Q

Quality

Quality Assurance

Quality Assurance and Internationalization, Higher Education

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The relationship between quality and internationalization is best defined in the definition of internationalization itself: "The intentional process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of post-secondary education, in order to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff and to make a meaningful contribution to society" (De Wit et al. 2015, p. 29). In this definition the misconception that internationalization is a goal in itself, and not a means to enhance the quality of research and education, is clearly articulated. This is relevant to emphasize, as the perceived quality of

internationalization is strongly related to rankings, reputation, revenue generation, and mobility. One could even say that internationalization and its quality are seen in many cases as synonymous with the position of universities in the rankings, which are disproportionately concerned with such indicators as the number of internationally co-authored publications, the number of mobile students and scholars, and the economic contributions of internationalization to higher education institutions and national economies. Such a quantitative approach to framing the "quality" of internationalization denies the qualitative dimensions of internationalization, the importance of internationalization at home, and the need to relate internationalization to all students and faculty, not only to a small, mobile elite among them.

The relationship between quality and internationalization has two dimensions: the first and most important one, as reflected in the definition of internationalization, is the contribution that internationalization makes to the quality of education and research. The second dimension, more dominant in past understandings of the relationship, has to do with the assessment of the quality of internationalization policies and practices itself. This contribution will address both processes and related instruments.

The Quality of Internationalization Policies and Practices

In the 1990s, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), in cooperation with the Academic Cooperation Association (ACA), commissioned a project, called the Internationalisation Quality Review Process (IQRP). In the course of this project, an instrument and guidelines were developed for assessing internationalization strategies based on a number of pilot reviews in institutions in different parts of the world. The results of this project were published in a book by the OECD (Knight and de Wit 1999). The project and book were intended to assist institutions of higher education in designing and reviewing their internationalization strategies and policies. The editors, in their concluding chapter, state: "Quality improvement may be a major aim of internationalisation but the process of internationalisation of higher education puts pressure on the current systems of quality assurance, which are generally national based and do not adequately address the international dimension of higher education. There is generally little coordination or cooperation among those organisations involved in quality assurance of higher education and those promoting internationalisation" (p. 235).

Although in the past two decades the relationship between quality and internationalization has come more to the forefront, until recently that observation has still been prevalent. Quality assurance entities have ignored and/or struggled with the way to attend to the role of internationalization, and internationalization entities have continued to focus mainly on the quality of the internationalization process itself.

As described by Aerden et al. (2013, pp. 59–60), several initiatives have evolved in the years since the publication of the OECD book in 1999, resulting in tools and instruments to measure internationalization. They include a benchmarking project by the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU), although not exclusively focused on internationalization, a project "internationalizing the campus" by the American Council on Education (ACE), an instrument "assessing best practices in internationalization" by the Association of International Educators (NAFSA), a list of indicators developed by the Centre for Higher Education Development (CHED) in cooperation with a group of German universities (Brandenburg et al. 2009), and the EU-funded project "indicators for mapping and profiling internationalisation" (IMPI), by a collection of entities in the field of international education such as CHE and ACA. As Aerden et al. (2013) state, all these tools and instruments measure the quality of internationalization processes based on inputs and outputs, not on outcomes; they more or less include the same categories of indicators; they are focused at the institutional level; and they are improvement focused. As the IMPI project notes, it "aims at providing HEIs with insight into their performance and means for improvement" (http://ww.ipi-project.eu).

The Contribution of Internationalization to the Quality of Education

This focus on improvement of the quality of internationalization policies and practices has been dominating the discourse for the past several decades and was addressed as such also in de Wit (2009), Van Gaalen (2010), and Greene (2012). And the same can be said about the focus on inputs and outputs, while outcomes – according to Hudzik and Stohl (2009) – are "usually most closely associated with measuring goal achievement and the missions of institutions . . . and are the really important measures" (p. 14). Also, no projects seemed to make direct connections to quality assurance processes, in particular accreditation.

