Subject	External Quality Assurance
Module	Networks Of External Quality Agencies
Topic	3.4 Latin America and the Caribbean

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1. Introduction

This topic traces the origin and growth of regional QA networks in:
- Latin America and Spain: Red Ibero-Americana de la Calidad del Educacion Superior (RIACES)
- The Caribbean countries: Caribbean Area Network for Quality Assurance in Tertiary Education (CANQATE)

The topic looks at the aims and objectives of these two networks. You will also learn about capacity building and harmonisation activities undertaken by RIACES.

Objectives: Latin-America and the Caribbean

Upon completion of this topic, you should be able to
- describe the rationale for the formation of RIACES and CANQATE
- identify capacity building and harmonisation activities developed by RIACES
- identify the aims and objectives of CANQATE

2. Red Ibero-Americana de la Calidad del Educacion Superior (RIACES)

The formation of RIACES was announced at the 1999 INQAAHE conference in Santiago, Chile and Mendoza, Argentina. MERCOSUR (Mercado del Sur), an alliance of South American nations, already existed as a mechanism for regional collaboration in economic and other dimensions. None of these dimensions was being pursued with much enthusiasm, but the activity in and around higher education QA became so energetic that it would be the major achievement of MERCOSUR for many years. This network has the benefit of operating mostly in a single language (Spanish).

RIACES is a network of QA agencies that also includes government agencies and other institutional or sub/regional associations that have interests in the quality of higher education. It covers eighteen countries, from Mexico to Chile, including Central America and the Spanish speaking Caribbean, plus Spain (which explains the use of 'Ibero' as part of its name).

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The first Latin American QA initiatives were launched in 1990, and by the mid nineties, Mexico, Costa Rica, Colombia, Argentina and Chile all had fairly well organised and active QA systems. These were developed around innovative approaches fitted to the actual needs and features of the national higher education systems. Mexico accredits accreditors, Costa Rica has voluntary program accreditation, Colombia focuses on voluntary 'high quality accreditation' for programs in conjunction with compulsory assessment of basic requirements for HEIs, Argentina has compulsory accreditation of programs 'in the public interest' as well as institutional assessment, while Chile has a licensing scheme for private HEIs, voluntary institutional and program accreditation, plus compulsory accreditation for Medicine and Teacher Training programs.

RIACES has developed into an active, regional, and integrated QA community, which has engaged in a number of capacity building and harmonisation activities.

RIACES Initiatives

Support and collaboration

Supporting and strengthening of existing QA agencies, and contributing to the development of QA processes in countries where QA initiatives are new or have run into difficulty getting off the ground.

Diversity of higher education systems

Handling the diversity of higher education systems and, in turn, the challenges that diversification poses to QA agencies; also the development of appropriate standards and procedures.

New approaches to QA

RIACES seeks new approaches to QA that may hasten the development of a quality culture (as program accreditation does), while at the same time reducing the need for large numbers of external reviewers and consequent costs.

Program accreditation is useful and effective, especially because deals with quality at the core of higher education. It is concerned with the academic staff and students, and the basic issues of teaching and learning. Even so, this approach may be unsustainable in the mid- to long-term for many institutions in the region because of the burdens in money, time, and training. Institutional accreditation or audit has been discussed as an alternative, but it means losing the bottom-up participation which has proven to be very important.

Impact of QA processes

Assessing the impact of QA processes on the quality of higher education, in two areas:
- Student learning outcomes, which pose a problem due to difficulties in dealing with the many intervening variables between QA and learning outcomes.

- Institutional management, which seems easier, since many QA processes have a direct link to management decisions.
   The important point here is to find a way to show that QA actually has an impact on the quality of higher education.

QA outcomes

A continuing concern of government has been to find ways to use QA outcomes to improve the mechanisms for the recognition of degrees and to promote the mobility of students, academic staff and professionals.

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

The Caribbean Area Network for Quality Assurance in Tertiary Education (CANQATE) had its genesis at the 2002 INQAAHE Members' Forum & Workshop held in Montego Bay, Jamaica. The Caribbean participants decided to form a regional QA sub-network in keeping with INQAAHE policy on regional groupings.

