



This review method  
is ESG-compliant

# International Quality Review

## Mid-Cycle Review

Doha Institute for Graduate Studies

**Review Report**

October 2025

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## About this mid-cycle review

This is a report of a mid-cycle review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Doha Institute for Graduate Studies, Qatar. The mid-cycle review is desk-based and was conducted by a team of two reviewers, as follows:

- Dr Andrew Thomas QAA Officer
- Dr Nadeem Khan, External Reviewer

The full International Quality Review (IQR) in August 2022, resulted in a published report. The 2022 review team concluded that Doha Institute for Graduate studies met all 10 standards set out in Part 1 of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). The 2022 team identified eight features of good practice and made two recommendations.

This mid-cycle review evaluates progress against the key actions since the IQR and considers any significant changes that may impact on the ability of Doha Institute for Graduate Studies to continue to meet the ESG standards.

## Outcome of the mid-cycle review

From the evidence provided, mid-cycle review team concludes that Doha Institute for Graduate Studies is making **satisfactory progress** since the August 2022 International Quality Review and that the period of validity of the IQR be extended to 2027.

## Summary of IQR outcomes

### Overview of the institution

The Doha Institute for Graduate Studies (DI) is a private, not-for-profit institution. It is a private initiative under the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies (ACRPS) in Doha and is primarily funded by the Qatari state. The establishment of DI in 2015/16 was born from the extensive collaboration between Arab intellectuals and scholars residing in the Arab world, Europe, and North America. Internally, DI is primarily accountable to the Board of Trustees. Externally, DI is accountable to and compliant with the national higher education laws and regulations as managed by the Ministry of Higher Education in Qatar. The Ministry of Higher Education does not have any direct input into the governance structure or executive matters at DI.

DI is a postgraduate degree-awarding institution which seeks to become the foremost centre of academic excellence both regionally and internationally. Its commitment to quality and excellence is central to its mission and ethos. All programmes fulfil the requirements of ministerial licensing and relicensing. International accreditation and partnerships are pursued to enhance its provision and position its provision within international standards. DI aims to prepare a new generation of academics and professionals who are independent thinkers, adept in interdisciplinary research methodologies, and capable of addressing the needs of the Arab region.

Programmes offered at master's, doctoral and executive levels are delivered by two schools: the School of Social Sciences and Humanities (SOSH), offering 14 programmes, and the School of Economics, Administration and Public Policy (SEAPP), offering 6 programmes. At the time of mid-cycle review, DI had 515 students with programme enrolments ranging from 1 (PhD Sociology, PhD Media Studies, PhD Politics and International Relations) to 38 (Master's in Public Administration).

DI offers both full-time and part-time study options though it is worth noting that the majority of students are enrolled full-time. Qatari students studying in DI whilst in full-time employment can choose options that suit their individual circumstances. However, there is no distance learning option.

Programmes reflect national and regional needs in terms of intellectual development, practical application, and market needs. Programmes aim to enhance interdisciplinary research which develops evidence that may support interdisciplinary collaboration in advancing knowledge and enhancing the welfare of societies. Two centres support the DI mission as well as students and staff – the Language Centre and Excellence Centre for Training and Consulting. The latter offers specialist training courses for professionals in government, NGOs, military, and police etc.

Arabic serves as the primary language of instruction and research at DI, reflecting a commitment both to originality and a wider regional accessibility for cutting-edge knowledge. International languages complement DI's academic objectives to support a globally engaged community of scholars and students. However, English is a requisite language.

