Subject	External Quality Assurance
Module	Networks Of External Quality Agencies
Topic	3.2 The Context

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1. Introduction

This topic considers the underlying rationale for EQA agency networks and provides an overview of selected EQA networks in action. You will learn about national and multi-national issues that are pertinent to higher education and EQA. The topic also provides information on EQA agency objectives extracted from a number of websites.

Objectives: The Context

Upon completion of this topic, you should be able to
- explain the rationale behind the existence of EQA agency networks
- identify some global and regional networks of EQA agencies
- identify the benefits of QA networks
- identify the national and multi-nationally oriented issues related to higher education
- identify the objectives and priorities of EQA networks

2. Co-operation and Exchange Among Countries

When Mark Twain, the nineteenth century American author, was informed that the newly invented telegraph would allow Texas to talk to Maine (leaping from the south to the far northeast of the USA), he is said to have asked "but does Texas have anything worthwhile to say to Maine?" Whatever the answer may be, the ability to communicate has provoked communication and over time our reliance on it. In our generation, the mobile phone is having a similar effect. Suddenly, people who got on well between the times when they met face to face, cannot resist calling at almost any time of day or night.

Until the nineteenth century, information traveled as fast and as far as a human or animal could carry it (with small exceptions, like smoke signals). Nations in distant parts of the world routinely waited months for the response to messages. Their lives neither depended on, nor took advantage of rapid exchanges of critical information.

Working with information that moved slowly in the best of times was not objectionable, as it allowed less external intrusion.

In one generation, long-distance communication has become increasingly accessible and reliable; its speed has increased in multiples, with the advent of fax and email technology. In our generation, the **possibility** of rapid world-wide communication (one facet of 'globalisation') gives people in distant places the **desire** to communicate, whether to learn, inform, help, influence – or even to threaten. Given that as the norm, we comment unfavorably on societies that hinder international interaction.

 In the sphere of higher education, the new possibilities for distant communication are expressed in various ways, including
- networks/associations of HE institutions that share ideas;
- distance/on-line learning via the Internet;
- other cross-border education;
- international research collaborations;
- international benchmarking of academic and administrative systems and outcomes;
- international rankings of institutions;
- consultation on degree mills and accreditation mills;
- recognition networks for complete and partial qualifications to facilitate mobility of students and graduates; and
- mutual assistance and recognition between QA agencies.

3. Networks of EQA agencies: Rationale and Overview

Learning from others

When a need is perceived for a new system, some people proceed to "reinvent the wheel". They believe that it takes more time to clone existing systems than to create one's own. Some people find creating more fun than copying. (Programmers usually prefer to write new code than to maintain or correct existing code, often written by someone else) Another explanation is that most people like to think they are unique, so there cannot be a system that will fit their needs.

There are people who have the opposite reaction to a new need and **do** see the benefit of building on the work of others. These people seek examples from which they can learn. Even Isaac Newton acknowledges his debt to others: "I have stood on the shoulders of giants". In the field of QA, some incipient QA systems have looked to the U.S because its higher education system is widely admired and because the U.S. has the longest established EQA systems.

While useful as a starting point, this lengthy experience could not be universally applied. The large 'regional' US accreditors are owned by institutional associations and only serve institutions. In most (though not all) other countries the government is owner (or part owner or instigator), and in effect, operator of institutions which have some form of 'independent' charter. As noted elsewhere, the U.S. government only recognises accreditors that serve a 'Federal purpose' by determining whether institutions meet quality standards and are therefore eligible for access to Federal funds. The U.S. government may not 'own' institutions, but it uses accreditation as a regulatory policy instrument.

Many countries in the British Commonwealth looked to Britain for ideas and experience. The common use of the English language and wide experience of the British system encouraged this, but ideas must always be adapted to work in

different social contexts. Similar orientations occurred in the Hispanic and Francophone worlds, although the Spanish and French systems themselves were not as highly developed in the 1980s when EQA systems began to proliferate.

