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International Quality Standards

IQS

Academic Quality Standards

International Quality Standards for Academic Institutions

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1. Purpose & Scope

This document establishes the Academic Quality Standards ("the Standards") of International Quality Standards for Academic Institutions (IQS). The Standards define the baseline expectations an academic or training institution must meet to be recognized as IQS-accredited, and the ongoing expectations it must sustain to retain that recognition.
The Standards apply to all education and training providers seeking or holding IQS accreditation, regardless of size, ownership structure, delivery mode (in-person, online, blended), or level (school, higher education, vocational, or skill-training).
The Standards are built around nine pillars: inclusion and equity, sustainability, skill development and continuing education, institutional digital presence, disclosure, grievance redressal, program transparency, learner identification and verification, and output orientation.

2. Foundational Principles

These Standards are informed by established international and national frameworks for education quality and transparency, including:

- ISO 21001:2018 — Management Systems for Educational Organizations, which provides a generic management-system structure (aligned with ISO 9001's Plan-Do-Check-Act cycle) for demonstrating that an institution supports competence development through teaching, learning, and research, and continuously improves learner and stakeholder satisfaction.

- UNESCO Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) and the Education 2030 Framework for Action — which establish inclusion and equity as foundational to educational quality, and commit institutions to lifelong learning opportunities for all.

- UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education (1960) and the Salamanca Statement (1994) — which frame the removal of barriers to access as a matter of rights, not discretion.

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- Public Self-Disclosure norms (modeled on regulatory practice such as India's UGC Guidelines on Public Self-Disclosure) — which require institutions to maintain functional, publicly accessible websites disclosing governance, academic, financial, and infrastructure information without requiring login or registration.

- Unique learner identification systems (Like TID)— which demonstrate the practical value of a permanent, verifiable digital academic identity for every learner.

IQS adapts these established principles into a single, coherent accreditation framework rather than inventing standards in isolation — ensuring institutions meeting IQS Standards are also aligned with globally recognized quality practice.

3. Standard 1 — Inclusive Access & Equity

Principle: Every learner matters, and matters equally. Quality education cannot be exclusionary.

Requirements:

- The institution shall maintain a published admissions/access policy that does not discriminate on the basis of gender, disability, ethnicity, religion, language, nationality, or economic condition.

- The institution shall identify and actively work to remove barriers to access — physical, financial, linguistic, or technological — for learners from underrepresented or disadvantaged backgrounds.

- The institution shall provide reasonable accommodations for learners with disabilities or special educational needs, in both physical and digital learning environments.

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- The institution shall track and report enrollment diversity data as part of its annual submission to IQS.

4. Standard 2 — Sustainable & Non-Commercial Orientation

Principle: Education is a public good. Institutions may be financially sound, but shall not be run as purely profit-maximizing ventures at the expense of learners.

Requirements:

- The institution shall demonstrate financial sustainability — the ability to operate, invest in quality improvement, and meet obligations to learners and staff — without dependence on unsustainable fee escalation.

- Fee structures shall be reasonable, transparent, and proportionate to the value and cost of program delivery; arbitrary or excessive fee hikes are inconsistent with this Standard.

- Any surplus generated shall be substantially reinvested into academic quality, infrastructure, faculty development, or learner support — not solely extracted as profit.

- The institution shall disclose its fee structure and refund/cancellation policy in full on its website (see Standard 5).

- The institution shall demonstrate environmentally and operationally sustainable practices where relevant to its scale (e.g., resource use, digital-first record-keeping, campus sustainability initiatives).

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5. Standard 3 — Skill Development & Continuing Education

Principle: Learning does not end with a degree. Institutions must actively support skill-building and lifelong learning.

Requirements:

- The institution shall offer, directly or through recognized partnerships, skill-development and vocational/practical training components alongside core academic programs.
- The institution shall provide continuing education, upskilling, or refresher pathways for alumni, working professionals, or returning learners — not exclusively first-time, full-time students.
- Skill and continuing-education offerings shall be documented with the same rigor as core academic programs (see Standard 7): duration, outcomes, certification, and fees.
- The institution shall track completion and post-program outcomes (employment, promotion, further study) for skill/continuing-education offerings as part of its Output Orientation reporting (Standard 9).

