

Subject	External Quality Assurance
Module	Introduction
Topic	Welcome

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1. Introducing the Subject

Welcome to *External Quality Assurance*.

Over the past three decades, the demand for greater public accountability has led to an increase in the number of external quality assurance (EQA) entities for higher education on a national, regional, or program level. Many have been established by national governments, and some by collectives of higher education institutions, or by professional organisations. Their approaches have been summarised as 'audit', 'assessment' and 'accreditation', although the meaning of these terms can vary when they are applied in different circumstances.

2. Subject Overview

Quality Assurance for Higher Education

This module highlights the complexity of the concept of quality and the various QA frameworks and processes used to define and measure quality. The focus is on external quality assurance (EQA) agencies, that is, systems external to Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and their internal QA systems.

External Quality Assurance (EQA) – Roles and Responsibilities

This module discusses the generic functions of EQA agencies and the different approaches that they take to discharge their roles and responsibilities. While many of the examples relate to QA at institutional level, the underlying concepts also apply to program-level QA.

Networks of External Quality Agencies

This module describes the extensive networks of EQA agencies and their purpose, with an emphasis on international networks and some consideration of national networks of QA agencies. The module provides detailed information pieces drawn from the websites of various networks.

Standards Applied by External Quality Assurance (EQA) Agencies

There is a continuing debate between government, EQA agencies, and institutions about the standards for evaluation, authorization and recognition or accreditation. Standards vary from quantitative prescriptions, to standards based upon objectives and outcomes, and even to more subjective measures of satisfaction. At present there is a sizeable controversy about the use of "competency" standards. This module is intended to give students an understanding of the standards debate and a sense of which standards may fit a given situation.

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External Quality Assurance Agencies – Emerging Challenges

Higher education has endured many challenges over the past three decades. The issue here is the way in which EQA agencies have dealt with those issues, including but not limited to the globalisation of education, the trend toward privatisation, new technologies, and the regrettable growth of so-called 'degree mills' that sell bogus or sub-standard qualifications.