For most countries, the British and American reference points are distant in geography or culture or both, so a natural reaction is to look to one's neighbors. Perhaps they will be similar in some ways and even enjoy similar problems. Maybe they are further advanced with useful experience to offer, or at the same stage of development (an incentive for collaboration in system design).

Regional collaboration

Several emerging QA systems or governments that wanted a national QA system are in regions where international co-operation already existed for other purposes. These include Europe, Latin America, the Caribbean, Central Europe, Central Asia and the Arab countries. The International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) was created as a world network in 1991, and by the time of its second conference in 1993, there were stirrings in Europe for the formation of a European quality network.

The INQAAHE Conference has been held every two years since 1991, and the Members' Forum every two years since 1998. The presence of such events in a region has proven to be a catalyst for QA initiatives. INQAAHE has facilitated this by setting aside times in conference agendas for the discussion of regional issues.

Some of the established networks are as follows. Some have been through several stages in form or title.
- Global: International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) (1991)
- Nordic Network of Quality Assurance Agencies (1992)
- Central America: Consejo Superior Universitario Centroamericano (CSUCA) (1997)
- Francophone Africa: Conseil Africain et Malgache pour l'Enseignement Supérieur (CAMES) (2000)
- Latin America and Spain: Red Ibero-Americana de la Calidad del Educacion Superior (RIACES) (1999/2003)
- European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (2000) / European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) (2004)
- Central and Eastern European Network (CEEN) (2000/2002)
- Caribbean countries: Caribbean Area Network for Quality Assurance in Tertiary Education (CANQATE) (2002/2003)
- Asia Pacific Quality Network (APQN) 2003)
- European Consortium for Accreditation in higher education (ECA) (2003)
- Countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States: Eurasian Education Quality Assurance Network (EAQAN) (2004)
- Arab Quality Assurance Network for Higher Education (ANQAHE) (2007) (Section 8)
- Africa: AQANet (2004) / AfriQAN (2007)
- ASEAN Quality Assurance Network (AQAN) (2008)

UNESCO plays an active role in QA for higher education. UNESCO recognises that QA networks are platforms for information exchange; dissemination of knowledge; increasing the understanding of international developments and challenges; and improvement in the professional expertise of agency staff and quality assessors. Networks can be used to improve awareness of bogus qualifications and institutions

('degree mills'), and to develop monitoring and reporting systems that will identify dubious degrees and disreputable QA/accreditation agencies.

4. International Reach of National Agencies

Higher education is a national resource that governments plan and provide for, while exerting some control over the HE system and institutions. Setting up national quality agencies is a national venture, so almost all agencies have been created by governments or institutions with responsibility and authority in one country. However, few aspects of higher education are specific to one country. Rather there are aspects that (Woodhouse, 2004)

- arise independently in so many different countries that they are effectively global; and
- occur at a supra-national or international level, so that international systems and structures are needed to address them effectively.

(These two categories are inter-related, because individual peoples and nations generate and then become involved in supra-national issues)

Some issues that relate to higher education are concerns for national governments:

1. The meaning and purpose of higher education: Does it continue to be higher education if the number of students increases greatly? Where is the qualitative boundary for higher education as system size increases?
2. Funding, including sources of increased funds; accountability for funds; value-for-money (whether government money or students' money).
3. National development - economic and social – and the role of teaching and research in this.
4. Credit transfer, including student mobility and recognition, both during and after study. Provisions for program completion by returning students.
5. Standards and ranking of institutions and programs. (Woodhouse, 2006)

Some issues are multi-nationally-oriented and/or multi-nationally determined, and include the following.

Multi-nationally Determined Issues of Concern

Export of education

What considerations are relevant to the sale of higher education abroad? Education as trade: what are the implications of the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS)?

Import of education

What considerations are relevant to importing foreign higher education? How do we know whether it is culturally or academically appropriate, or whether the claimed outcomes will be realized? Do our laws permit real control of foreign HE providers seeking to operate within our borders?

