Subject	External Quality Assurance
Module	Standards Applied By External Quality Assurance (EQA) Agencies
Topic	4.1 Overview

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1. Introduction

The popular media are prone to discuss 'standards' in reference to negative judgements on matters such as education, ethical behaviour, or the adequacy of public transport. However, their definition of standards tends to be an abstraction.They speak of something that meets standards without sayin what they are. EQA agencies are concerned with 'standards' but still as a broad term. Questions still remain about whether and how more absolute standards might be applied in higher education. Many in the community at large would like the certainty they perceive in demanding, absolute standards for educational institutions and programs -- but the matter is far from simple. Finding suitable standards and methods that will meet community expectations is a work in progress.

2. Module Overview

Standards Applied By External Quality Assurance (EQA) Agencies - Overview

The opening topic, **Standards: Basic Concepts and Benefits**, discusses the benefits of standards-setting activities by EQA agencies for the general public, students, institutions and their programs. The topic then goes into a range of terms that EQA agencies use to define standards. You will also learn how the purpose and unit of analysis influence the formulation of standards.

In **Quality Assurance at Institutional Level** you will consider issues that pertain to higher education institutions (HEIs) which EQA agencies must address in their evaluation standards. You will also learn about two broad philosophical approaches to QA that standards-setting organisations for HEIs adopt. The topic ends with a discussion of the important role of stakeholders in developing standards.

Next, **Quality Assurance at Program Level**, examines the areas of overlap between institutional- and program-level QA reviews. You will learn about important areas that should be considered when developing standards for program reviews. The topic ends with a discussion on the role of stakeholders in developing these standards.

The topic, **Pitfalls in Standards Development**, discusses the ways in which standards development, however earnest, can go wrong. The topic details good practices to follow in order to avoid such hazards.

Finally, in **Current Trends in Standards Development**, you will consider how technological advances have prompted changes in the structure and delivery of higher education (HE), and the effect of change on standards development. You will learn about the current trends in standards development, and how these developments alter the role of EQA agencies.

3. Objectives

Objectives: Standards Applied By External Quality Assurance (EQA) Agencies

Upon completion of this module, you should be able to
- analyse a range of definitions of standards and identify their strengths and weaknesses
- evaluate the appropriateness of different approaches to standards used by EQA agencies for different QA purposes and levels
- discuss contemporary issues and trends in standards development

4. Reading

Reading: Suggested Reading and Reference
- Ewell, P.T. (2008). *U.S. accreditation and the future of quality assurance: A tenth anniversary report from the Council for Higher Education Accreditation*. Washington, DC: Council for Higher Education Accreditation.
- Middle States Commission on Higher Education (2006). *Characteristics of excellence in higher education*. Philadelphia, PA: Author.
- Council for Accreditation of Counselling and Related Educational Programs. (2009, January). Policy Document.
- Harvey, L. (2004–9). Analytic Quality Glossary. Quality Research International. Retrieved from http://www.qualityresearchinternational.com/glossary/