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ALLIANCE FOR EDUCATION OF WOMEN IN AFGHANISTAN

Learning Quality Standards

For independent, private, non-profit and other non-governmental schools and organizations (learning providers) providing educational programming to Afghan women and girls.

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INTRODUCTION

What Are the Learning Standards?

These standards outline the principles established by the Alliance for the Education of Women in Afghanistan as a model to measure and uphold the expected practices of educational provision and to be accountable towards the students being served. The overarching commitment of the Educational Provider Standards is that women and girls in Afghanistan have access to quality learning programs that will enable them to thrive and contribute effectively to society.

They can be used by educational providers as a basis for verifying their own performance and guiding improvements. They provide agreed principles for the provision of quality educational services and can be used alongside the associated quality assurance mechanisms by educational providers to demonstrate and improve the quality of their services.

Designed for use by organizations, institutions, departments, and initiatives providing educational services in Afghanistan, these standards ensure that all providers contribute to a future where Afghan women and girls have access to quality learning programs. Educational providers that meet these standards are contributing to a world in which Afghan women and girls can access and receive quality education, empowering them to thrive and contribute to a more equitable and prosperous society.

Background

Soon after its establishment, the Alliance recognized the critical need for common standards to be adopted by the growing community of independent education providers working to meet the educational needs of Afghan women and girls. The initial framework for these standards was deliberated and developed by the member organizations of the Alliance at the second annual members' meeting in Doha, 13-14 June 2024. Following this, a pilot was conducted in Fall 2024 with six early-adopting organizations to test the relevance and practicality of the standards in Afghanistan's specific context.

The pilot provided relevant insights into how the standards could be adapted to better reflect the needs of learners and providers specific to the context of Afghanistan, emphasizing the importance of community-driven education, partnerships, and shared resources. The feedback from this process informed the final iteration of the standards.

In drafting the Standards, we consulted well-established resources including the HPass Learning Providers Standards, the Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) Minimum Standards for Education in Emergencies, and drew on the expertise of educational leaders and institutions familiar with Afghan education. Standards were selected and adapted to meet the specific needs and experiences of the member organizations of the Alliance. Standards were selected and adapted to meet the specific needs and experience of the member organizations of the Alliance.

Scope

The standards have been developed through the lens of providing education in emergency settings, addressing the unique learning needs of women and girls in Afghanistan. These standards are intended to support educational providers operating in a context of severe restrictions, resource depletion, and economic hardship. They offer member organizations an opportunity to compare their services with similar providers globally, ensuring that the highest quality benchmarks are met. Alliance member organizations include educational programs for all levels of education including primary, secondary, tertiary as well as vocational, technical and information education; these standards are applicable to every level and type of education.

Where national regulations exist, these standards are not a substitute but rather a supplement, enhancing the educational framework already in place. The standards and accompanying handbook will be periodically revised to incorporate feedback and insights from their application in the field.

Who Are These Standards For?

These standards are designed for use by organizations, institutions, and initiatives providing educational services to women and girls in Afghanistan. This includes NGOs, community groups, volunteers, government agencies, and international donors involved in educational action. The educational services may be external or integrated within an organization's internal learning framework. These standards are applicable to educational providers regardless of their size and scope, ensuring that all can contribute effectively to the Alliance's mission.

Structure of The Learning Provider Standards

The educational provider standards comprise a set of five standards, each with associated focal sub-standards. Following the aforementioned pilot, the structure was revised to better reflect the foundational importance of support processes and resources, which are crucial to ensuring sustainable, high-quality education in Afghanistan.

The revised structure prioritizes community support, partnerships, and shared resources as the bedrock of sustainable and impactful educational programming. This ensures that the groundwork for successful delivery and evaluation of education is firmly established before the educational cycle is implemented. This approach acknowledges that quality education is not solely dependent on curriculum design and delivery but is equally reliant on the ecosystem of resources, governance, and community engagement.

Key reasons for the revised structure include:

- Duty of Care: Establishing policies and safeguarding measures ensures that students, staff, and volunteers are protected and supported, creating a safe and conducive learning environment.
  1. Policy and Good Governance
  2. Child Protection and Safety
  3. Security
  4. Psychological Well Being

- Learning Resources Efficacy: Providing competent staff, professional development, digital environments, and appropriate resources lays the groundwork for effective learning experiences.
  1. Competencies
  2. Professional Development, Training, and Support
  3. Digital Learning Environments
  4. Resources

- Design & Planning: With robust foundational support, providers can design and plan programs that are responsive to learners' needs and aligned with recognized educational benchmarks.
  1. Analysis
  2. Design
  3. Coordination

- Delivery: Effective program implementation builds on the strength of support systems and planning, ensuring inclusive and high-quality learning experiences.
  1. Evidence-Based Pedagogy
  2. Communication
  3. Transparency
  4. Facilities

- Evaluation and Accountability: Monitoring and assessment ensure continuous improvement and alignment with standards, reinforcing the credibility and effectiveness of education programs.
  1. Monitoring and Evaluation
  2. Assessment of Students.
  3. Standards Alignment
  4. Recognition and Credentialing

Each standard outlines what educational providers need to do to meet the overarching commitment. Associated key actions provide specific steps that must be taken to achieve these standards.

