

Subject	Operating an External Quality Agency
Segment	Structures and Management
Topic	1.1 Overview

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Please note that this is a text-only version. All links and animations are not activated in this version. It is recommended that you view the topic online for an interactive learning experience.

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1. Introduction

This module discusses the options available for managing, organising and controlling a quality assurance agency. It also discusses the major functions the agency has to perform. While functions may vary from one context to another, the resources needed (financial resources, personnel and so on) will need to adequately support the functions to be performed.

The module starts with an overview of the basic functions and the resources needed to perform them once the agency is established. It then examines the management and organisational structures that support delivery of the functions. The module also explores the role of QA agencies in the initial accreditation and recognition of institutions. Finally, the module highlights the importance of managing stakeholders' relations and identifies mechanisms for ensuring accountability and credibility.

Approaches to QA and agency activities from a variety of country experiences will be introduced and are used to illustrate experiences in the establishment and running of a quality assurance support structure.

2. Module Overview

Structures and Management – Overview

Let us review the topics we will cover in this module.

Broad Functions of the QA Agency

This topic highlights the basic functions that QA agencies perform. The topic discusses the need to define the scope of quality assurance and prepare the methodology in consultation with the various stakeholders. You will be introduced to the strategies that agencies use for making review decisions based on the outcome of peer reviews and you will also learn about the importance of building capacity with a capable core staff and expert external reviewers.

Operational Context

This topic examines the governance, management and organisational structures that supports the functions that a QA agency performs. In this topic, you will learn about the human and financial resources that an agency requires to support its functions and at the same time maintain independence in its operations.

Quality Assurance Frameworks

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There are many ways to define quality. This topic explores how agencies differ in the way in which they define quality and the methodologies they put in place to assess it. In this topic, you will learn how some agencies follow the 'fitness-for-purpose' definition of quality and look into the ways in which higher education institutions (HEIs) or programs fulfil the objectives they aim to achieve. The topic also discusses QA agencies that emphasise pre-determined sets of standards for the HEIs or the programs they assure quality.

Credibility, Accountability and Stakeholder Relations

External quality assurance agencies are accountable to their many stakeholders, in particular to government where they are 'owned' or funded from government sources. They must demonstrate that the process is credible and the objectivity of the outcome is ensured. This topic deals with the various accountability measures used to demonstrate that the agency achieves its objectives.

3. Objectives

Objectives: Structures and Management

Upon completion of this module, you should be able to

- describe the functions to be performed by a quality assurance agency
- identify the resources and competencies required to establish and run a quality assurance agency in your national context
- recommend the management and organisational structure that would be effective in your national or regional context
- describe a range of quality assurance frameworks highlighting the differences in how these define quality implicitly or explicitly
- discuss strategies for ensuring the credibility of the EQA processes
- analyse the direct and indirect accountability measures that operate in quality assurance

4. Reading

Reading: Suggested Reading and References

- El-Khawas, E. 2001. *Accreditation in the United States: origins, developments and future prospects*. Paris: IIEP-UNESCO.
- European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). 2005. *Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European higher education area*. Helsinki: ENQA.
- Revelo Revelo, J.; Augusto Hernandez, C. 2003. *The National Accreditation System in Columbia: experiences from the National Council of Accreditation (CNA)*. Paris: IIEP-UNESCO.

Websites:

There are websites mentioned at different points in this module so you will need to refer to them from time to time. You may also need to use other websites for some of the Discussion tasks in different topics included in the module. You can link to quality assurance websites through the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies (INQAAHE) at the following URL:

<http://www.inqaahe.org/members/list-full.php>

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Note that there several categories of membership of INQAAHE and hence other lists to consult if you do not find an agency you are trying to locate.

5. Terminology

Reminder:

These QA materials were written by an international team and so, inevitably, there is a variety of terms used throughout the text. The Syllabus section of this subject includes an overview of these terms to help you comprehend individual terms and their meanings in the QA context. You will need to consult this list from time to time!