PHNOM PENH INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY (PPIU)

# REPORT ON THE SHARE INSTITUTIONAL ASSESSMENT

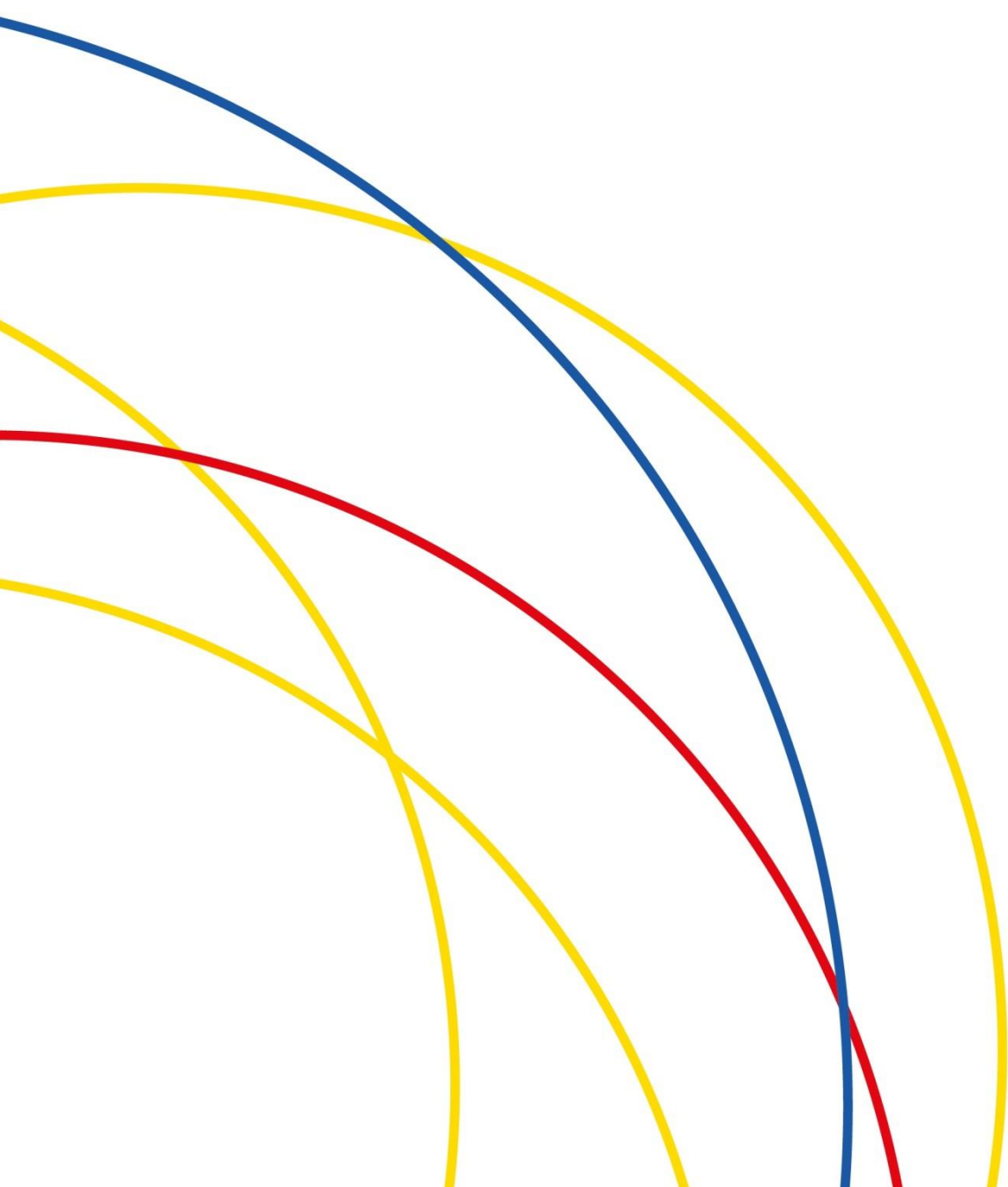**June 2018**

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# 1. Executive Summary

The following report summarises the findings of the assessment panel which conducted a site visit at the Phnom Penh International University (PPIU) from 5 - 6 February 2018. It evaluates the alignment of PPIU's internal quality assurance (IQA) standards with the ASEAN Quality Assurance Framework (AQAF). The report highlights PPIU's achievements in setting-up its IQA system and makes recommendations for its further improvement.