In 2010, a pilot project by the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO) built an existing option as part of program accreditation – a so-called distinctive feature – and addressed these three issues: consideration of outcomes, certification and the role of internationalization in quality assurance, and accreditation. The main approach of the pilot project, as described by Aerden et al. (2013, p. 72), included attending to:

– The ambition and vision on internationalization of the individual program
– A clarification of how a specific form of internationalization contributes to the overall quality of the program
– The transfer of the vision into intended and achieved learning outcomes of students
– The reflection of the vision in standards relating to the teaching and learning, the staff, the services, and the engagement of students

As the authors state, the pilot project "is a response to the three developments in internationalisation and the rethinking of its concept . . .: mainstreaming, increased focus on the curriculum and learning outcomes, and a greater diversity of approaches" (p. 73).

Building on the pilot project by NVAO, the European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA) started a European pilot project with EU funding called "Certificate for Quality in Internationalisation" (CeQuint). This pilot project and the program resulting from it not only focus on the program level but also include the option for an institutional certificate.

In terms of key aspects of good practice for quality assurance of internationalization, Aerden (2014) suggests the following for the assessment of programs:

> Since internationalisation is contextual, its quality should be assessed in the context of the programme's internationalisation goals. By setting standards, these goals are expected to be meaningful. They should have an effect on the learning outcomes intended by the programme, on the student group composition and on the students' internationalisation experience. The intended international and intercultural learning outcomes provide the context for the assessment of graduate achievement, teaching and learning, staff and services. (p. 9)

For institutional assessments, he states:

> They should have an effect on the institution's plans for action in several dimensions. The implementation of internationalisation, here regarded as the realisation of action plans must, of course, be demonstrated. Internationalisation should, additionally, be directly included in the institutional quality assurance system. Finally, the institution's governance must prove to be enabling the coherent implementation of all elements related to institutional internationalisation. (Aerden 2014, p. 21)

The frameworks for the assessment are described in "Frameworks for the Assessment of Quality in Internationalisation" (Aerden 2015).

Quality and Internationalization: A Complex Relationship

The relationship between quality and internationalization is an essential one, given that the internationalization is a means to enhance the quality in higher education. But at the same time, it is a complex one, as it addresses different dimensions, the quality of internationalization policies and practices and the contribution of internationalization to quality, and should be focused on outcomes but in reality is mainly directed toward inputs and outputs. Rankings, accreditation agencies, institutions,

and governments have an output-focused approach toward internationalization, while an outcome-focused quality assurance process is desirable. CeQuint is an attempt to focus more on quality assurances of outcomes of internationalization and is related to accreditation processes. Internationalization in higher education is little by little moving into the direction of becoming an integral part of quality assurance and accreditation processes and moving from outputs toward outcomes.

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Quality Assurance in Higher Education, A Global Perspective

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Synonyms

Accreditation; Higher education: in some countries, it is limited to university education. In most cases, however, it is a synonym for tertiary education, that is, all formal postsecondary education, leading to a degree; Quality; Quality assurance: in some cases, it is equated with accreditation, quality audit, regulatory measures; Quality review: external review, peer review, external evaluation

Definition of the Topic/Key Term (Harvey 2004–2017)

Quality Assurance in higher education is a process of establishing stakeholder confidence that provision (input, processes, outcomes) fulfils expectations or measures up to threshold minimum requirements.

It is linked to Assessment (referring to all methods used to judge the performance of an individual, group or organization) and to Accreditation (the establishment of the status,

legitimacy or appropriateness of a higher education institution or program).

The Development of Quality Assurance

The global landscape of quality assurance has changed significantly in the last 25 years. In 1991, when the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) was launched, it gathered less than ten quality assurance agencies. Today, it has 176 full members, in 88 different countries, from all regions of the world. While this is not the full picture – there are quality assurance agencies that are not members of INQAAHE, because they belong to other regional or specialized networks – it is a good indicator of the expansion of quality assurance (QA) in the world.

The existing QA agencies at the beginning of the 1990s had a focus on accountability, against pre-defined quality criteria, similar to the experience of the United States (US), the oldest QA system in the world. The exception was Europe, where the existing QA arrangements focused on institutional or program goals and purposes, and the focus was on the evaluation of the degree of achievement of stated purposes.

The expansion of QA was a response to several developments. Probably the most significant driver was the growth of the demand for higher education and the emergence of a large number of private providers, many of them addressing a non-traditional student population, with different institutional and teaching arrangements. The ensuing diversification of higher education and the uncertainty about the quality of the services provided generated a demand for someone to assure that higher education offerings met basic quality requirements; in some countries, the development of quality assurance processes was taken up by higher education institutions themselves, but in most cases, especially at later stages of QA evolution, this was a public responsibility of either government agencies or public, independent organizations.

