning, commitment to activate partnerships and cooperation at local, regional and global levels for the university to open up to the world and to exchange experience and information in all areas, which had a positive impact on all the activities of the University. The mission is the basis for the planning process in NU via its strategic plan. The mission was formulated in consultation with the stakeholders and was used as a guide in the decision-making processes. It was publicized and guided the University's academic and administrative activities. Goals were used effectively to guide the planning and decision-making processes in the University. Even with Southern border crisis, NU continued its projects and activities and overcome challenges. NU continued implementation of the fourth stage of strategic plan. There was some delay in some projects, however the general achievement is good. Moreover, NU has connected all its plans and developmental projects to KSA Vision 2030 and the National Transformation Program 2020. NU has a strong system that involved all NU units and leaders in implementing the strategic plan, and a good follow up for projects, and achievement reports are provided. The University vision, mission and strategic objectives were evaluated. However there are some points that need to be addressed:

- More evidence is needed regarding achieving the strategic objectives, what was provided are reports.
- NU needs to show how it will carry its projects with no delay, and address the major issues considering risks facing the university, and it needs to include risk management plans for projects.
- NU needs to address how it will increase its funds for projects, and how it will deal with new coming changes such as privatization and independence of universities in the near future.
- Aspects of partnership and cooperation at local and international levels need to be addressed.

Standard 2: Governance and Administration (*)**

NU has a Higher Governing Body within its organizational structure with clear terms of reference. NU has a comprehensive strategic plan and established a Standing Committee of the Strategic Plan and budget. A mechanism for measuring the effectiveness of the University Council was implemented, and risk management plan was done. NU has an approved organizational handbook that outlines the terms of reference and tasks for all the academic and administrative units. NU has policies and regulations. Policies define the scope of authorities and work actions of the standing committees, administrative units, and leadership positions. More efforts are put towards improving faculty and staff satisfaction rates and representation of females. In addition, NU should work on the following:

- More evidence is required to address that governing body regularly reviews its effectiveness and develops plans for improvement in the way it operates.

- More evidence needs to be provided to ensure communicating all higher governing body decisions across university.
- An electronic system to manage the strategic plan projects and identify performance level and progress across objectives and goals is needed.
- There should be more representation for females in all higher committees and more leaders at upper levels of management.
- Although staff satisfaction has improved, but it is still not high and NU should take steps to create more positive environment and address concerns across campuses.
- There are good risk management handbook and plans, but they need to be implemented, with more detailed plans on how to deal with possible crisis.
- NU should differentiate between risk management that is associated with strategic plan and the general risk management.
- Evidence of conflict of interest policies and their implementation needs to be provided.
- Handbooks that details codes of ethics need to be more comprehensive .
- NU needs to provide more evidence about the implemented arrangement to assure quality of provision of contracted services to students, particularly the preparatory year program.

Standard 3: Management of Quality Assurance and Improvement (*)**

NU has support from its leaders in all quality assurance and improvement activities. There is an institutional commitment to improve quality at the institution. There is a governing body concerned with quality affairs represented in the Vice-Rectorship for Development and Quality and Deanships for Development and Quality. Quality assurance processes in NU include all academic and administrative tasks at the institution through an effective system related to inputs, processes and outcomes. The University carries out self-evaluation processes to ensure the quality of its performance depending on several sources and evidence. Quality is assessed by reference to evidence based on indicators of performance and external standards. Different KPIs were established to cover NCAAA requirements, AFAQ requirements, and NU strategic plan projects. NU covers the view of all stakeholders and the different standards in its surveys. In addition, NU needs to address other points:

- NU needs to report KPIs not only by total numbers, but by gender and campuses and trend data should be provided.
- NU needs to have indicators at different levels of strategic plan (projects, objectives and goals) with outcome KPIs allocated to goals.
- More evidence is required regarding closing the loops at all levels.
- Even though quality assurance activities cover all functions and units, evidence needs to be provided regarding quality of all standards for males vs. females.
- NU should review the way measurement is conducted for ILOs because it is simplified and is based mainly on student grades of courses plus surveys.

- NU should provide enough evidence regarding closing the loops at all levels.
- Quality policies are general, quality handbook and processes need to be reviewed to be appropriate.
- Verification of student achievement standards needs to include comparing the work of the students with their peers in other similar institutions and verifying grades.