PRINCIPLES UNDERPINNINGTHE STANDARDS

Three principles guide the provision of educational services:

- Accessibility: aim to reach those who have limited or no access to learning opportunities. Aim to address barriers to participation that may include location and financial restrictions, language proficiency, literacy/numeracy levels, physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments.

- Impartiality: conduct processes in a fair, just and equitable manner.

- Inclusivity: promote respectful inclusion regardless of age, gender, marital status, race, nationality, disability, religion or religious or other beliefs, sexual orientation, social or educational background.

HOW TO USE THE STANDARDS

The standards are designed to be flexible, enabling appropriate application by different types of educational providers and contextualization in various regions, countries, localities, and communities.

Educational providers must implement the key actions to meet the standards. These key actions explain what needs to be in place to ensure the quality of educational services. Further information and guidance on implementing the key actions will be available in the accompanying handbook. A quality assurance mechanisms manual will also be provided, detailing how to measure and evidence the key actions.

OVERVIEW OFTHE LEARNING PROVIDER STANDARDS

Overarching Commitment

Afghan women and girls have access to quality educational programs that will empower them to thrive, and contribute to and benefit from a more equitable and prosperous society.

FRAMEWORK FOR QUALITY EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS

Standard 1. Duty of Care

1.1 Policy and Good Governance

Objective:

Learning providers are governed by relevant, adequate policies and governance structures that promote sustainability and enhance trust with stakeholders.

Description:

Learning providers have necessary written policies in place that provide clear information on standards to be met, rules and regulations, and guiding principles, among others. Oversight mechanisms are in place, policies are upheld and standards met, contributing to organizations' continuity and consistency.

1.2 Child Protection and Safety

Objective:

Children who participate in the provider's learning programs are not exposed to any harm, abuse, rights violations, or danger.

Description:

The learning provider has safeguards in place to protect children (anyone under the age of 18) from any and all forms of exploitation including by the organization's personnel, such as screening all individuals who work with children, providing child protection and safety training to personnel, enforcing a children protection policy, and eliminating situations where children are vulnerable or at risk.

1.3 Security

Objective:

Students, instructors, staff and other participants are not put at risk due to their participation in learning.

Description:

Implement reliable and secure security and cyber-security measures and education with program participants that enable everyone to apply safe practices when accessing learning programs.

1.4 Psychological Wellbeing

Objective:

Ensure the psychological wellbeing of students, instructors, staff, and other participants is safeguarded throughout their participation in learning programs.

Description:

Implement comprehensive mental health support systems and promote a culture of psychological safety among program participants. Provide resources, education, and support to foster resilience, manage stress, and encourage a positive and healthy learning environment.

Standard 2. Learning Resources Efficacy

2.1. Competencies

Objective:

Educational program roles are filled by individuals with the right competencies to achieve high quality learning outcomes.

Description:

Key roles, such as instructional staff and leadership, are recruited on the basis of merit and hold sufficient qualifications and experience. Even when instructors are volunteers, they are assessed for holding the competencies to teach the assigned subject.

2.2 Professional Development, Training and Support

Objective:

Instructors continuously develop professionally and are supported by the learning provider to deliver exceptional learning experiences.

Description:

Learning providers ensure instructors have access to occasional professional development opportunities aligned to their role, such as training, access to knowledge resources, and peer networking structures.

2.3 Digital Learning Environments

Objective:

Educational programs offered virtually provide digital learning environments that are dynamic, engaging and appropriate for their learners.

Description:

Learning providers have and continue to build their capacity in virtual teaching and learning, demonstrating an understanding of best practice in e-learning methodologies, instructional practices, learning platforms and technological tools.

2.4 Resources

Objective:

Resources are sufficient and appropriate.

Description:

Ensure that adequate and suitable resources, including materials, staff, instructors, and funding, are available to support the educational programs effectively.

Standard 3. Design & Planning

3.1 Analysis

Objective:

Relevant learning needs are identified and prioritized.

Description:

Conduct thorough assessments to determine the specific educational needs of the Afghan women and girls being served, ensuring that the programs are based on evidence of need and are tailored to address these needs effectively.

3.2 Design

Objective:

Learning programs are designed and prepared according to identified needs and curricula meet recognized educational benchmarks as appropriate to the field of study.

Description:

Develop age and/or level appropriate educational programs based on the identified needs, incorporating best practices and innovative approaches to maximize learning outcomes. Universal design for learning (UDL) is reflected in learning program design.