A second important driver was the reduction in public funding in many countries. Public funding for higher education competed with increasing demands from other sectors, and many governments started shifting the cost of higher education to the private sector, mostly via student fees, thus strengthening the requirement for accountability towards students, the government and society.

Thirdly, globalization and the increase of student and professional mobility provided an additional driver for QA. This was most evident in Europe after the Bologna Declaration in 1999; the promotion of student and staff mobility required not only an assurance that institutional purposes were met, but also an assurance about the contents of teaching and learning, and about the credibility and readability of degrees and qualifications. This led to a shift from mostly audit processes to the establishment of accreditation agencies, which in addition had to meet a set of quality requirements to be recognized as such among the Bologna signatories.

Quality Assurance Mechanisms from a Global Perspective

If we take an overall look at quality assurance mechanisms from a global perspective, three distinctive levels can be identified: national, regional and international.

National Quality Assurance Systems

Quality assurance operates mainly at the national level, and as stated above, most countries have developed their own mechanisms, with different functions and units of analysis, in response to the perceived needs or issues in their respective higher education systems.

Based on a general framework proposed by the World Bank (2003), the functions of QA can be further elaborated and organized as follows (Table 1):

The rows show the functions, following the main purposes of QA: quality control, which is usually a public or governmental responsibility, carried out through the initial assessment of institutions programs or, increasingly, QA agencies and leading to authorization or licensing; professional certification is also a case of quality control, focusing on the capacity for professional performance of each individual graduate, guaranteed by governmental agencies or professional

Quality Assurance in Higher Education, A Global Perspective, Table 1 Main functions and levels of operation for quality assurance

		Units of assessment			
		Higher Education Institution (HEI)	Program	Student	External QA agency
Functions	Entry point/ initial assessment	Licensure/ authorization	Licensure/ authorization	Admission test	Govt. decree or authorization
		Government authority/ ministry	Government authority/ ministry		Private provider/NGO
	Monitoring/ enhancement	Audits/ inspections	HEI	HEI	Audits/inspections
	Accountability/ credibility	Buffer body	Buffer body	Assessment of learning outcomes	National and international auditing
		Independent agency	Independent agency		QA networks: overarching QA standards, good practices
		Professional organizations	Professional organizations		
	Professional certification	Not applicable	Professional associations	Professional associations	Not applicable
			Govt. entities	Govt. entities	
	Public information	Government agency HEI	Government agency HEI	Not applicable	National Govt QA networks

associations. A second typical purpose is accountability, that is, the certification that an institution, program, graduate or external QA agency meets previously determined quality criteria; it is summarized in an accreditation decision, which provides an indication of credibility. QA also has another purpose, to promote continuing improvement of institutions, programs, student experience or the operation of QA agencies; here QA focuses on the development of the institution's capacity for quality management and self-regulation. Together with these purposes there is an additional function, which is increasingly relevant: that of providing information to a wide range of stakeholders, including higher institutions themselves, prospective students, families, employers, researchers, policy makers and the public at large. This is a complex task, demanding sound coordination between higher education institutions (HEI) and governmental agencies, and the capacity to respond to stakeholder needs, providing information in different formats, contents or media.

These functions operate at different levels or units of assessment. Quality assurance focuses mainly on institutions and programs, a mixture of both, or the assessment of specific units (faculties, departments, other functional units). The increased emphasis on student learning outcomes has led some countries to introduce external assessment through standardized testing, but in general, the focus is more on the need for institutions to provide evidence of the validity and reliability of their own methods of assessing student learning. The last column, which refers to the external review of quality assurance agencies, is a significant new development, mainly dependent on governmental regulations or the work of quality assurance networks.

This generic framework provides a good background for an in-depth analysis on where different systems stand and which mechanisms need further attention to make the system QA holistic and coherent.

The initial purpose of QA was accountability: to ensure that all providers of higher education met

certain basic quality criteria, and to put some order on the deregulated expansion and diversification of higher education. The quality assurance networks (most notably, the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and INQAAHE) emphasized the need for an increased focus on improvement, and for a while, this seemed to be the main trend. As a result, QA agencies paid more attention to institutional mission and purposes, and insisted that quality was mainly the responsibility of HEI themselves. There was a stronger concern with internal quality assurance and the development of institutional research capacities to support accreditation requirements and quality management.