The external review of the Phnom Penh International University (PPIU) in Phnom Penh, Cambodia was performed on the basis of a self-assessment report. In this document, PPIU described its quality assurance system's tasks, its organisational setup, and its involvement in higher education development processes.

During the site visit relevant clarifications were successfully made regarding the actual structure of the university's management system and its approaches to quality. The panel's work was performed in a collegial spirit both within the assessor group and in regard to the communication with the university members.

In sum it can be stated that PPIU's quality assurance system is aligned with the requirements of the ASEAN Quality Assurance Framework's (AQAF) criteria. Recommendations for future elaborations focus mainly on transparency and documentation issues. Closing the quality circuit and reconsidering the institution's organisational setup by strengthening the administrative powers of lower administrative levels such as the faculties and their representation in central university boards is highly suggested.

## 2.  Introduction

This report analyses the state of alignment of Phnom Penh International University (PPIU), with the *ASEAN Quality Assurance Framework (AQAF)*. It is based on an external assessment conducted from 5 - 6 February 2018.

The assessment forms part of the activities under the *"European Union Support to Higher Education in the ASEAN Region (SHARE)"* project. In the frame of SHARE, a consortium of British Council (lead), Campus France, the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), Nuffic, the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and the European University Association (EUA) are working with ASEAN counterparts, from 2015 to 2019, to strengthen regional cooperation, enhance the quality, competitiveness and internationalisation of ASEAN higher education institutions and students, contributing to an ASEAN Community beyond 2015. SHARE focuses on three result areas, among them Qualifications Frameworks (QFs) and Quality Assurance (QA). Here the project aims at supporting the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework (AQRF) and the ASEAN Quality Assurance Framework (AQAF) and the work of the AQRF Committee and AQAN with a focus on higher education.

By means of the *Pilot Institutional Assessments*, SHARE offers selected Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in the ASEAN region the opportunity to undergo a review exercise, led by a panel composed of ASEAN as well as European Quality Assurance experts. This approach marks an innovative first in the history of ASEAN, aimed at sustainable development of the HE landscape. The specific goals of these SHARE *Pilot Institutional Assessments* are:

- Developing the capacity of participating HEIs in taking charge of their IQA systems and providing them an opportunity for benchmarking against regional standards and in view of international good practice;
- Putting the IQA quadrant of the ASEAN Quality Assurance Framework (AQAF) to test and providing feedback for its further development; and
- Collecting good practices and providing material for a toolbox for the entire IQA community.

# 3.    Review Process

The external assessment of Phnom Penh International University was conducted in line with the process described in the SHARE GUIDELINES – Institutional Assessments. The panel for the institutional assessment of PPIU was appointed by the German Academic Exchange Service DAAD and the European University Association EUA on behalf of the SHARE consortium and composed of the following members:

1. Adam Pamudji Rahardjo, Gadjah Mada University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia (chair)
2. Philipp Pohlenz, Magdeburg University, Germany (coordinator)
3. Ronald Allan Mabunga, Philippine Normal University, Manila, Philippines
4. Freddy Coignoul, University of Liege, Belgium

The panel was supported by the DAAD's SHARE team located at the DAAD Regional Office Jakarta and the DAAD Headquarters Bonn.

The review was carried out by the panel in a very collegial atmosphere. The responsibilities were equally distributed among all panel members. During the interviews that were held at PPIU all panel members had equal chances to address their individual questions. As a result, the interviews created also for the interviewees a very open and trustful situation. The talks were held at an eye-to-eye level. The interviews were well prepared since the panel team took its time to meet in advance and developed a script for the individual interviews. The respective questions were designed to clarify uncertainties that had remained after having studied the self-assessment report and to triangulate clarification from preceding interviews.

# 4.    Self-Assessment Report

PPIU had submitted its Self-Assessment Report (SAR) in due time to the SHARE project, thus the assessors were equipped with the respective documents well in advance of the visit. The SAR provided the team with a range of relevant information, all fields of the respective AQAF quadrant were properly addressed. However, in its preparation meeting the panel discussed that the report lacked documentation of relevant details in many aspects. In particular, the SAR team had missed the chance to support its self-assessment with relevant sources of evidence. Most of these were then provided or at least their existence was verified during the site visit. The team was pleased to find out that the quality assurance system of PPIU was a lot more elaborate than as was described in the SAR.

