What is the SQA Framework?
The School Quality Assurance Framework (SQAF) is a tool which the performance of all UNRWA schools can be evaluated against. Effective use of the tool will establish a strategic, systemic approach for regular evaluations of the schools 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), and also the 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 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 expertise. 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 will be using the SQAF?
At the Field level, the School Quality Assurance Unit is responsible for implementing the SQAF system and ensuring follow up. The outcomes of the SQA visit to individual schools will be key to the planning 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 will also be of value to other HQ Departments, such as Protection, and Safety and Security. Findings will need to be discussed at the 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 continuing to provide any support required to ensure the effectiveness of the whole process. 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”.
school quality assurance (SQA) system

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 SQA Unit Coordinators and others, one of whom will be the Lead SQA Coordinator).

- **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 before 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; these will include classroom observations, meetings with the teachers and parents, 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.

What is the “follow up” after the SQA visit?
Follow up after the visit might take either of the two following paths:

- Where the school is rated as “Poor” or “Fair”, the school 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 the 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.

Are there challenges in the implementation of the SQA system in schools?
The main challenge will be if the SQA system, and its value, is not understood by all stakeholders as then the overall objective of improving school performance could be jeopardized. Therefore, it will be important to promote a strong understanding of the SQA system for schools, teachers and parents.

For more information
Please contact your Chief Field Education Programme, or UNRWA HQ Education Department on: info.education@unrwa.org.