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| **Subject** | Operating an External Quality Agency |
| **Segment** | Subject Introduction |
| **Topic** | 0.1 Welcome |

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# 1. Introducing the Subject

Welcome to *Operating an External Quality Agency.*

Over the past few decades, higher education has seen an unprecedented growth with the result that the application of quality assurance and accreditation procedures has become more important today than ever before. The need of the hour is for stringent checks on the institutions and programs conducted by external quality assurance (QA) agencies. For credible and reliable judgments by QA agencies it is necessary to establish modes of operation that provide the necessary rigour to examining programs and institutions. This subject introduces you to the philosophies and methods used by QA agencies in external quality assurance activities and builds on your earlier study of the theoretical aspects of the quality assurance concepts and frameworks. As the subject matter warrants, a practical approach has been adopted to outline the various aspects of operations.

# 2. Subject Overview

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**Subject Overview**

Welcome to the subject *Operating an External Quality Agency*.

Here is an overview of the modules included in this subject.

**Structures and Management**

This module takes an organisational perspective on the establishment and management of an external quality assurance agency. It describes the functions to be performed such as determining scope of operations and the development of methodologies to be used for reviewing and other activities. The module outlines a variety of frameworks used by agencies to link theoretical aspects of quality, purpose of review and the practice of quality assurance. It contrasts different approaches, eg, fitness-for-purpose, fitness-of-purpose and (qualitative and quantitative) standards-based frameworks. The module also discusses governance and organisational structures as well as the ways in which an agency can establish its credibility and demonstrate accountability.

**Methods of Review and Accreditation**

This module examines the practical implications of applying different quality assurance approaches in an agency setting. The module draws on a wide range of examples from QA agencies around the globe with some emphasis on institutional accreditation activities. You will learn about different approaches to the self-assessment that forms the basis of external quality assurance ways in which agencies and institutions collaborate to make that activity worthwhile for the institution and useful for an external review. The module also outlines the different

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ways in which reports from review teams are dealt with by QA agencies, and where the locus of decision making on the outcome lies.

## Reviewer Roles and Training

Competent peer reviewers are an essential ingredient in quality assurance operations. This module discusses in detail the roles that reviewers play, with emphasis on the differences in expectations depending on the kind of external quality assurance (EQA) activity, be it audit, review or accreditation. It describes the strategies for identifying potential reviewers and forming teams for specific situations. Since the training of reviewers is a crucial function of agencies, this module also introduces examples from several training programs to show the diversity of approaches internationally. The module also provides useful resources for trainers, including potential handouts for reviewers attending training sessions.

## Site Visits

Conducting site visits is an integral part of the review process and has the primary purpose of collecting evidence and exploring the self-assessment information supplied by the institution. This module outlines the planning activities that need to be undertaken in preparation for site visits. It also discusses construction of schedules and approaches to questioning with an emphasis on exploration of issues identified in advance by the team members.

## Preparation of the Report

The production of a team report is the culmination of the quality review. This module deals with the substance of the report and how it is structured. It provides many examples from actual review reports. There is an emphasis on the relationship between the type of review and the approach of the report showing how important it is to tailor the report to the goals of the particular quality assurance activity. The module also demonstrates how an argument can be constructed using firm evidence to give a reliable basis for the conclusions. Further, the module provides an example of a fictitious team report.