6. Standard 4 — Institutional Website & Digital Presence

Principle: A functioning, dedicated website is the baseline infrastructure of institutional transparency.

Requirements:

- Every accredited or applicant institution shall maintain a dedicated official website (not solely a social-media page or third-party listing).
- The website shall be functional, regularly updated, and accessible without requiring login or registration for public-interest information.

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- The website shall include a working site search function to help stakeholders locate disclosures, programs, and policies.
- The website shall be reasonably accessible to users with disabilities (e.g., readable contrast, alt text on key images, mobile compatibility).
- Website uptime and content currency shall be subject to periodic IQS audit; non-functional or substantially outdated websites are treated as a compliance failure (see Standard 5 precedent of regulatory non-compliance for reference).

7. Standard 5 — Compulsory Public Disclosure

Principle: Institutions shall be accountable to stakeholders through transparent, self-initiated disclosure — not disclosure only on request.

Requirements:

- The institution's website shall carry a clearly labeled "Compulsory Disclosure" or "Public Disclosure" section, linked from the homepage.
- The Disclosure section shall be updated at least annually, or immediately upon material change (e.g., new accreditation status, fee revision, leadership change).
- The minimum contents of this section are defined in Annex B — Compulsory Disclosure Checklist.
- Disclosure information shall be accessible without login, registration, or payment.

8. Standard 6 — Grievance Redressal

Principle: Learners and stakeholders must have a clear, accountable channel to raise concerns.

Requirements:

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- The institution's website shall carry a dedicated Grievance Redressal section, linked from the homepage.
- The section shall name the Grievance Redressal Committee (or equivalent), including at least one external or independent member where feasible.
- section shall publish a clear escalation process: how to file a grievance, expected acknowledgment and resolution timelines, and the appeal path if unresolved.
- The institution shall maintain an internal log of grievances received and resolved, made available to IQS upon request or audit.
- Retaliation against a learner, staff member, or stakeholder for raising a grievance in good faith is a direct violation of these Standards.

9. Standard 7 — Program Listing & Transparency

Principle: A prospective learner should be able to make a fully informed decision from the website alone.

Requirements:

- Every program offered by the institution — academic, vocational, skill-based, or continuing education — shall be listed on the website, with no material offering omitted.
- Each program listing shall include, at minimum: full name, duration, eligibility/prerequisites, curriculum/syllabus outline, delivery mode, faculty assigned, fee structure, intake capacity/schedule, and recognized certification or credential awarded.
- Discontinued or inactive programs shall be clearly marked as such, not left ambiguously listed alongside active offerings.

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- Program-level outcome data (where available) — such as completion rate or graduate progression — should be linked from the program listing to support informed decision-making.

10. Standard 8 — Trainee Identification Number (TID)

Principle: Every learner's academic and skill journey should be uniquely identifiable, portable, and verifiable — for the learner's own benefit and for institutional accountability.

Requirements:

- Every institution shall issue a unique Trainee Identification Number (TID) to each enrolled learner at the point of admission or enrollment, whether the offering is academic, vocational, or short-term skill training.

- The TID shall function as a permanent identifier for that learner across their engagement with the institution, and — where the learner consents and the receiving institution participates in the IQS network — across institutions.

- The TID shall be linked to a verifiable record of the learner's enrolled programs, credits, skills, and certifications earned, enabling third parties (employers, other institutions) to verify credentials directly rather than relying solely on paper certificates.

- Institutions shall provide a verification interface (a lookup tool, portal, or API) allowing authorized parties to confirm the authenticity of a TID and its associated credential(s), with appropriate learner consent and data-protection safeguards.

- Full data-structure guidance for the TID system is provided in Annex A.

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11. Standard 9 — Output Orientation & Outcomes Reporting

Principle: Quality is demonstrated by outcomes, not intentions. Institutions must measure and report what actually happens to learners.

Requirements:

- The institution shall track, at minimum: program completion rates, learner satisfaction, and post-program outcomes (employment, further study, or measurable skill application, as relevant to the program type).
- The institution shall submit an Annual Outcomes Report to IQS, and shall publish a summary of key outcome metrics on its website.
- Outcome data shall be reported honestly, including unfavorable results — selective or misleading reporting of outcomes is a violation of this Standard and of Standard 5 (Disclosure).
- IQS accreditation review shall weigh demonstrated outcomes at least as heavily as input factors (infrastructure, faculty count, etc.), consistent with an output-oriented approach to quality assurance.