Electronic modes of education

What foreign higher education is coming, unbidden and unmonitored, into our country?

Borderless or transnational education

Who is responsible for education that crosses national borders when quality agencies are mainly national? Should our government be talking about this with neighboring governments? Have such discussions produced any visible effects?

Cross-border recognition of qualifications for work and study

Does the government regulate the recognition of educational credentials for purposes of licensing, professional practice, or other employment? This includes recognition of partial credit toward completing a qualification at another institution; recognition of a complete qualification for further study elsewhere. What do we know about the qualifications of immigrants? Conversely, can graduates of institutions in our country get jobs or pursue further study abroad?

Bogus institutions ('degree mills') and trivial programs

How can we police and deal with these to protect people from being deceived?

Multi-national QA networks are one mechanism for enabling a national EQA agency to operate effectively in the international sphere by extending the effect of its actions through network members.

Although almost all QA agencies are created nationally for national operation, there are a few organisations or structures which have been deliberately established with an international QA function. These include the management audits of the European Universities Association (EUA), the Internationalisation Quality Reviews developed by the OECD, the European system for quality assessment, improvement and accreditation of management and business administration (EQUIS) and CCA (the Central American accreditation council which accredits QA agencies in the region; its creation was fostered by the Consejo Superior Universitario Centroamericano (CSUCA), an association of public universities).

5. Network Objectives

The four most common objectives of the existing EQA networks are:
- Information Sharing;
- Research & Policy Development;
- Quality Improvement; and
- Liaising.

The information below details examples of the objectives of a number of national, regional and special interest QA networks. These have been extracted from websites of the individual networks.

 Network Objectives

Network Objectives

Given below are some examples of the objectives of a number of national, regional and special interest QA networks.

Network Objectives

International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE)

3. The purposes of the Network are:

3.1 to create, collect and disseminate information on current and developing theory and practice in the assessment, improvement and maintenance of quality in higher education;

3.2 to undertake or commission research in areas relevant to quality in higher education;

3.3 to express the collective views of its members on matters relevant to quality in higher education through contacts with international bodies and by other means;

3.4 to promote the theory and practice of the improvement of quality in higher education;

3.5 to provide advice and expertise to assist existing and emerging QA agencies;

3.6 to facilitate links between QA agencies and support networks of QA agencies;

3.7 to assist members to determine the standards of institutions operating across national borders and facilitate better-informed international recognition of qualifications;

3.8 to assist in the development and use of credit transfer and credit accumulation schemes to enhance the mobility of students between institutions (within and across national borders);

3.9 to enable members to be alert to improper QA practices and organisations; and

3.10 to organise, on request, reviews of the operation of member agencies.

Source: www.inqaahe.org

Network of Central and Eastern European Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (CEE)

The objectives of the CEE Network are
  * to share experiences and to foster cooperation among member agencies
  * to exchange information about background, aims, procedures and outcomes of activities of member agencies
  * to recommend experts
  * to serve as a clearing house for issues on QA in higher education in the Central and Eastern European countries
  * to assist each other in elaborating measures for harmonising activities in QA, in order to participate in the European dimension of higher education, and to play a proactive role in shaping the European higher education area
  * to open common possibilities in launching new projects for the sake of better quality in higher education and build consortia for joint activities, including the applications to funds.

Source: www.ceenetwork.hu

Eurasian Quality Assurance Network (EAQAN)
  * emphasising great importance of higher education quality in modern life;
  * taking into account the tendencies of education development at national and global levels;

- admitting the necessity to preserve cultural, historical, social and national peculiarities of educational systems;
- assuring the importance of application of rich historical experience and traditions of co-operation in the sphere of education;
- taking into consideration work experience of the International networks in the sphere of education quality, namely:
  - o The International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education INQAAHE,
  - o The Central and Eastern European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education CEE Network,
  - o The European Quality Assurance Association ENQA,

on the grounds of the International conference resolution devoted to the development and integration of higher professional education quality assessment systems in the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Baltic States, held in Yoshkar-Ola (Russia), on October 1-3, 2003,

with the purpose of assistance to the education quality in Network member-states,

sign the present **Agreement** on creation of the Eurasian Quality Assurance Network (EAQAN).