3.3 Coordination

Objective:

The learning provider contributes to, and benefits from participating in key consultation and coordination mechanisms in the sector that exist to support quality learning.

Description:

The learning provider maintains an active membership in relevant recognized coordination bodies, aligns its programs with the membership's shared goals for the sector, and engages within the sector to learn from the successes and failures of others.

Standard 4. Delivery

4.1 Evidence-based Pedagogy

Objective:

Learning programs are implemented effectively, using a variety of teaching methods to remove any barriers to learning and give all students equal opportunities to succeed.

Description:

Execute the educational programs with fidelity to the course design, ensuring that all logistical and instructional aspects are managed to provide a high-quality, student-centered learning experience. Suitable methods and strategies are applied to achieve the program objectives.

4.2 Communication

Objective:

Two-way communication channels are open and accessible.

Description:

Maintain clear and open communication channels between all stakeholders, including learners, educators, and administrative staff, to foster collaboration and address any issues promptly.

4.3 Transparency

Objective:

Students, instructors and any staff and volunteers are well informed and aware of the learning provider's scope, capacity, structure, limitations, and capacity to award credentials, or not.

Description:

The learning provider has taken steps to be transparent with its stakeholders about what it can offer and what it cannot, so that expectations are well managed, and stakeholders can make informed decisions about their participation.

4.4 Administration

Objective:

Administration systems are secure and accurate.

Description:

Implement reliable and secure administrative systems to manage data, records, and other essential information, ensuring accuracy, confidentiality, and the protection of student, instructor, staff and volunteer data, for their security.

4.5 Facilities

Objective:

Learning providers delivering programs in-person provide safe, hygienic, inclusive, and engaging learning environments.

Description:

When provided in person, learning environments are provided in welcoming spaces that are well maintained and clean, and adequately equipped for learner needs, and have necessary safety precautions in place to promote the wellbeing and safety of teachers, students and staff.

Standard 5. Evaluation and Accountability

5.1 Monitoring and Evaluation

Objective:

The quality of learning services is maintained and improved.

Description:

Regularly monitor and evaluate the educational programs and services to ensure they meet quality standards, using the findings to enhance and refine future offerings.

5.2 Assessment of Students

Objective:

Learning is assessed against the learning objectives.

Description:

Implement formative and verifiable assessment methods to evaluate learners' progress and attainment of the defined learning objectives, providing feedback for continuous improvement.

5.3 Standards Alignment

Objective:

Students complete programs that are aligned to the recognized standards for that domain.

Description:

Many domains have governed standards to ensure common educational outcomes, such as learning standards set by professional associations (i.e. national association of evaluators), professional colleges (i.e. college of medicine), or self-regulating professional groups (i.e. law societies for lawyers). To every extent possible, learning providers reflect these sector-wide, profession-wide, or internationally accepted standards in their learning design, content and objectives.

5.4 Recognition and Credentialing

Objective:

Students can earn credentials from the learning provider that are recognized by other institutions including other learning providers, employers and professional associations; or the Alliance's Peer Recognition Framework.

Description:

Learning providers have obtained accreditation, when possible and where relevant, for their program(s), or partner with a credential granting authority in order to award credentials to students, or meet the criteria and actively abide by the Alliance's Peer Recognition Framework.

GLOSSARY

Competencies

Knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors identified as necessary to effectively deliver educational services to women and girls in Afghanistan.

Competency Frameworks

An established group of competencies needed to fulfill specific educational functions and roles within the Alliance.

Key Actions

Actions to be taken by educational providers to achieve the standards set forth by the Alliance.

Learners

Women and girls participating in educational programs provided by the Alliance, including community members, volunteers, and staff.

Learning Needs

The specific knowledge and skills that individuals or groups need to develop competencies effectively within the context of education in Afghanistan.

Learning Objectives

Statements describing what learners are expected to know or be able to do by the end of an educational program.

Learning Outcomes

The measurable results achieved by learners upon completion of an educational program, demonstrating the attainment of learning objectives.

Learning Programs

Programs developed and/or delivered by educational providers that enable learners to meet specified learning objectives and develop their competencies.

Learning Providers

Organizations, institutions, departments, groups, and initiatives providing educational services to women and girls in Afghanistan.

Learning Services

Services offered to individuals and organizations to build competencies, knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for quality education.

Modality

The model used to deliver educational programs, including online, face-to-face, distance learning, simulation exercises (both in-person and virtual), blended learning, internal staff development programs, coaching, gamified learning, mentoring, and academic courses.

Resources

Money, materials, staff, and other assets that can be drawn on by a person or organization to deliver educational services effectively.

Standards

Documents that provide requirements, specifications, guidelines, or characteristics used consistently to ensure that educational materials, programs, processes, and services are fit for their purpose. In this context, they describe what educational providers should do to meet the overarching commitment of the Alliance.