Interestingly, the success of QA in promoting changes within HEI in response to the use of quality criteria led governments to discover how useful QA was as a regulatory tool. As a result, in many countries there is now a trend for QA to become more controlling, with less emphasis on enhancement and more focus on the definition of external standards and criteria. Hence, risk-based assessment, criticism of peer review, focus on outcomes, increased use of quantitative standards and indicators have become central to the debate in QA.

National quality assurance mechanisms can be further analyzed from the point of view of their ownership, their focus or their scope, that is, the type of institution they cover.

Ownership

In general, Dill (2007) identifies three main models for the national frameworks for external quality assurance: the European model of central control of quality assurance by state educational ministries, the US model of decentralized quality assurance combining limited state control with market competition, and the British model in which the state essentially yielded responsibility for quality assurance to self-accrediting universities.

These models can still provide a general framework: Central governmental control is a significant feature in the Middle East, and in some African or Asian countries; decentralized quality assurance with a strong market influence can be seen in many Latin American countries, and the recognition of the self-regulatory capacity of more consolidated higher education institutions is being promoted and applied in several European countries.

Focus

In terms of the unit of assessment, or focus of quality assurance, it is interesting to see that there has been a shift from the accreditation of programs to institutions, and again to programs, although with a different approach. During the 1990s, the emphasis was on program accreditation, which was consistent with the need to provide information to prospective students and to employers about the relative reliability of different providers. Agencies reviewed a range of programs, based on specialized peer reviewers, and only a few of them (mostly, the regional agencies in the US) focused on institutions as a whole.

As accreditation became more important and increased its coverage, it was evident that program accreditation made huge demands in terms of human and financial resources, and this led many countries to shift towards institutional accreditation. However, the mobility of students and professionals demanded that some assurance of the quality of professional or specialized training be provided, which in turn resulted in the emergence of specialized or professional accreditors, focusing on specific programs and even more specifically on the achievement of previously established learning outcomes. This can be seen in the European Quality Labels and the efforts of the project on the Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes (AHELO), which even though it could not prove internationally feasible, provided significant information about the ways in which learning outcomes should be developed and assessed.

This approach to the assessment of learning outcomes has also been recognized in the development of qualifications frameworks, now present in many countries, and which are meant to increase the transparency of higher education systems, and make learning pathways more

accessible to larger number of students. Qualifications frameworks do not focus on specific programs, but rather on the levels of knowledge, skills and competences of students at different levels of learning. These descriptors then provide a framework for the development of expected learning outcomes for specific programs at each level, and as such, should be a significant component of the quality criteria used to assess programs.

Scope

Most quality assurance systems cover both public and private institutions, as well as university and non-university (or vocational, or short cycle, tertiary institutions).

In general, agencies tend to apply the same or very similar criteria to all the institutions within their mandate, as well as the same procedures.

The main differences between public and private higher education institutions arise from other regulations (such as the ability to grant degrees without supervision) or from funding schemes.

Current Landscape of Quality Assurance

A survey conducted by INQAAHE to measure its impact throughout its 25 years of operation, provides a picture about the current landscape of quality assurance providers. The respondents are full members of INQAAHE, which are external quality assurance agencies (EQAAs) with different jurisdictions.

Most quality assurance systems cover public (97.8%) and private institutions (91.1%); intergovernmental institutions are covered in 26.7% of cases, whereas transnational providers are covered in the 40% of the cases. The EQAAs in the sample also cover both university and non-university (or vocational, or short cycle, tertiary institutions).

If we take an overall look at the HE quality assurance landscape, the following major trends could be identified:
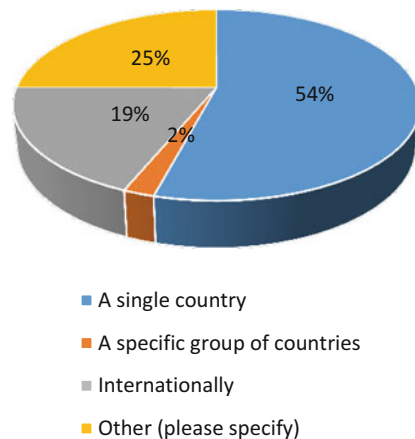
- Predominantly the EQAAs operate in a single country (54%). 19% work internationally and only 2% do so within a specific group of countries.