The Network activity is guided by **the Regulations on the Eurasian Quality Assurance Network**.

Source: www.eaqan.org

African Quality Assurance Network (AfriQAN)

AfriQAN is an umbrella organisation of the Quality Assurance Agencies in Africa. It is a non-profit organisation.

Objectives

The following are the objectives of AfriQAN:
1. To promote collaboration and linkages among the QA agencies within the African continent;
2. To promote good practice in the maintenance and improvement of quality in higher education in the African continent;
3. To collaborate in building up capacity for QA in the African continent;
4. To facilitate research into the practice of quality management in higher education and apply the outcomes of research in improving the quality of higher education in Africa;
5. To provide advice and expertise to assist the development of new QA agencies in the African regions;
6. To assist members of AfriQAN to determine standards of institutions operating across national borders;
7. To permit better-informed international recognition of qualifications throughout the regions;
8. To assist in the development and use of credit transfer schemes to enhance the mobility of students between institutions both within and across national borders;
9. To promote the sharing of best practices between AfriQAN members and to provide generic guidelines for accreditation decisions and judgements in order to avoid dubious accrediting practices and organisations in the continent;
10. To represent the African regions and promote the interests of the region in other networks and international organisations, with related focus, such as

the INQAAHE.

Source: www.afriqan.net

Caribbean Area Network for Quality Assurance in Tertiary Education (CANQATE)

The aims and objectives of CANQATE are as follows:
- Promote and assist in the implementation of best practices in quality assurance (QA) in tertiary education;
- Provide up-to-date information on QA issues for Caribbean agencies / networks / tertiary institutions and organisations;
- Ensure mutual recognition among QA agencies in the Caribbean;
- Support regional QA agencies in identifying funding to assist in their activities;
- Advocate for national QA bodies in regional and international forums;
- Work with other professional bodies on matters of QA and accreditation in the region;
- Support and advise CARICOM and other Caribbean regional bodies on matters pertaining to a regional framework for QA;
- Develop a cadre of professionals in the field of QA in the region;
- Encourage and support research in the field of QA in the region;
- Network regionally and internationally with similar organisations.

Source: www.canqate.org

Arab Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ANQAHE)

ANQAHE has been established in June, 2007 as a nonprofit nongovernmental organisation.

The mission of ANQAHE is "To ensure and strengthen the QA of higher education institutions and to enhance the collaboration between similar QA organisations in the Arab states as well as to develop cooperation with other regional and international QA networks."

The purpose to establish the Arab network for QA in higher education is to create a mechanism between the Arab countries to:
- Exchange information about QA
- Construct new QA agencies or organisations
- Develop standards to establish new QA agencies or support the already present one
- Disseminate good practice in QA
- Strengthen liaison between QA bodies in the different countries

Source: http://english.anqahe.org

Conseil Africain et Malgache pour l'Enseignement Supérieur (CAMES)

The objectives of CAMES are to:
- Promote understanding and solidarity among the member states;
- Establishing a cultural and scientific cooperation between Member States;
- Collect and distribute all documents university or research statistics, information on examinations, directories, history, charts, information on vacancies and applications for employment from all sources;
- Prepare draft agreements between the States concerned in the fields of Higher Education, Research and contribute to the implementation of these conventions;

- Develop and promote dialogue with a view to coordinating higher education systems and research institutions to harmonise programs and the levels of recruitment in the various institutions of higher learning and research, to promote cooperation between the various agencies, as well as information exchange.