## Good practice identified by the 2022 International Quality Review

The following **good practices** were identified by the 2022 review team:

- The broader socio-cultural impact of programmes offered on the state of Qatar and Arab region (ESG Standard 1.2).
- The strategic and substantial investment in human capital significantly impacts student-staff ratio of 6:1 and ensures provision of student-centred teaching and learning (ESG Standard 1.3).
- The commitment of faculty to publishing in high-quality peer-reviewed journals with students (ESG Standard 1.5)
- Arrangements for students, especially international and students recruited from conflict zones, are comprehensive and effective (ESG Standard 1.6).
- Specialist support for students, available in-person or virtually, is responsive, accessible, and positively impacts experiences of students (ESG Standard 1.6).
- The extensive range of learning resources and high-quality physical environment constitutes good practice (ESG Standard 1.6).
- The agile and impactful approach to student feedback enhances the learning experience of students (ESG Standard 1.9).
- Use of external periodic review, including international accreditations, to continuously enhance programmes and institutional practices (ESG Standard 1.10).

## Recommendations of the 2022 International Quality Review

The 2022 review team made the following **recommendations** to DI.

- Implement a schedule for a review of policies that impact quality assurance and enhancement (ESG Standard 1.1).
- Formulate a consistent and institution-wide approach to qualitative feedback which supports student development (ESG Standard 1.3).

## Changes since the last IQR review visit

The University has updated its organisational structure to enhance leadership efficiency and improve support for students and alumni. These adjustments reflect a natural progression in DI's commitment to operational effectiveness and fostering stronger connections within its academic community. Key changes are the appointment of a new Dean for SEAPP; removal of the office of the Executive Director of Finance and Administration with the President taking over those roles, thereby streamlining decision-making; and establishment of an Alumni Affairs Unit and launch of an Alumni Association to enhance graduate services.

A new Strategic Plan for 2023-2028 was developed and implemented with the following priorities:

- Teaching and Learning: DI aims to enhance teaching effectiveness, support interdisciplinary integration, adopt innovative educational technologies, and expand resources to strengthen its doctoral track and regional standing.
- Research and Innovation: The plan emphasizes increased support for research through enhanced resources, collaboration with institutions such as the ACRPS and promoting impactful research that engages stakeholders and amplifies societal contributions.
- Institutional Development: DI is committed to reviewing policies and procedures, redesigning administrative frameworks for efficiency, and optimizing resource utilization to adapt to evolving institutional needs.
- Operational Efficiency: The plan intends to integrate advanced administrative practices, modern technologies, automation and more effective use of Oracle and other technologies; and strengthen communication across departments to improve performance, manage resources effectively, and address future space and infrastructure needs.
- Sustainability: DI is committed to implementing more environmentally friendly procedures, including optimising energy use.
- Community Engagement and Service: DI seeks to expand community service opportunities, strengthen partnerships with diverse sectors, and deepen engagement with alumni while fostering academic, research, and societal connections with the Qatari community and beyond.

## Findings from the mid-cycle review analysis

### Responses to recommendations

***Recommendation 1. Implement a schedule for a review of policies that impact quality assurance and enhancement (ESG Standard 1.1).***

A plan for formalising the review of policies was implemented by the University in 2022 with an initial review of all policies completed by the second semester of 2020-2021, and with new policies added into the system as they arise, guided by the Policy for Preparing, Developing and Approving Policies that had initially been developed in 2021. The Policy Review Schedule establishes a five-year cycle for each policy review whilst allowing for interim changes in response to internal developments or national / international expectations that might impact policies.

The mid-cycle review team heard that the initial backlog that led to some discrepancy in review cycles has been cleared and moving forward all policies will be reviewed

synchronously. Furthermore, in another enhancement, the President's Office has assumed direct oversight of policies related to administrative and operational functions to ensure parallel consistency with academic governance policies. An Administrative Policy Committee is responsible for reviewing administrative policies whereas a separate Academic Policy Committee reviews the academic policies.

Support staff confirmed that improved accessibility to updated policies has enhanced clarity in administrative processes and accountability within their respective units.

Overall, the University demonstrates clear progress in institutionalizing a robust and sustainable policy review framework consistent with the expectations of ESG Standard 1.1, with effective oversight and stakeholder engagement across all levels.