Standard 4: Learning and Teaching (*)**

NU has a system to monitor programs standards of learning and teaching and to monitor the institution and programs' performance on them. Student learning outcomes are specified based on NQF. NU has qualified and experienced faculty. NU has developed a framework to oversight the quality of learning and teaching at the University level, and it is evaluated through student assessments and graduate and employer surveys, with feedback collected. Colleges have advisory committees from various sectors to help develop the learning and teaching processes. NU has developed electronic software to measure the learning outcomes of programs. A system of academic counselling as well as dealing with low-achievers and outstanding students is well activated. E-learning systems and courses are supported. Student progression rates and graduation ratios indicate a problem because they are low. The rate of students who graduated on time is low (23%) for bachelor's and very low (18%) for post graduates. Students who completed first year successfully is low (40%). Some data was provided to some programs, such as self assessment scales on standard 4. No explanation was provided about affiliate (Entisab) courses. However, NU should consider the following:

- NU should study the reasons for low graduation and completion rates and deal with the root cause of the problem.
- NU should review program and course specifications to ensure that their learning outcomes are appropriate, cover required skills at their level, and that teaching learning and assessment strategies match each LO domain.
- Program and course specifications need to be reviewed to make sure they are approved, do not differ across campuses, use the same forms, and in English.
- NU should explain the system it has for entisab students (first and second year) and how it assure quality of learning and courses for them.
- NU should review its methodology of measuring learning outcomes (KPIs) because they depend on averaging course scores.
- NU should consider eliminating some preparatory year courses from being accounted in credit hours, since many courses address abilities that are before bachelor degree and they are not taught by program faulty or supervised by them.
- Survey data need to be reported particularly on standard 4 with some comparisons across programs, colleges, campuses, females and males, etc.
- More evidence is needed for procedures followed to deal with situations where standards of student achievement are inadequate.
- More evidence needs to be provided regarding the match between faculty

specializations and courses they teach.

- Some programs do not apply field experience, and some have contradicting information. Review is needed for the match between field experience specifications and study plan in program specifications.

Standard 5: Student administration and support services (*)**

NU has reliable and effective central electronic system for admission and student record system with approved policies. All required admission documents are available. It also provides electronic and paper guide handbooks for the actions and requirements of admission, and each student has a personal account on the University's Edugate. Student guidebook was published with procedures available for discipline and appeals. NU applies approved mechanisms of the student counselling and support system, and evaluates students' satisfaction with the services of academic, vocational and psychological counselling offered. NU pays attention to extra-curricular activities to improve students culturally, socially, ethically and physically. However, student services budget is low and satisfaction is still low for students 64%. Health is good but psychological services seem with low quality. It is good that NU set up an academic guidance and student support unit, however, caring for gifted and creative students is weak. Despite the reference to a Code of Conduct in the self-study, it was a list of rules and not the rights and duties and code of conduct for students. (Note: there is a brief list of rights in Standard 11). NU needs to work on the following:

- NU needs to improve psychological and personal counselling services for students.
- NU should develop proper gifted programs, not just awards for students who have high gpa.
- NU needs to produce comprehensive code of conduct for students approved by the university.
- NU is recommended to activate the system for central academic counselling and forming student disciplinary, complaints and grievance committees in all male and female colleges.
- Students' records backup copies need to be kept in more advanced system outside campuses not in hard disks or CDs.
- NU should improve student satisfaction of extra-curricular activities
- Evidence is required for effective and continuous improvement of student services and activities.
- Student services budget needs to be increased, which will cause better services and satisfaction.

Standard 6: Learning resources (*)**

Learning resources including libraries and electronic databases are planned and provided in accordance with NU programs. NU established Central Libraries, and established specialized libraries in colleges in male and female sections. Libraries and associated IT facilities are accessible for students and assistance is provided in finding materials. The Deanship of Library Affairs adopted high standard benchmarks for the services of the Central Library and an executive regulation for them and conducted a study on them. The

services are evaluated from teaching staff and students and results are used for improvement. Reports on gap between the current status and the targeted services are conducted to ensure equal provision of library and information resources, for male and female sections. Satisfaction data trend was provided showing increase across years, but student satisfaction level of library services is still lower than target. NU needs to improve the following:

- Preparing a mechanism to ensure equality of services and information resources in the male and female sections.
- Central libraries need to have more agreements with libraries at other universities for borrowings.
- Facilities must be provided for individual and group study.
- NU needs to renew books in library and provide enough numbers of them as evidence indicated.
- Student satisfaction level of library services needs to be increased.

Standard 7: Facilities and equipment (*)**

NU facilities are designed to meet the teaching and learning needs with safe and healthy environment for education. A new University City was established recently with e-government system that provided all electronic services for the University employees and students, therefore, NU was one of the best Saudi universities in transition from paper to electronic based transactions. Appropriate provision is made for many services such as food services, extra-curricular activities, and student accommodation for males and females. NU made improvements on student residence based on feedback. In addition, NU updated its website in Arabic and English. The website provides student services as well as academic, administrative, and visitor services and each college and department at the University has its own website. NU provided a large number of training courses for faculty to use computers and modern technology in the field of teaching. NU surveys the stakeholders' perspectives about the efficiency and adequacy of facilities, equipment and technical staff. In addition, NU may consider the following:

- NU needs to show how results of user surveys are used to assist in planning for improvement.
- NU needs to work on safety procedures such as exit signs inside colleges.
- Provide transportation all the day between the colleges on campus.
- Data need to be updated, and full data of surveys provided, making sure to benchmark results with university who use same surveys.
- Review statistics used in reports to be give the full picture and accurate. Means are different that percentages, because agreement percentage exclude number 3 neutral response.