- Further, a majority of the respondents (37.5%) have a quasi-autonomous status at the national level, 8.3% are governmental bodies, 14.6% are supranational non-profit agencies and 16.7% are private enterprises.
- Ninety one percent of the EQAA respondents claimed to apply generic level criteria in their procedures, whereas only 16.7% claimed to apply subject-specific criteria. These figures suggest that QA is predominantly aimed at the performance management of HEIs and programs and less so on the evaluation of the subject specific outcomes (Fig. 1).
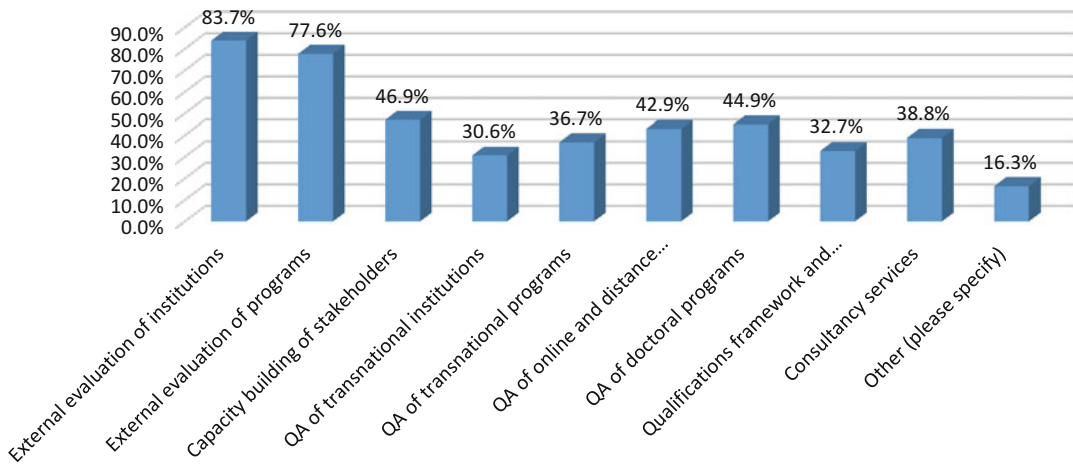
The emphasis on the performance management is also clear from the chart below, which demonstrates the major functions of the EQAAs. The predominant trend for the EQAAs is evaluation of the HEIs and their programs. To some extent, they also engage in capacity building of the stakeholders (46.5%), offer consultancy services (38.8%) and deal with qualifications frameworks (32.7%).

QA of transnational and distance education providers is also covered in some of the systems (Fig. 2).

The study also looked at the frame of reference for the EQAAs when developing quality assurance policies, procedures, criteria and indicators. To a greater extent the national legislation (27%),
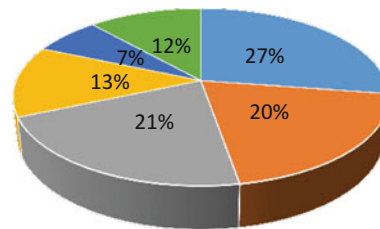

Quality Assurance in Higher Education, A Global Perspective, Fig. 1 Scope of operations of quality assurance agencies

Quality Assurance in Higher Education, A Global Perspective, Fig. 2 Major functions of QA agencies

Quality Assurance in Higher Education, A Global Perspective, Fig. 3 External reference points the QA agencies use for developing quality assurance criteria and procedures

- National legislation
- INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practices (GGPs)
- ENQA European Standards and Guidelines (ESGs)
- UNESCO/OECD guidelines on cross-border higher education
- Salzburg principles on doctoral education
- Other (please specify)

INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practice (20%) and ENQA European Standards and Guidelines (21%) were referenced (Fig. 3).