***Recommendation 2: Formulate a consistent and institution-wide approach to qualitative feedback which supports student development (ESG Standard 1.3)***

The University has reviewed and amended the Assessment Policy, highlighting the overarching principles of the policy and reorganizing its sections to increase navigability. Added detail was incorporated on assessment methods, use of rubrics, providing feedback to students, and managing the assessment process. Dissemination of the new policy was underlined through a letter from the Provost to all faculty. The policy, among other academic policies, is also available publicly, in Arabic, on the DI website under Academic Policies.

DI, through the Office of Teaching, Learning and Assessment (OTLA) has organised a range of workshops to support faculty and produced rubric templates in Arabic and English relevant to a variety of assessment types. Indeed, overall, significant work has been carried out under OTLA, such as consultation on rubrics and feedback, as well as a review of the Assessment Policy and on-going work to all assessment / rubric nexus. An Assessment Feedback Policy is also ongoing.

As a result of policy amendments, faculty and students have indicated through surveys that feedback - whether delivered face-to-face or online - has improved in terms of timing, usefulness, and consistency and were able to support this with examples. Students and faculty were very positive about the new approach to feedback and gave examples of how it had helped to improve the quality of their work. Again, OTLA has been instrumental in shaping the enhancement of feedback practice through faculty workshops, training and moving the approach to assessment beyond just numbers to enhancement.

These outcomes were reinforced by academic leadership which confirmed that the implementation of revised policies and OTLA-led initiatives has resulted in measurable improvements in feedback quality, timeliness, and relevance. The leadership team reaffirmed continued institutional support for faculty development and assessment enhancement through OTLA, ensuring sustainability of the progress achieved.

In conclusion, the University has effectively established a coherent and institution-wide approach to qualitative feedback that demonstrably supports student development. This initiative reflects alignment with ESG Standard 1.3, showing a strong culture of continuous enhancement and student-centred learning.

## Development of quality assurance and enhancement procedures

### Good practice (GP) identified and continuing DI enhancements

As identified by DI in the SED:

#### **GP 1: The broader socio-cultural impact of programmes offered on the state of Qatar and Arab region (ESG Standard 1.2)**

- *DI continues to ensure that all new program offerings are aligned with the updated DI policy for the design and approval of programs, with appropriate input from stakeholders and prospective students.*
- *DI continues to offer programs that are aligned with DI mission and responds to socio-cultural needs.*

The review team noted an aspect of DI's mission statement aims to create 'independent thinkers using interdisciplinary methodologies and tools within the region' and the team interrogated how DI mid-cycle review participants understood that term. Collectively all participants understood the idea of critical, well-rounded graduates who can apply learning to real world problems, and the notion of interdisciplinary study was understood and applied in practical ways.

The review team commends DI for its sustained emphasis on aligning its programmes with regional socio-cultural needs and for embedding interdisciplinary perspectives into programme design and delivery.

**As further enhancement, the review team encourages DI to explore how the UNESCO Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) can be more explicitly reflected in programme design, learning outcomes, and research themes. Embedding these global frameworks would further enhance the regional and international relevance of DI's academic offerings.**

- *DI continues to enhance the role of existing students, prospective students, and alumni in shaping program proposals.*

The review team heard across meetings how students and alumni engage in programme review and the development of new programmes. Examples of this include the use of an Advisory Board consisting of faculty and students where feedback can be provided on existing and proposed programmes. Students also have an end of semester course survey administered independently of their School and Faculty to provide their feedback on the courses taught. In addition, the yearly Student Satisfaction Survey serves as another channel through which student feedback is collected, covering programme satisfaction as well as student life and services. Again, students were able to give examples of changes made to course and programmes. Every semester there is also a Student Forum, and the team heard an example of how a survey was conducted to canvas student opinion on whether a course should be compulsory or elective.

- *DI continues to build partnerships with institutions with respect to student internships/field work and field trips.*

The University continues to strengthen partnerships with external institutions to provide students with experiential learning opportunities through internships, fieldwork, and study

visits. Students described a range of beneficial internship experiences both locally and regionally, noting their relevance and value in applying academic learning to professional contexts. Faculty members also highlighted growing international collaborations that enrich student learning and extend DI's academic reach, including engagement with the ACRPS.