Standard 8: Financial planning and management (*)**

NU has modern systems used for budgeting and financial delegations and accountability with flexibility in budget management which permits transfer from item to another that

prevents expenditure problems at the end of fiscal year. Financial planning and management is in accordance with NU mission and priorities of the strategic plan. Preparation of the budget plan is based on consultation with various departments. NU plan of risk management involves financial risks. In addition, NU has a system for internal and external financial auditing annually conducted. NU has to work on the following:

- The student's total expenses rate is low and needs to be increased.
- More evidence is needed for effective financial management and institutional accountability and responsibility
- NU should have investment plan to overcome any expected financial risk.
- NU should have separate and specialized financial risk plan and management system, particularly with privatization of education in the near future (ksa2030).

Standard 9: Employment processes (*)**

NU has established profile for faculty, and they have to some level the qualifications and experience to carry on their responsibilities and NU has developed and implemented a plan for professional development . Performance of all faculty and staff is evaluated, and outstanding performance is recognized. There is bylaws for promotions that includes standards which ensure the achievement of the University mission, quality of education, community service, and scientific research. NU applies the rules and regulations that define the disciplinary procedures. It was noticed that NU percentage of faculty who are PhD holders are low (39.1%) and most of them are non-Saudis. In addition, even though NU worked on improving satisfaction rates for faculty and staff, it is still moderate (60%). Parentage of trained staff are less than what was targeted. Some points need to be addressed:

- NU is recommended to work on increasing faculty who are PhD holders particularly Saudis and females.
- NU needs to conduct studies to investigate how to increase faculty and staff satisfaction rates.
- More training is needed for faculty in teaching and evaluation strategies.
- Faculty handbook needs to be provided.

Standard 10: Research (*)**

NU staff have scholarly activities and are encouraged to publish their research and funds are allocated for research projects. Adequate facilities and equipment are available to support the research activities. Since NU is a newly established university, such research activity is good. NU also has research project management systems and a strategic plan for scientific research with strategic objectives and performance indicators was developed. Research output is monitored and benchmarked against other similar institutions. Policies are established for ownership and intellectual property and research chairs. NU also established the Innovation and Entrepreneurship Unit to provide opportunities for innovators to transform their ideas to successful projects in the business market. It was

noticed that satisfaction rates is moderate for male and low for female about quality of research. In addition, research and budget is lower than previous year and targeted percentage. Several points need to be addressed:

- NU research reports needs to be provided with details regarding conducted research across its research centers and colleges, not just numbers. Annual reports need to be provided for previous years. (not just general or university reports).
- NU needs to increase collaborative research projects with industry and other universities and research centers.
- More support needs to be provided to female faculty in research
- Expenditure on research needs to be increased (>2.5% of its overall budget)
- Marketing and commercialization for research should be encouraged.
- Research publication data (ISI) need to be updated
- Cooperative, applied and innovative research need to be reported with evidence and return.
- NU needs to have more postgraduate programs.
- Research maintenance evidence needs to be provided.
- Evidence should be provided for joint research with postgraduate students.
- Satisfaction rates for female about quality of research need to be increased.

Standard 11: Relationships with the community (*)**

NU has an approved strategy and prioritized its short/long term strategic goals. NU has institutional policies on community relationship, and annual reports are prepared on community services and are published on the Electronic Portal of NU. A range of community services, education and training courses, and health services are provided. Academic and administrative units are participating in achieving the strategic goals of NU for the community relationships under the umbrella of the Deanship of Community Service and Continuing Education. It is good that NU established a project for community needs. There are established mechanisms to monitor and enhance the reputation of the University and NU has an official spokesperson with experience in the field of public relations and media. NU has official mechanism to assure the continuous improvement of the community service system, and it measures the degree of satisfaction of the stakeholders with good rates of satisfaction. More focus was on service but less is on partnership. Advisory boards are allocated for colleges and they include members from the community, such as employers from industrial, health, and education sectors. In addition, NU should consider the following:

- NU is recommended to enhance its relationships with local industries and employers to assist program delivery. Its partnership with other universities, industry and business is still weak. More local and international relations and partnership are needed.
- NU needs to focus more on engagement with community more than courses.
- NU is recommended to translate all important content on its web site to English.

Conclusion:

NU listed institutional activities that are successful and the ones that are less than satisfactory and that need to be improved.

- NU should only summarize the most important points of successful and the ones that are less than satisfactory issues .
- Action plan needs to be short and focused with unified form.

Appendices:

- All appendices for SSRI need to be included in English and to be organized in consistent manner with all titles in English, and repetition should be reduced.
- Evidence needs to be reduced to important documents, with approval dates for important formal ones.
- Most data are for the whole university. Appendices do not provide enough information on males and females, campuses.
- KPIs are given as totals and there is no statistics for males and females, or campuses separately. Comparisons need to be given and could be in attachments with indications within SSRI.

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