For future exercises of the nature of an external review it is highly recommendable to display both the internally analysed strengths and weaknesses in the SAR in a more

"outspoken" way. This would make it a lot easier for any panel of assessors to get an impression of what the university's achievements are.

# 5. Site Visit

The panel highly appreciated the openness of all interviewees. These ranged from the top-level management to external stakeholders (e.g. employers). The meetings were scheduled according to the globally recognised procedures in the field of external quality assurance:

- The team held an initial meeting with the top-level management (Rector, Vice-Rectors, Senior Personnel and Board Members)
- The initial meeting was followed by interviews with:
  - The team of PPIU members that had composed the SAR
  - Faculty members
  - Support staff
  - Students
  - Alumni
  - Employers
  - Deans
- In between the meetings sufficient time had been arranged for internal meetings of the panel.
- A visit of PPIU's facilities was conducted.
- A closing meeting which was open to the university's public and aimed at presenting the panel's preliminary findings and recommendations was scheduled at the end of the site visit.

# 6. Findings: Alignment of Phnom Penh International University with the ASEAN Quality Assurance Framework (AQAF)

## AQAF QUADRANT 3: INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE (INSTITUTIONS)

The Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) system is important for continuous quality improvement and effective performance of institutions. It has become a quasi-mandatory requirement in many EQAAs' quality assurance standards. It reflects the close linkage between external quality assurance and internal quality assurance of institutions. Quadrant 3 requires institutions to develop their own policies and internal quality assurance systems and processes for accountability, transparency and achievement/improvements.

The stage of development of IQA systems in ASEAN Member States varies from one country to another. In order to help institutions to develop their IQA systems, AQAF formulated 10 guiding Principles, which are mentioned in the SHARE Guidelines and which also provide the structure for the panel's findings regarding the IQA system at AUF. Instead of prescribing a specific model of IQA, AQAF would like to simply emphasise the importance of the internal quality management system and offer the principles as a benchmark for its development. The following report of the panel's assessment findings is thus intended to help the institution further develop its IQA system and to highlight some of the best practices that may be of interest to others.

## 6.1 The institution has a primary responsibility for quality

PPIU has a strategic development plan for the time period 2016-2020. Under this plan quality assurance is prioritised as one of 15 strategic goals. The university is aiming at further strengthening its quality assurance system. Initial measures in order to achieve this goal have already been undertaken, such as the provision of training on QA for various internal stakeholders. In terms of institutionalising quality assurance, PPIU has set up an internal quality assurance unit (IQA unit) within its organisational structure. This unit is located under the direct supervision of the Rector and Vice-Rectors, granting it the necessary authority within the organisation. At the same time, it could be problematic that the recognition of the IQA unit from other administrative bodies (in terms of its responsibilities and tasks) is not fully clear.

The panel is convinced that quality assurance is indeed a strategic goal of the university. However, in terms of practically implementing the respective procedures, the university will need to improve its documentation system. Processes for quality assurance (e.g. student feedback to teachers) will have to be documented in more detail, e.g.: Who is responsible? How are the respective results used for further

improvements? What are the conclusions that are drawn from the collected information, etc. It could be considered to go for an ISO 9001:2015 Quality Management System certification, since in this process the requirements towards an internal quality assurance system are quite clear.

## 6.2 Quality assurance promotes the balance between institutional autonomy and public accountability

PPIU provides information on its compliance with general academic rules and the relevant regulations of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) along with its internal mechanisms in relation to external requirements. The balance between institutional autonomy and public accountability is interpreted by PPIU in terms of the inter-relationship of its admission policies and academic rules and regulations. Strong emphasis is placed on "obedience" (e.g. of students with academic rules, of teachers with syllabi and strategic goals, etc.). This however, is in the best case partial alignment to the respective QA criterion. PPIU may consider engaging more stakeholders (external) in various QA-related activities including, but not limited to, strategic planning and curriculum planning.