**GP 2: The strategic and substantial investment in human capital significantly impacts the student-staff ratio of 6:1 and ensures provision of student-centered teaching and learning (ESG Standard 1.3)**

- *DI retains and continues to invest in recruiting highly qualified faculty.*
- *DI continues to enhance pedagogical training for faculty to enable a progressive learning environment.*

The University demonstrates a clear and ongoing commitment to human capital development, reflected in a favorable student–staff ratio of 6:1 that enables personalized, student-centered teaching and learning. This ratio is among the strongest indicators of DI's strategic prioritization of academic quality and student engagement, allowing for meaningful interaction between students and faculty, close academic advising, and individualized feedback mechanisms.

Leadership discussions confirmed that investment in faculty recruitment, faculty development and retention continues to be a principal component of DI's strategic plan. The University maintains a rigorous recruitment process to attract highly qualified faculty from diverse international and regional backgrounds, ensuring alignment with programme needs and the University's mission to provide world-class education within the Arab region. Academic leaders emphasized that new appointments are carefully evaluated for both disciplinary expertise and teaching excellence, contributing to a rich learning environment that balances academic rigor and accessibility.

During discussions with academic leadership and faculty, it was highlighted that DI continues to strengthen pedagogical capacity through OTLA. OTLA plays a key role in faculty development by offering continuous professional learning opportunities focused on innovative pedagogy, technology-enhanced teaching, and assessment literacy. Both new and continuing faculty participate in structured induction and pedagogical training programmes organized by OTLA, ensuring consistency in instructional quality and student-centered practice. New faculty orientation activities include sessions on course design, inclusive teaching strategies, and alignment with institutional learning outcomes.

**GP 3: The commitment of faculty to publishing in high-quality peer-reviewed journals with students (ESG Standard 1.5)**

- *DI further supports faculty-student collaboration in research projects funded internally and externally.*
- *DI continues to support students and graduates to author academic publications, and co-author with faculty when feasible.*
- *DI establishes clear guidelines and formal procedures to enhance the facilitation of student co-authorship of academic publications with faculty.*
- *DI promotes and publicizes student and graduates' achievements related to research publications internally and externally.*
- *DI reports on student and graduate involvement in research activity with faculty.*

The review team heard from the students and faculty that institutional policies (including the 2024 'Guidelines for Authorship') and practices clearly encourage faculty-student



collaboration in research, with structured support provided through both internal and external funding mechanisms and through publications guidelines. Leadership emphasized that research engagement is integral to DI's mission of producing graduates capable of contributing to knowledge creation and addressing issues relevant to the Arab region. The University allocates resources to support joint research initiatives, conference participation, and scholarly publication, positioning research as a key pillar of teaching and learning.

Faculty also reported that DI highlights successful publications and presentations through its website, newsletters, social media, and institutional awards, thereby promoting a culture of academic excellence and visibility. These efforts have also strengthened DI's profile in the regional higher education landscape and reinforced its reputation for high-quality scholarship.

**GP 4: Arrangements for students, especially international and students recruited from conflict zones, are comprehensive and effective (ESG Standard 1.6).**

- *DI continues to support recruiting students from disadvantaged backgrounds.*

The University demonstrates a strong institutional commitment to inclusivity and student wellbeing through comprehensive support structures tailored to its diverse and predominantly international student body – many of whom are drawn from conflict zones. All but one of the students interviewed were international students or alumni.

Leadership discussions confirmed that DI continues to prioritize the recruitment and support of students from disadvantaged and underrepresented backgrounds. The University provides generous scholarships, accommodation facilities, and a wide range of student services including counselling and mentoring to address both academic and personal needs. These provisions are viewed not merely as welfare measures but as integral to DI's mission of advancing opportunity and social mobility across the Arab region.

Students who participated in their review meeting spoke positively about the support they receive upon arrival and throughout their studies. Many described how the accommodation, scholarship, and counselling services have enabled them to focus on their learning despite difficult personal circumstances or transitions from conflict zones. The review team noted that such student-centred arrangements foster a deep sense of belonging and commitment to the institution.