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12. Compliance & Verification Matrix

This matrix summarizes the ten core compliance clauses IQS auditors and self-assessment reviewers use to evaluate an institution against these Standards

Clause	Requirement	Verification Method
1	Institution has valid legal existence under applicable national/state law	Registration certificate / government recognition license
2	Institution maintains a dedicated, functional official website	Live URL check + uptime/accessibility audit
3	Website carries a Compulsory Disclosure section per IQS checklist	Disclosure checklist audit (see Annex B)
4	Website carries a functioning Grievance Redressal section	Grievance page review + sample complaint trace
5	All programs offered are listed with full detail (fees, duration, eligibility, faculty, outcomes)	Program listing cross-check against actual offerings
6	Every learner is issued a Trainee Identification Number (TID)	TID registry sample check
7	Institution demonstrates inclusive admission and support practices	Inclusion policy document + enrollment data review
8	Institution demonstrates financial sustainability without purely profit-driven practice	Financial disclosure + fee-policy review
9	Skill development / continuing education offerings are active and documented	Course catalogue + enrollment/completion records
10	Institution reports measurable outcomes (completion, employment/progression, satisfaction)	Annual Outcomes Report submission

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13. Annex A — TID Data Structure

Recommended minimum data fields for the Trainee Identification Number system (Standard 8):

Field	Description
TID Number	Unique alphanumeric identifier issued at enrollment; permanent for the learner's lifetime
Issuing Institution	Name and IQS accreditation ID of the institution that issued the TID
Learner Profile	Name, enrollment date, program(s) undertaken
Credit/Skill Ledger	Running record of courses, credits, skills, and certifications earned, across institutions if the learner transfers
Verification Interface	Public/employer-facing lookup to verify a TID and its associated credentials
Data Protection	Access controls ensuring only authorized parties can view detailed records; learner consent required for third-party sharing

14. Annex B — Compulsory Disclosure Checklist

Minimum contents required in the Compulsory Disclosure section of an institution's website (Standard 5) :

Category	Must Include
About the Institution	Legal name, registration/license number, ownership/governance structure, year established
Approvals & Recognition	Government/regulatory approvals, IQS accreditation status and validity, any other accreditations held

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Academic Programs	Full list of programs with duration, eligibility, curriculum outline, fee structure, intake capacity
Faculty & Staff	Names, qualifications, and designations of core faculty and key administrative staff
Fees & Refund Policy	Complete fee schedule and refund/cancellation terms
Infrastructure	Facilities relevant to program delivery (labs, library, learning platforms, accessibility provisions)
Governance	Governing body/board members, code of conduct, anti-ragging/anti-harassment policy
Financial Transparency	Annual report or audited financial summary (non-profit institutions: utilization of surplus)
Grievance Redressal	Link to grievance section, committee members, escalation/appeal process, response-time commitment
Outcomes	Completion rates, placement/progression outcomes, learner satisfaction summary
Sustainability & Inclusion	Scholarship/fee-waiver policy, inclusion and accessibility measures, sustainability initiatives

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15. References & Basis

This framework draws on the following publicly available standards, policy frameworks, and regulatory practices as its evidentiary and structural basis:

- ISO 21001:2018 — Educational organizations — Management systems for educational organizations — Requirements with guidance for use (International Organization for Standardization).
- UNESCO — Sustainable Development Goal 4 and the Education 2030 Framework for Action (Incheon Declaration, 2015).
- UNESCO — Convention against Discrimination in Education (1960) and the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education (1994).
- UNESCO — A Guide for Ensuring Inclusion and Equity in Education.
- University Grants Commission (India) — Guidelines on Public Self-Disclosure by Higher Education Institutions (approved 2024; updated guidelines issued 2025).
- Academic Bank of Credits (ABC) and the Automated Permanent Academic Account Registry (APAAR) — India's unique lifelong student-identifier and credit-ledger system, referenced as a structural model for the TID concept.
- Trainee Identification Number (TID) An independent learners identification number. official website: tid.egov.ind.in

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