Source: www.cames.bf.refer.org

La Red Iberoamericana para la Acreditación de la Calidad de la Educación Superior (RIACES)

The objectives of RIACES are:
- Promote cooperation and exchange of information and experience among agencies and entities in Latin America whose mission is the evaluation and accreditation of the quality of higher education.
- Facilitate the transfer of knowledge and information for development activities in each country seeking to strengthen and qualification processes evaluation and accreditation of qualifications or academic programs and colleges, as well as the entities that perform -- - evaluators and other agencies and government entities involved in the conduct of these proceedings.
- To contribute to the progressive development of an accreditation system that favours the recognition of diplomas, degrees and periods of study and academic programs and higher education institutions, to facilitate the mobility of students, staff members and academic professionals, as well as the processes of educational integration in countries whose regional offices and agencies for assessment and accreditation are part of the RIACES.
- To assist in the promotion of QA in higher education in Latin American countries through its own activities and with the support of agencies and national and international cooperation.
- Support the organisation of systems, agencies and entities evaluation and accreditation in those countries in the region who lack them and express their interest in acquiring them.
- To encourage reflection on scenarios for the future of higher education in Latin America from the perspective of the evaluation and accreditation as tools for continuous improvement of the quality of institutions and programs that teach them.

Source: www.riaces.net

European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)

Objectives
- to encourage and develop the exchange of information and experience, in particular on methodological developments and examples of good practice;
- to function as a policy forum, developing and proposing standards, procedures and guidelines for QA;
- to fulfil requests for expertise and advice from European Ministers of Education, national and regional public authorities and other bodies associated with the European Higher Education Area (EHEA);
- to facilitate QA activities in the area of transnational higher education;
- to promote the development and implementation of effective peer-review systems for QA and accreditation agencies;
- to maintain and develop co-operation with other appropriate European stakeholder organisations;
- to contribute to the establishment of the EHEA.

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Asia-Pacific Quality Network (APQN)

4. The purposes of APQN are:

4.1 to promote good practice in the maintenance and improvement of quality in higher education in the Asia-Pacific region;

4.2 to facilitate research in the region into the practice of quality management in higher education and its effectiveness in improving the quality of higher education in the region;

4.3 to provide advice and expertise to assist the development of new QA agencies in the region;

4.4 to facilitate links between QA agencies and acceptance of each others' decisions and judgements;

4.5 to assist members of APQN to determine standards of institutions operating across national borders;

4.6 to permit better-informed international recognition of qualifications throughout the region;

4.7 to assist in the development and use of credit transfer schemes to enhance the mobility of students between institutions both within and across national borders;

4.8 to enable members of APQN to be alert to dubious accrediting practices and organisations; and

4.9 where appropriate, represent the region and promote the interests of the region, e.g. vis-à-vis other networks and international organisations.

Objectives of In-country Networks

Association of Accrediting Agencies of Canada (AAAC)

Mission – To foster the highest quality education of professionals, the AAAC pursues excellence in standards and processes of accreditation:

Objectives:
- Provide a forum for networking and information exchange.
- Establish benchmarks for accreditation standards and processes.
- Represent the interests of professional education accrediting agencies to governments, professional bodies, educational institutions, the public and the private sector.
- Promote the expertise of Canadian professional education accrediting agencies within Canada and abroad.
- Monitor and investigate common issues related to accreditation and mobility of professionals internationally.

Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions (C-RAC)

C-RAC is composed of the seven regional accreditors that accredit over 3,000 colleges and universities in the United States Each operates within a specified region of the United States and conducts activities abroad.

C-RAC's primary recent activities (as of April 2007) have included:
1. Working with the United States Congress and Department of Education on new legislation and regulations that would affect the operations of accreditors. Working with higher education organisations, institutions, and others in these areas.
2. Strengthening C-RAC's organisational structure by adopting new by-laws and authorising employment of new staff
3. Cooperating on matters of mutual concern, such as treatment of institutions that operate in more than one region
4. Working towards adoption of joint policies, such as mutual recognition of "sister" regional accreditors and treatment of accredited institutions that are subject to outside control
5. Promoting interregional cooperation among the professional staffs of all of the regional accreditors.