- *DI continues to offer students field trips and/or training to prepare students to be competent in global environments.*

DI also provides opportunities that prepare students to operate competently in global and multicultural environments. Students described a variety of experiential learning opportunities, including internships, fieldwork, and field trips both within Qatar and regionally. These placements have provided meaningful, discipline-specific experiences that connect theory with practice and enhance employability.

OTLA further engages faculty by bringing in experts from outside e.g. arranging symposia or as adjunct faculty. These activities expose students to diverse global perspectives and promote intercultural dialogue in the classroom.

- *DI enhances orientation sessions on cultural expectations and adjustments for international students.*

The University also recognizes the importance of cultural integration and adjustment for international students. Enhanced orientation sessions are provided to support newcomers in understanding cultural expectations, academic standards, and available support services.

- *DI gathers student feedback on student orientation and include question items on ease of integration in DI and level of support.*

The review team heard that feedback mechanisms have been strengthened to assess the effectiveness of orientation programs, including survey items that specifically gauge the ease of integration and satisfaction with the level of institutional support.

- *DI explores and develop student exchange initiative.*

DI is exploring and expanding student exchange initiatives to enhance global mobility. Both students and faculty shared examples of ongoing and planned exchanges with partner universities, including collaborations with institutions in China. These initiatives not only broaden students' cultural understanding but also reflect DI's aspiration to nurture globally engaged graduates who can contribute positively to international dialogue and development.

**GP 5: Specialist support for students, available in-person or virtually, is responsive, accessible, and positively impacts experiences of students (ESG Standard 1.6)**

- *DI to continue to monitor students' satisfaction on all support services.*
- *Improve the DI website visually and in content, especially with regards to accessibility for students with special needs.*
- *Further develop psychological and career counselling support to students.*
- *Continue to provide special needs services.*
- *Continue to automate documents and services related to students*
- *Launch a mobile application with tailored services for students and alumni.*
- *Improve the library's online presence on the DI website and continue to provide specialized library services through it.*
- *Identify and build partnerships that strengthen the library's ability to deliver comprehensive collections and effective services.*

Leadership discussions and a meeting with the support staff emphasized that continuous monitoring and enhancement of student support services form an integral part of DI's strategic objectives. The University regularly evaluates the effectiveness of its student services through surveys, focus groups, and feedback collected via the Student Council, student forums, and alumni networks through the Office of Institutional Effectiveness and other units.

In meetings with students, participants consistently reported that the University's support systems ranging from academic advising and counselling to administrative and library services are accessible, efficient, and responsive to student needs. Students noted that their feedback is actively sought and acted upon, citing examples of tangible changes implemented following their suggestions.

DI continues to expand the scope and quality of its psychological and career counselling services. Faculty and support staff highlighted ongoing efforts to ensure that students have timely access to trained professionals who can provide both academic and personal support.

Significant progress has been made in enhancing digital accessibility and service delivery. The University's website has been fully redeveloped, providing improved navigation, up-to-date content, and enhanced accessibility features for students with special needs. Although the DI mobile application is still under development, students reported that its absence has not hindered access to essential services, as current online platforms and communication channels remain effective and user-friendly.

Special needs services remain an essential component of DI's inclusive support framework. The University maintains individualized learning and accessibility arrangements for students requiring special accommodations, ensuring equitable access to teaching, assessment, and campus resources. Leadership reaffirmed that the University remains committed to further enhancing accessibility standards across its digital and physical environments.

DI is pursuing strategic partnerships to strengthen its library collections and enhance digital resource sharing, ensuring that students and faculty benefit from comprehensive academic support.

Automation and digital transformation remain ongoing priorities. The University continues to streamline administrative processes by digitizing student records, forms, and service requests. These initiatives have improved efficiency, reduced response times, and enhanced transparency for students and staff alike.