Regional or Sub-regional Arrangements

While most QA mechanisms operate at the national level, there are also some interesting regional or sub-regional arrangements. In Latin America, the Common Market of the South (MERCOSUR, for its name in Spanish) established a regional accreditation scheme for university programs (ARCUSUR, for its name in Spanish) which operates for a growing number of selected programs. It is managed by the national agencies in member countries, and operates with internationally agreed upon quality criteria and procedures, which include the use of peer reviewers from other MERCOSUR countries. As a result, degrees from ARCUSUR accredited programs are automatically recognized for academic purposes in all member countries. Although mutual recognition within the regional and sub-regional systems is not common in all the regions, it is becoming increasingly a trend.

Qualifications frameworks can also have a regional perspective. The most obvious example

is that of the European Qualifications Framework, but there are also initiatives covering Central America, the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), Southern Africa, the Association of Southeast Asia Nations (ASEAN) and the initiatives of the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth. Increasingly, the links between quality assurance and qualifications frameworks are being strengthened to ensure legitimacy and operationalization of the latter.

The International Scene

Globalization and the blurring of national boundaries for many students and professionals has meant an increasing demand for information about the quality or the performance of higher education institutions. There are different responses to this demand.

One of them is that of international organizations providing either a common framework for the accreditation of specific programs or directly accrediting them. Engineering, Architecture, Business Administration, Communications, provide good examples of accrediting agencies operating across borders to ensure the quality of programs offered in a wide range of countries. This also happens at the institutional level, mainly through the action of US based regional agencies which offer accreditation in other countries, either to provide reliable assessment mechanisms in countries without them or to enhance the prestige of accredited institutions with a US label.

A second, increasingly visible response is that of international rankings. These aim to reduce the complexity of higher education to information easily read by a wide range of users, thus ranking institutions or programs on the basis of a set of pre-determined indicators. Leaving aside the issue of the actual relevance of selected indicators, it is evident that rankings have a significant regulatory power, as policy decisions are made in order to improve specific indicators which would move the institution's position upwards in the rankings. A drawback of many of the existing rankings is that they focus mainly on the research capacity of HEI and in their perceived prestige, leaving the quality of the student experience or the effectiveness of learning to a second place, which is one of

the main issues relevant for quality assurance. Having said that, there are interesting experiences worth noting: that of U-Multirank, U-Map or the Center for Higher Education (CHE) in Germany, which are not really rankings but rather mechanisms for describing institutions or programs on the basis of their performance on different areas.

Intergovernmental agencies also play a role, albeit a less visible one. The United Nations Education, Science and Culture Organization (UNESCO) and the Organization and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) have played a significant role in setting guidelines for specific programs (such as cross border higher education), in assessing higher education systems and in promoting mechanisms for the recognition of degrees.

Quality Assurance Networks

EQAAs are usually set up within countries to deal with the needs of specific higher education systems. In 1991, as a natural evolution of the external quality assurance and in response to the needs of higher education systems to share the knowledge and practices on QA and thus build on the body of knowledge, INQAAHE, the global network, was established to bring these agencies together and provide them with an opportunity for sharing experiences and learning from each other. Predominantly, INQAAHE has managed to lead the sphere through open biennial conferences and members' forums where agencies meet to discuss their professional concerns, capacity building opportunities and the exchange of experiences and good practices.

While many issues were appropriately dealt by INQAAHE at a global level, by the beginning of the 2000s it became evident that there were issues which needed to be addressed in closer contexts, and a rise of new regional or specialized networks became evident. These networks currently cover the whole world, and they can be roughly classified in three main groups:

– Regional networks, organized on a geographical basis (a large region, e.g. Europe, the English speaking Caribbean, Asia Pacific, Latin America and Spain, Africa; or a group

of countries within a region e.g. East African countries, the ASEAN countries as a sub-network of the Asia Pacific Quality Network, or the Gulf countries, most of whose members are also a member of ANQAHE – the Arab QA Network);

– Special interest networks:
– Organized around cultural issues, such as the Arab countries, which brings together QA agencies from Arab speaking countries, in the Middle East and North Africa (ANQAHE); CAMES (the African and Malagasy Council for Higher Education), for agencies in francophone Africa; or agencies from the Islamic world.
– Organized around a specific mode of education and its quality assurance such as International Council for Open and Distance Education (ICDE).
– Subject specific networks, such as the associations of specialized and professional accreditors in the US (ASPA) or Europe (EASPA), the Council of Regional Accreditors in the US (C-RAC), or associations of accreditors of specific programs (such as engineering or architecture).