## 6.3 Quality assurance is a participatory and cooperative process across all levels incorporating involvement of academic staff, students, and other stakeholders

PPIU has a range of instruments at hand to secure a broad discourse on quality issues within its academic community. It has developed a strategic plan which gives quality and quality development a high priority; the university has set up an administrative body in charge of quality assurance procedures (IQA unit); it provides training on quality assurance procedures for relevant internal stakeholders. Moreover, the panel team observed participatory and cooperative practices across management levels, involving faculty and staff as well as the students.

However, the quality assurance system lacks institutionalisation and documentation. It is not fully clear to all students whom to address in cases of conflicts (appeal system). Moreover, in terms of elaborating the quality assurance system with a view to its sustainability, PPIU should secure a proper documentation system, in order to save its organisational knowledge. A good means to achieve better in this respect could be the above-mentioned ISO 9001:2015 QMS certification.

Minor problems have been addressed during the interviews such as the reluctance of teachers to engage in the envisaged subject based learning meetings (which are one of the instruments to secure a steady flow of communication of all stakeholders in the university). It has been announced that this effect will be studied by the IQA unit in

order to achieve better in the future. This is remarkable, demonstrating that the IQA unit is assigned with relevant tasks in the field of institutional research. At the same time it is an example for the necessity to "close quality circuits": What the panel does not know is what will be done by what deadline and what expected result or consequences will be drawn by the IQA unit or other decision makers. Here a more thorough documentation of activities and the outcomes of these activities would be helpful, also with a view to the transparency of the quality assurance activities which are at the core of this criterion.

## 6.4 A quality culture underpins all institutional activities including teaching, learning research, services and management

PPIU has a range of quality assurance measures in place to develop a specific culture for its teaching and learning processes. These measures are among others: lecturer's evaluation; an institutional system on curriculum design and development (through a university committee; an institutional student assessment system; a system of faculty incentive for faculty development), to name but a few.

Thus, the panel is convinced that a quality culture does exist at PPIU, but in a relatively informal way (i.e. the management approach reflects a "family culture" as opposed to a clearly structured academic institution). This is in line with the panel's assessment regarding the above criteria. In addition, one could conclude that even the best laid out quality assurance system requires a clear vision of what quality in teaching and learning is. PPIU is lacking a bit of a "narrative" for its higher education provision: What do we want to be excellent at? What does make us unique in comparison to our competitors?

Such strategic questions were addressed throughout the interviews, however, in the form of a mission statement, they could be made more transparent and public. This would, in turn, support the university in its attempt to create a "PPIU-spirit" which is meaningful to all of its stakeholders.

In sum, the panel is convinced that PPIU's practices are aligned with the respective AQAF criterion. However, such practices need to be structured into a more organised and institutionalised manner. The panel also has the impression that the respective information provided is very much restricted to higher education. Other fields of activities such as research and community services do not receive as much attention. This is due to the current setup of the university as a higher education institution (which is not seeing itself as a research university). However, as a university, PPIU should be active in fields that go beyond its immediate mandate.

## 6.5 A structured and functional internal quality assurance system with clearly defined responsibilities is established

PPIU has set up an internal quality assurance unit (IQA unit) which is located under the direct supervision of the Rector and Vice Rectors. Its organisational structure secures a strong support from the top-level management. It represents the university's faculties and their specific needs in an appropriate manner. Moreover, administrative bodies are represented in the unit.

The national external quality assurance body (ACC) has made some suggestions to PPIU in order to support the further elaboration of its quality assurance procedures and administrative structure. It has not become fully clear to what extent these suggestions have been followed by PPIU.

In the report, a SWOT analysis has been implemented in order to outline the current state of the IQA unit's development and necessary further steps. The SWOT analysis seems to be incomplete in the sense that it does not become clear how the quality circuit is supposed to be closed (formal responsibilities of the unit, etc.).

Notwithstanding such development needs, the panel is convinced that PPIU's practices are in line with the requirements of the respective AQAF criterion. PPIU may consider the further formalisation and institutionalisation of the quality management system and to include publicly transparent terms of reference of the various units involved in quality assurance.

## 6.6 The quality system is promulgated and supported by the top management to ensure effective implementation and sustainability

The IQA system at PPIU enjoys strong support from the top management and has demonstrated its ability to ensure the effective implementation and sustainability of the quality management system at large.

