



school quality assurance (SQA) system

What is the SQA Framework?

The School Quality Assurance Framework (SQAF) is a tool to measure the performance of all UNRWA schools. Effective use of the tool will establish a strategic, systemic approach for regular school evaluation against quality, inclusive and equitable education indicators. These indicators reflect the principles, practices and values of the Education Reform Strategy and of the Medium-Term Strategy (2016-2021) as well as cross-cutting issues related to protection, gender, disability, neutrality and safety and security.

The Framework has five key focus areas: Student Outcomes, Student Personal and Social Development, Teaching, Learning and Assessment, Safe and Secure Learning Environment and Leadership and Management. Their related indicators will be measured through the collection of quantitative and qualitative data, review of school planning documents and records and classroom and school observations. Schools will be rated based on a four-level rating scale: Excellent, Good, Fair or Poor.

Why does UNRWA need a SQA system?

The SQA system will be critical for embedding, sustaining and enriching the policies, principles and practices of the Education Reform, towards the achievement of Strategic Outcome 3 (2016 – 2021 Medium Term Strategy), i.e. “school-aged children complete quality, equitable and inclusive basic education.”

How was the SQAF developed by UNRWA?

The SQAF was developed through a series of Agency- wide forums in 2015-2017 and with the support of international experts. Following extensive consultations, a rigorous review and pre-testing process took place of both the Framework and its process for implementation during 2015. The Framework was finalised in 2017.

Who uses the SQAF?

At Field-level, the School Quality Assurance Unit is responsible for implementing the SQAF system and ensuring follow-up. The system starts by a comprehensive SQA visit to individual schools, the outcomes of which will be key to the planning of the work of the other two Strategic Support Units (Assessment Unit, Professional Development and Curriculum Unit), in terms of providing the appropriate support required at school, Area and Field level. The outcomes of the visit will also be of value to other HQ Departments, such as Protection and Safety and Security. Findings will need to be discussed at Field Management meetings, drawing from the summaries provided by the Head School Quality Assurance Unit.

How frequently will the SQA visits be undertaken?

The Field Offices will monitor the implementation of the SQA system, with the UNRWA Education Department continues to provide any support required to ensure the effectiveness of the whole process as articulated in the SQA Guidelines. All schools will be visited according to a schedule prepared by each Field. The follow up visits for each school will then depend on the outcome of the initial SQA visit. Specifically, schools rated “Fair” or “Poor” will receive more frequent follow-up visits, than those receiving the “Good” and “Excellent”.



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How is the SQA system implemented?

The following steps are key to the implementation of the SQA system:

- **Planning for the prioritisation of the schools** to be evaluated at Field level, taking into consideration the overall achievement, student completion rate, repetition, dropout, achievement, gender and school location.
- **Composition of the SQA Teams:** the size and composition of the SQA Team may vary according to the specifics of a school. There will be a minimum of three and a maximum of five team members (the members will be mainly SQA Unit Coordinators, one of whom will be the Lead SQA Coordinator, and others such as Education Specialist of specific subjects).
- **Training and preparation of the SQA Teams:** all staff involved in the SQA visits (visiting teams, D/CFEP, AEOs, and ESs) must have had training/awareness on the SQA system.
- **Pre-visit data collection and analysis:** the SQA Team will collect data prior to the visit to prepare an overview of the school's current status and determine any specific objectives of the visit.
- **Planning of the visit:** the SQA Team will develop a comprehensive schedule for the school visit that will include a detailed timetable, highlighting the responsibilities and tasks of each team member.
- **Notification to the school:** the Lead SQA Coordinator will arrange for a first meeting with the School Principal four weeks prior to the actual SQA visit.
- **The visit itself:** there will be a schedule shared with all schools and staff members involved in the visit. All members of the SQA Team will have clear responsibilities, which will include classroom observations, meetings with the teachers and parents and review of students' work, school planning documents and reports.
- **Follow-up visits** will be conducted as required, based on the visit outcome and the school rating.

Are there challenges in the implementation of the SQA system in schools?

- The main challenge will occur if the SQA system, and its value, is not understood by all stakeholders as, in that case, the overall objective of improving school performance could be jeopardized. Therefore, it is important to promote a strong understanding of the SQA system for schools, teachers and parents.
- In 2020, an unprecedented health crisis (COVID-19) has been a major challenge that hindered the implementation of the whole SQA system especially during times of full lockdown. However, the Education Department (HQA) has prepared checklists to help School Principals and teachers ensure that all COVID-19-related school practices are fully in place in the three learning scenarios: normalcy, fully remote and hybrid. These checklists outline practices that must be respected in

order for schools to operate in the COVID-19 context, i.e. logistical preparedness, learning arrangements, physical distancing measures, hand and respiratory hygiene measures, cleanliness and disinfection, food services and canteens, drinking water systems, health protective measures, psychosocial support (PSS), health education and remote learning activities.



What is the "follow-up" after the SQA visit?

Follow-up after a visit might take either of the two following paths:

- Where the school is rated as "Poor" or "Fair", it will need to develop an Action Plan for improvement within two weeks of receiving the SQA Final Report. The Action Plan should be based on the recommendations in the Final Report and all staff are expected to be actively involved in the development of this plan. The Field support cadre will engage in supporting the implementation of this plan and to work to address the most crucial points for improvement within six months of receipt of the Report.
- Schools that are rated as 'Good' or 'Excellent' are not required to develop an Action Plan but should make any improvements recommended in the Report. They should also continue to strengthen the quality of the education delivered in their schools. Fields should also consider how other schools can learn and benefit from these 'Good' or 'Excellent' schools.

Accordingly, the School Quality Assurance Framework, and its system of implementation and follow-up, will play a key role in the quality, equity and inclusiveness of UNRWA education programme. The system has been integrated in EMIS in order to increase efficiency, registering data such as visit plans and schedules, stages of the visits and schools' ratings.

For more information

Please contact your Chief Field Education Programme, or the UNRWA HQ Education Department, via:

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united nations relief and works agency
for palestine refugees in the near east

www.unrwa.org

UNRWA is a United Nations agency established by the General Assembly in 1949 with a mandate to provide humanitarian assistance and protection to registered Palestine refugees in the Agency's area of operations, namely the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, Gaza, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria, pending a just and lasting solution to their plight. Thousands of Palestine refugees who lost both their homes and livelihood because of the 1948 conflict have remained displaced and in need of significant support for over seventy years. UNRWA helps them achieve their full potential in human development through quality services it provides in education, health care, relief and social services, protection, camp infrastructure and improvement, microfinance and emergency assistance. UNRWA is funded almost entirely by voluntary contributions.