In January 2008, INQAAHE asked the other networks about their then current highest priorities. The four highest were:
- Capacity building,
- Showing that external QA is effective,
- Dealing with different types of Institutions, and
- The cost and efficiency of EQA.
- Out of these four priorities, only the first overlaps with the formal objectives.

[Analysis and Classification of Network Objectives](#)

Analysis and Classification of Network Objectives

The following table summarises the functions of the different EQA networks.

Objective	INQAAHE	ENQA	CEEN	EAQAN	APQN	RIACES	CANQATE	AfriQAN	ANQAHE	CAMES
Info-sharing, liaison, collaboration	*	*	*			*	*	*	*	*
Good practice,	*		*	*	*	*	*	*	*	

quality improvements										
New agencies, capacity-building	*				*	*		*	*	
Standards	*								*	
Credit transfer & recognition	*				*	*		*		*
Policy forum, advice, research	*	*			*		*	*		
TNE		*			*			*		
Agency review	*	*								
Consultants	*	*				*				
Mutual recognition			*		*		*			*
Monitoring					*					
Advocacy	*	*			*		*	*		*
Funding							*			
European Higher Education Area (EHEA)		*								
Caribbe							*			

an Community (CARICOM)										

The top three are the most common, but when asked in January 2008 about their then current highest priorities, the four most common priorities reported did not overlap with the formal objectives. They were:

- Capacity Building
- Showing External QA is effective
- Dealing with different types of Institutions
- The cost of EQA - efficiency

6. Discussion

Discussion: Network Objectives and their Classification

Review the information provided on the "Network Objectives" and "Analysis and Classification of Network Objectives". Consider whether another categorisation would be more appropriate or useful.

7. Discussion

Discussion: Rationale for Development of EQA Networks

Information-sharing is still the core rationale for the existence of networks, if one extends this to include consulting and reviewing, both of which are sharing of a specific type of forensic information. What can networks do that could not be done by individual agencies, or by more ad hoc collaboration?

8. Discussion

Discussion: Need for QA Networks

How much is the clustering into networks due to the social nature of human beings, and how much is due to a 'genuine' need beyond that in respect of QA?

9. Summary

This topic covered the following main points:

- Among the new possibilities for communication we find networks, online learning and cross-border education.
- The development of national and international EQA agency networks was hastened by a desire to learn from other systems, and to build regional collaboration.
- In the field of QA, emerging QA systems often build on the work of others, such as USA accreditors and British QA systems in the case of Commonwealth

countries. However, most countries use their neighbouring countries as a reference point because of geographical proximity and similarities in culture.

- Several incipient QA systems or governments wanting a national QA system found themselves in geographic regions where international co-operation already existed for other purposes. Networks of EQA agencies need not be built on geographical proximity, but proximity of other interests.
- The following are some of the issues related to higher education that concern many national governments:
  o The meaning and purpose of higher education
  o Funding
  o National development
  o Credit transfer
  o Standards and ranking of institutions and programs
- The following are some of the issues related to higher education that have a multi-national orientation:
  o Export of education
  o Import of education
  o Electronic modes of education
  o Borderless or transnational education
  o Cross-border recognition of qualifications for work and study
  o Bogus institutions and trivial programs
- Although almost all QA agencies are created nationally for national operation and authority, there are just a few organisations or structures that have been deliberately established to carry out a QA function internationally.
- The four most common objectives of EQA agencies are:
  o Information Sharing;
  o Research & Policy Development;
  o Quality Improvement; and
  o Liaising.
- According to an INQAAHE survey in January 2008, the four highest priorities of EQA agencies are:
  o Capacity building,
  o Showing that external QA is effective,
  o Dealing with different types of Institutions, and
  o The cost and efficiency of EQA.

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