PPIU complies with this QA criterion based on the submitted SAR. However, the interviews revealed that there is a need to formalize its quality management system and to make its achievements more transparent to internal and external stakeholders of the university.

## 6.7 Sufficient resources for establishing and maintaining an effective quality system within the institution should be provided.

PPIU has shown evidence to indicate that the management is supportive of quality assurance-relevant programmes and projects (as in the case of an entire floor being constructed as the new university library).

In general, the questions on human and financial resources have not been looked into by the team of assessors.

For a more holistic assessment of an academic institution in terms of quality assurance, it is highly recommended that financial resources be included in the assessment tools if only to determine the university's capacity to provide (and sustain) enough resources, both capital and human, for all its programmes, activities, projects and services.

## 6.8 The institution should have formal mechanisms for approval, periodical reviews and monitoring of programmes and awards

The SAR as well as the interviews with the top management and other internal stakeholders of the university revealed that PPIU has mechanisms for approval, reviews and monitoring of programmes and other services. Such mechanisms however, are not formalized or institutionalized. The structure of academic self-management at PPIU is different from many other universities in the sense that there is no Academic Senate in charge of deciding on all relevant issues in the field of curriculum development. Such decisions are taken by an administrative board, with details resting mainly in the hands of the faculties. With the existing administrative structure, the respective decision-making processes can be equally secured. However, a clearer structure of academic self-management (e.g. represented by an Academic Senate) would be helpful to raise transparency and make academic issues an affair of the academia.

It is recommended that PPIU may consider to further formalize and institutionalize its mechanisms for approval, review, monitoring and evaluation of its programmes and services vis-à-vis quality assurance.

## 6.9 Quality is regularly monitored and reviewed for purposes of continuous improvement at all level.

With regard to the other criteria, the panel can only reiterate its impression that the practice of PPIU is conducive to achieve its quality goals. However, with a view to this particular criterion, one would have to state that the quality assurance activities are very much limited to the teaching and learning processes only.

Thus it may be recommendable that PPIU considers the formalization and institutionalization of its QA system along with expanding the terms of reference of its IQA unit to include functions relevant to monitoring, review and evaluation of the university's programmes and services within higher education and beyond.

## 6.10 Relevant and current information about the institution, its programmes, achievements, and quality processes is accessible to public.

PPIU maintains a website that provides updated information about the university and its provisions. However, the English version content is still very limited. PPIU thus seems to be compliant with this QA criterion although "printed" materials available to the public may need to be presented in addition to the information found on its website.

The university may consider other modalities in the dissemination of information relevant to their programmes and services other than what is already presented on their website. Respective activities should aim at maximising the use relevant and current information.

## Additional Observations (optional section)

PPIU benefits from the unique situation that it hosts a range of enterprises in its facilities. These are a valuable source for the connection of higher education curricula and real life learning experiences for students. The university is already making extensive use of these partnerships. The panel encourages the university to further elaborate such forms of cooperation and to involve enterprises into the academic life of the university (e.g. with regard to curriculum development). This cooperation would create mutual benefit and contribute to their sustainability.

# 7. Conclusion

## Summary of Commendations

PPIU has initiated a process of placing high emphasis on quality and quality assurance procedures. The administrative and academic institutions which are in charge of the respective task are cooperating well and are creating benefit for students and other stakeholders.

As a privately operated university PPIU cannot rely on public funding and is thus dependent on other sources, including tuition fees. However, PPIU has developed an academic spirit that goes beyond being a service provider that simply delivers good learning conditions and degrees to the students. Members of PPIU actively strive to create an academic spirit in which members of the university – from the Rector to students – feel as a community. It might be that this "family spirit" is the reason for potential weaknesses in the area of institutionalising quality assurance procedures. Nonetheless, it is worthy to cultivate a communicative spirit and to balance it with requirements of a formal quality assurance system.

