Subject	Operating an External Quality Agency
Segment	Subject Introduction
Topic	Syllabus

Table of Contents

1. Introduction
2. Subject Description
3. Objectives
4. Subject Design
5. Subject Resources
6. Terminology

1. Introduction

In this topic, you will learn the practical aspects of *Operating an External Quality Agency*. The syllabus includes important information about the subject, the subject description, intended learning outcomes, common terms and other resources. Please read this information carefully and revisit it, whenever necessary.

2. Subject Description

This subject deals with aspects of operating an external quality assurance agency (QA agency) building on the concepts and frameworks in quality assurance. The focus here is on the practical aspects of providing QA services that ensure quality of programs or institutions either through initial accreditation or later through re-accreditation or quality review and improvement strategies.

3. Objectives

Objectives: Operating an External Quality Agency

This subject will enable you to
- explain the requirements for establishing and operating an external quality agency
- discuss the importance of contextual factors in designing quality assurance systems for different regions or countries
- describe the generic functions of a quality assurance agency
- discuss the range of potential activities carried out by an agency
- identify the resources and expertise required to operate a QA agency in your country
- apply the different concepts of quality and quality assurance in a QA agency setting
- discuss the ways in which an agency establishes its credibility and demonstrates accountability to stakeholders
- discuss the areas generally analysed in quality assurance exercises
- identify different approaches to the self-assessment carried out by an institution or program
- discuss the roles of peer reviewers relative to the purposes of different kinds of reviews
- describe different approaches to the training of peer reviewers
- design a reviewer training program that is appropriate for a given set of circumstances

- discuss the importance of site visits and how these can be used to effect in collecting evidence
- design a program for a site visit that will focus on collecting evidence for drawing a well-founded conclusion to the review process
- describe the structure and purposes of different types of review reports
- identify the essential elements to be included in a review report
- construct a text that demonstrates the links between evidence and the conclusions of a review process
- discuss the processes of decision making on review outcomes based on peer reviewers' reports
- describe the options open to agencies for dealing with the report and publishing the decisions from the review process

4. Subject Design

The subject is divided into five modules. To provide a wider view and facilitate critical thinking, readings are embedded throughout the content. Many of the topics also require you to develop skills that can be applied in your own contexts.

In addition, you are expected to communicate with your fellow students and participate in discussions using the communication tools provided. Here are some useful tips to help you collaborate successfully with other students. Interaction among group members enhances the learning and understanding of the cases presented.

Guidelines for Online Interaction

The following tips are important to keep in mind at all times:
- Keep postings short and to the point.
- Include pieces of the original message in any response.
- Be positive about others' ideas and comments.
- Post responses in a timely manner.
- If a comment is private, send a personal email to the person.
- Choose words carefully and consider how the reader might interpret them. Sometimes text may seem more harsh or critical than the spoken word.

Assessment

You will be informed of the approach to assessment and your assessment tasks at the start of the subject.

5. Subject Resources

Extensive reading lists are provided along with key websites to give you the main sources you will need to consult for general reading and for completing various learning activities and assessment tasks.

The material for this subject was prepared by a team of international QA practitioners working with INQAAHE (International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education) and the World Bank. Hence, the perspective is international with examples drawing on a great range of national and regional QA agencies. This will give you the widest possible exposure to global practices and to the ideas of the leading practitioners on the international scene. But, inevitably, with

such international authorship comes some variation in the use of terms and abbreviations within and between different parts of the subject. While we have done our best to ensure that the meaning of terms is clear in the contexts in which they occur you will need to adapt to the variations as you work through the materials. As you do further reading, you will realise this adaptation is also required when you move outside your own national and regional boundaries to work with the literature of quality assurance agencies in other places.

6. Terminology

As suggested above, one of the challenges in coming to grips with the field of quality assurance in higher education is the lack of consistency in use of terms from country to country, region to region. This sometimes makes discussions with colleagues and analysis of agency materials from outside your immediate environment very confusing. These differences in usage of terms arise from quirks of labeling as well as nuances in the intended meaning of a term or phrase. For example, in some countries the word 'assessment' is used on a day-to-day basis in higher education primarily to refer to the assessment of student learning while in others, such as the US, the term 'assessment' is used very often to describe the process of judging how 'good' an institution or activity might be.

You will already have some experience of the variety of ways terms are used from your studies of the theoretical aspects of 'quality'. Fortunately, there is an authoritative source you can check to understand the meaning of particular QA terms:

Harvey, L. (2004–9). Analytic Quality Glossary. Quality Research International. Retrieved from http://www.qualityresearchinternational.com/glossary/

Here are some of the terms that are frequently used in 'Operating an External Quality Agency':

Accreditation
Accreditation is the establishment of the status, legitimacy or appropriateness of an institution, program (eg Bachelor of Arts; Master of Science) or module/unit of study (eg Accounting for Managers; Human Physiology).

Assessment
A general term that covers all of the methods used to judge the performance of an individual, group or organisation

Audit
An audit is a process by which there is an external check that procedures are in place across an institution to assure quality, integrity or standards of provision and outcomes.

Evaluation
Evaluation (of quality or standards) is the process of examining and passing a judgment on the appropriateness or level of quality or standards.

External Quality Assurance
A process that uses peer reviewers, who are external to the program or institution, to evaluate the quality or standards of an institution or program. Often referred to as 'EQA'

Quality Assurance Agency
A quality assurance (QA) agency undertakes monitoring and evaluation or review of the quality of higher education. The three main types of activity conducted by QA

Subject	Operating an External Quality Agency
Segment	Subject Introduction
Topic	Syllabus

agencies are: accreditation; evaluation; and audit which are collectively described in this subject as 'review'.

Quality Improvement **OR** *Quality Enhancement*
 The process of enhancing, upgrading or enriching the quality of provision or the standard of outcomes.

Review
The term 'review' is used in this subject as a general term to include audit, evaluation and accreditation activities