Initially called the Caribbean Network of Quality Assurance Agencies (CNQAA), the Network was established as a professional body and sub-regional network of INQAAHE, with aims and objectives compatible with those of INQAAHE; specifically:
1. Assist in the implementation of best practices in QA;
2. Provide up-to-date information on QA issues for Caribbean agencies;
3. Ensure mutual recognition of QAAs in the Caribbean;
4. Support CNQAA's in identifying funding to assist in their activities;
5. Support Technical/Vocation Education and Training (TVET) agencies/councils within the region;
6. Assist Caribbean Member States in the formation of national QA agencies;
7. Be an advocacy for regional bodies in regional and international forums;
8. Work with other professional bodies on matters of QA and accreditation;
9. Support and influence Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) on matters pertaining to a Regional Framework for QA.

Representation on CNQAA would include national accreditation bodies; institutions; ministries of education (if national accreditation bodies had not been established); including associate members (e.g., the accrediting agencies SACS and HETAC) and professional associations.

CNQAA was to meet annually and be represented at regional/international meetings (e.g. ACTI, CARICOM, INQAAHE) as a professional body, but otherwise operate electronically.

Further work led to a revised Network, and in 2003 CANQATE was established as a professional body, operating as a sub-network of INQAAHE, with compatible aims. At the regional level, CANQATE is recognised by CARICOM, and will set up a framework for communication, and for academic, professional, and collegial support in QA.

At the Inaugural CANQATE Conference in November 2004 the Network agreed to:
* Work with institutions, governments, CARICOM, student organisations, employers and others to sustain and enhance the standards and quality of tertiary education in the region.
* Work together to increase the mutual recognition of qualifications to facilitate the movement of students and graduates within the region.
* Through cooperation on such matters as staff development (including the staff of both agencies and tertiary institutions), exchange of academic

reviewers and the sharing of information, seek to improve the capacity for QA and accreditation in the region.
- Through partnership with INQAAHE and other agencies, form effective working relationships with other regional groupings of QA and accreditation agencies.
- Seek to establish productive links with professional associations and other similar bodies in the region.
- Help smaller countries in the region to sustain and enhance their capability to quality assure and accredit.
- Make potential students aware of the need to inform themselves of the accreditation status as appropriate for the institution or program in which they are interested.
- Encourage public awareness of the role that quality plays in the education system particularly at the tertiary/higher education level.

CANQATE aims to support and advise CARICOM and other Caribbean regional bodies on matters pertaining to a regional framework for QA.

Membership in CANQATE is open to all countries in the wider Caribbean region, regardless of language, although presently there are no non-anglophone members. Addressing this is one of CANQATE's strategic priorities. CANQATE will particularly reach out to the Dutch-speaking countries (such as St. Maarten, Aruba and Curacao) and French-speaking ones (such as Guadeloupe and Martinique). The Spanish-speaking ones (such as Cuba) are naturally drawn to RIACES.

4. Discussion

Discussion: Setting up a QA Network

Consider the following questions:
1. What should be taken into account in setting up a network?
2. How would you set up a network in your region?

5. Summary

This topic covered the following main points:

- Established in 1999, RIACES is a network of QA agencies that covers 18 countries, from Mexico to Chile, including Central America and the Spanish speaking Caribbean, in addition to Spain.
- Latin-American countries such as Mexico, Costa Rica, Colombia, Argentina and Chile developed active and mature QA systems by following innovative approaches closely linked to the actual needs and features of the national higher education systems.
- RIACES has developed an integrated QA community and developed a number of capacity building and harmonisation activities, including the following:
  - Supporting and strengthening existing QA agencies
  - Handling the diversity of higher education systems
  - Finding new approaches to QA
  - Assessing the impact of QA processes
  - Analysing QA outcomes
- CANQATE was established at the 2002 INQAAHE Members' Forum as a professional body and a sub-regional network of INQAAHE, with aims and objectives compatible with the purposes of INQAAHE.
- CANQATE aims to support and advise CARICOM and other Caribbean regional bodies on matters pertaining to a regional framework for QA. Membership in CANQATE is open to all countries in the wider Caribbean region, regardless of language.