## Summary of Recommendations

The recommendations of the panel to PPIU can be condensed to two major aspects which are valid with regard to all of the AQAF criteria:

- With a view to the formal requirements of a quality management system, PPIU needs to take action in order to further systematise, document, and institutionalise its activities in the field of quality assurance. The panel is convinced that the major expectations that the public has towards an internal quality assurance system are being met: The university's quality assurance system is built on an existing quality culture; it is reflected in the university's administrative structure; it receives substantial support from the top-level management. However, there is a lack of transparency as regards the quality assurance system's outcomes and results. Future activities should aim at further formalising and publicly documenting the different administrative bodies' responsibilities and their activities. One of the major aims of quality assurance procedures is to "close the quality circuit". This would mean to take action whenever indicated by the different sources of evidence, and to make clear to the involved stakeholders, what action has been taken for what reason and with what intended result.
- With a view to the strategic relevance of quality assurance for higher education development, it is recommended to not only formalise quality assurance procedures and responsibilities, but also to reflect on the university's ultimate

goals for higher education. Here again, one can draw on the picture of the quality circuit. The recommendation to close the quality circuit does not only refer to the stage where the checking part results in whatever type of action. The phases of planning and doing also need to be bridged by a clear strategy. There is no doubt that PPIU does have a strategy for the development and the current goals and tasks of its higher education provision. However, this strategy could be made more of an issue for all members of the university. It might be that the organisational setup which is very much built around the top level management is rather a burden in this regard. Thus PPIU may consider strengthening the administrative powers of lower administrative levels such as the faculties and their representation in central university boards.

Finally, it is recommended – with a view to future external reviews of this type – that PPIU is more outspoken with regard to its strengths. The panel was positively surprised about the elaboration of the university's quality assurance system after having performed the site visit and the respective interviews. A self-confident assessment of strengths and weaknesses is part of an active quality assurance culture. PPIU is thus encouraged to be more "aggressive" in terms of displaying its assets to future assessor teams.

# 8. ANNEXES

## 8.1 ANNEX 1: PROGRAMME OF THE SITE VISIT

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**PHNOM PENH INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY**

## SHARE Panel of Assessors
## PPIU Site Visit Program
## 5-6 February 2018

| Panel Arrival: 4 February 2018 | | |
|---|---|---|
| Time | Program | Venue |
| 08:50 | - Arrival of Prof. Freddy Coignoul | |
| 17:30 | - Arrival of Prof. Phillipp Pohlenz, Dr. Adam Pamudji, and Prof. Ronald Allan | |
| **Day 1: 5 February 2018** | | |
| 9:00-10:00 | Meeting with Rector, Vice-Rectors, Senior Personnel and **Board Members** | Rector Office |
| 10:00-10:15 | Break | |
| 10:15-11:15 | Meeting with the self-assessment team | Meeting Room |
| 11:15-11:25 | Break | |
| 11:25-12:30 | Campus visit | Campus |
| 12:30-14:00 | Lunch: SHARE Team + PPIU Team | |
| 14:00-15:00 | Meeting with faculty members | Meeting Room |
| 15:00-15:10 | Coffee Break | |
| 15:10-16:00 | Meeting with support staff | Meeting Room |
| 16:00-16:10 | Break | |
| 16:10-17:00 | Meeting with alumni | Room 501 |
| 18:00 - | Dinner (Hosted by PPIU) | |
| **Day 2: 6 February 2018** | | |
| 9:00-10:00 | Meeting with students (Year 1+2+4) –*Year 3 on exam preparation* | Room 501 |
| 10:00-10:15 | Break | |
| 10:15-11:05 | Meeting with employers | Meeting Room |
| 11:05-11:15 | Break | |
| 11:15-12:30 | Meeting with deans | Meeting Room |
| 12:30-14:00 | Working Lunch | |
| 14:00-16:00 | Meeting for clarification with self-assessment team or selected group or any team as panel sees fit. | Meeting Room |
| 16:00-17:00 | Presentation of key findings of the panel and discussion | Meeting Room |
| | Offering of Souvenir, and Photo Session | |
| **Panel Departure: 7 February 2018** | | |
| 11:00 | Panel Departure from PP International Airport | |

**Contacts:**

**Mr. CHHIN Kona,  Head of PPIU-IQA Unit;    Tel: +885 78 682 682**
Mr. Srorn Oudom        Tel: 010-838 328
Ms. HATH Kim Huy    Tel: 031-777 2377
Ms. HY Daleap          Tel: 017-440 778

**Phnom Penh, 01 February 2018**
Prepared by HEAD of PPIU-IQA Unit
CHHIN Kona