Subject	External Quality Assurance
Module	External Quality Assurance (EQA) – Roles And Responsibilities
Topic	2.4 Summary

Table of Contents

1. To Students in the EQA Course

In the original program materials, section 2.4 dealt extensively with self-assessment and the role of peer review. Based on our experience in teaching this module and on the feedback received, it was considered more appropriate to shift this section in full to the Operating an External Quality Agency subject and retain a summary in EQA."

We suggest that you acquaint yourself with the summary, below.

2. Summary

- In the three stage EQA model, self-assessment and external review are followed by the outcome of the EQA process.
- Self-assessment not only helps HEIs provide the information required by the external body, but can result in improvements even without the external involvement.
- Following are some obstacles to developing self-assessment capabilities, which may not give a true picture of the weaknesses:
  o Anxiety about external scrutiny, leading to a biased report
  o Absence of adequate mechanisms (such as information systems, participation mechanisms, a significant number of full time faculty members)
  o Lack of a culture of evaluation
- King (1998) identifies several possible generic strategies for conducting self-assessment:
  o Survey approach
  o Guided self-assessment
  o Assessment team approach
  o Structured learning self-assessment
- The table below summarises the benefits and drawbacks of the self-assessment process:

Advantages	Disadvantages
- Leads to a better-informed, more objective evaluation - Assesses the performance of QA & QC systems and procedures - Ensures faculties/ departments /service areas are accountable to the institution - Enables the institution to meet the expectations/ requirements of an	- Cost - Time (reviewers and reviewees) - Cynicism - Evaluation fatigue - Difficulty of maintaining commitment - Potential for identifying too many areas for

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EQA • Improves institutional ability to prioritise issues & facilitate decision-making • Serves as an aid to learning, improvement & development • Serves as a vehicle for gathering evidence & disseminating good practice • Raises awareness of quality issues and assists team-building through wide staff involvement • Assists personal professional development • Brings service areas into the main stream of the institution	improvement

- The SA report is the foundation on which an external review team builds their understanding of the institution or program.
- An 'external reviewer' refers to an expert external to the program or the institution taking part in the EQA process. External reviewers provide an outsider's perspective that enriches the views of the program or institution.
- External reviewers analyse and discuss the self-assessment report and validate the claims made by visiting the institution. The team also collects information before and during the site visits and through personal interviews of internal and external stakeholders.
- The external review process can be flawed if the peers are not well regarded or if the evaluation tools and information supplied for the review are unsatisfactory. Van Vught in Westerheijden et al. (1994) also identifies three criticisms voiced about the mechanism of peer review:

  a. Social bias
  b. Intellectual bias
  c. Random error
- The disclosure of EQA outcome varies based on EQA approach. In the case of a typical accreditation, only the final outcome is disclosed while the full review report is disclosed in the case of a typical audit.
- Decisions that form part of the outcome may either be a 'yes' or a 'no' or may include certain conditions.