**GP 6: The agile and impactful approach to student feedback enhances the learning experience of students (ESG Standard 1.9)**

- *Implement new survey software (Blue) to conduct student surveys.*
- *DI to continue to hold student-faculty forums.*
- *DI to continue to provide a feedback report by Provost on the student-faculty forums annually.*

A significant recent enhancement is the implementation of the Blue Survey Software, which has transformed the way student feedback is collected, analyzed, and utilized. Faculty and academic leadership commended the Blue Evaluation System for its capacity to generate detailed, timely, and data-driven insights into teaching effectiveness and course delivery. The system enables both quantitative and qualitative analyses, facilitating a more nuanced understanding of student perceptions across courses, programs, and instructors. Faculty members stated the platform's analytics have been instrumental in helping them identify trends, strengths, and areas for improvement in their teaching practice.

Leadership and academic staff confirmed that the adoption of Blue Survey aligns with the University's broader strategy to strengthen evidence-based quality enhancement processes. The system supports regular monitoring of teaching quality, course design, and overall student satisfaction, feeding into programme review and strategic planning cycles. Reports generated from the system are discussed at departmental and institutional levels, ensuring that feedback informs both pedagogical and policy decisions.

Student engagement in feedback processes extends beyond surveys. The University maintains a well-established structure of student-faculty forums and Provost-led feedback

reports, which provide open channels for dialogue and transparency. During meetings with students, participants described these forums as constructive spaces where they can express their views, discuss challenges, and propose solutions directly to faculty and administrators. Students emphasized that their feedback is taken seriously and often results in visible changes, such as adjustments in assessment methods, course scheduling, and resource allocation.

**GP 7: Use of external periodic review, including international accreditations, to continuously enhance programmes and institutional practices (ESG Standard 1.10)**

- *DI to continue to ensure that programs are externally accredited and maintain accreditations.*

The leadership, academic and support staff stated their commitment towards international accreditation, DI continues to ensure that all its academic programmes are externally accredited and that these accreditations are maintained through ongoing compliance and continuous improvement. External accreditation is viewed as a cornerstone of quality assurance, ensuring that programmes remain aligned with national and international benchmarks and standards. Faculty members and institutional leadership regard both national and international accreditations as essential mechanisms for aligning programme content, structure, and delivery with international best practices. This shared perspective reinforces a culture of continuous enhancement and accountability across all levels of the institution.

The University has also adopted a structured framework for measuring Programme Learning Outcomes (PLOs) at two-year intervals. This cyclical assessment process supports data-informed decision-making and enables ongoing refinement of academic programmes to ensure they remain relevant, effective, and consistent with external quality expectations.

**GP 8: The extensive range of learning resources and high-quality physical environment (ESG Standard 1.6)**

- *Maintain DI facilities and enhance them.*
- *Improve the library physical spaces to enhance learning, research, and collaboration.*

The panel learned that students were aware of how they had been engaged in change processes through surveys and other forums including a Sustainable Development Club and Alumni Affairs Office.

DI continues to maintain and enhance its facilities to provide an extensive range of learning resources within a high-quality physical environment. The University's ongoing commitment to infrastructure development which ensures that classrooms, laboratories, and student areas support effective learning, research, and collaboration was stressed during the meetings with the leadership support staff.

Plans are underway to improve the physical spaces of the library, with the aim of creating a more stimulating and student-centred environment that fosters learning, research, and group interaction. These improvements are intended to strengthen access to learning resources and promote a culture of academic engagement and innovation.

## Conclusion

The review team were pleased to note a positive attitude and enthusiasm across all their engagements during the mid-cycle review. This points to a positive culture of quality assurance and enhancement, and this was evidenced in the documentation submitted and the answers to review panel questions. DI is clearly focused on improvement and enhancement activities and can appropriately articulate those. The review team believes that, given its mission, vision, and student profile, DI should consider evaluating whether UNESCO Strategic Development Goals (SDG's) can lead to further enhancement of curricula, research, and regional / global relevance and engagement for students and faculty. However, it should be noted that the team has not put this as a Recommendation. Overall, the team concludes that DI is making satisfactory progress.

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