Recently a new network has emerged, the CHEA International Quality Group (CIQG), set up by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), which addresses global issues with a special perspective on nontraditional provision, especially that coming from outside regular higher education institutions.

QA networks make it possible to address issues from a more focused perspective, that of a region, a subject specific area or cultural requirements. At the same time, they give network members a stronger voice in the global context; last but not least, they make it possible to engage in a more informed dialogue with other networks on larger issues, such as online or cross border higher education, accreditation mills or quality standards for quality assurance.

Good Practices in Quality Assurance

An additional function of quality networks is to act as the main professional association for quality assurance. As such, they have systematized a body of knowledge about the development of quality assurance processes, including criteria and procedures, and a set of recognized and validated good practices. These focus on institutional practices, external quality assurance and requirements for the organization of QA agencies; the main ones are the following:

The European Association for Quality Assurance, ENQA, developed the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG). These, revised in 2015, establish a European quality assurance framework against which all European agencies must be reviewed. They are organized in three interrelated parts: Internal quality assurance, external quality assurance and quality assurance agencies (ENQA 2015).

INQAAHE set up its Guidelines of Good Practice (GGP) in order to provide a framework for the creation of new agencies, to be used in the self and external evaluation of agencies and to promote their public accountability. They address the structure of the QA agencies, their framework for external review, decision making processes, the relationship between the agencies and the public, the accountability of QA agencies and issues related to cross border higher education (INQAAHE 2016). Agencies can ask to be externally reviewed and thus be certified to be aligned with the GGP.

In addition to these guidelines, there are the Chiba Principles approved by the Asia Pacific Quality Network, and recently CIQG developed seven quality principles, which outline the relationship between quality and different stakeholders (higher education providers; students; society and government) as well as quality and quality assurance, QA bodies and change.

All these guidelines emphasize the main principles guiding quality assurance, that is, the recognition that quality is essentially the responsibility of higher education institutions; the need to ensure that quality assurance processes are transparent and that institutions or programs are subject to standards and criteria that are clear, public and supported by adequate documentation; that decisions are consistent and independent from government, corporate or institutional

Quality Assurance in Higher Education, A Global Perspective, Table 2 Meta-organizations: scope of operations, year of establishment, the standards and guidelines used to evaluate QA agencies

	INQAAHE	ENQA	CHEA	RIACES	APQN
Coverage	Woldwide	Europe	US and beyond	Iberoamerica	Asia – Pacific
Established	1991	2000	1996	2003	2003
Standards/ guidelines	Guidelines of good practice (GGP)	European standards and guidelines (ESG)	CHEA eligibility standards Quality principles	Guidelines of good practice (PBP)	Chiba principles

pressures, made and justified only on the basis of published criteria and procedures, and that agencies have the needed resources to operate in an effective, timely and efficient way.

The guidelines can be used for different purposes: to guide the design and development of new agencies; to serve as a framework for the self-evaluation of agencies, in order to identify aspects for improvement; for the external review of agencies, in order to certify their substantial compliance with international good practice, and thus, ensure the credibility and validity of their work.

In Europe, all agencies must be evaluated against the ESG, in order to be included in the European QA Register for Higher Education, EQAR; in the US, CHEA reviews agencies against principles developed with participation of higher education institutions. In other regions, agencies can apply to INQAAHE for external review, which is carried out against the GGP, with a team of international experts, or to some of the regional networks offering this service (such as the Asia Pacific Quality Network (APQN) or the Iberoamerican Network for QA (RIACES) covering Latin American countries plus Spain and Portugal (Table 2).

Quality Assurance and Higher Education Institutions

After over 25 years of quality assurance, it became important to learn what impact it had had on higher education institutions. A comprehensive review of the results of these studies (Liu et al.

2015) analyzed several studies in focusing in Europe, Australia, the US and Taiwan and showed that the results appear quite consistent.

At the organizational level, most studies report the development of institution wide quality management policies and procedures, the improvement of strategic planning, better information systems and their increased use in evidence based decision making. This is linked to a shift in power from the academic units to the central administration, an increased professionalization of management practices and in some cases, the development of a managerial approach that tends to improve efficiency and administrative effectiveness, albeit sometimes ignoring or, at least, downplaying academic priorities.

At the academic level, there is a stronger recognition of the central role of teaching and learning. Resources for teaching and learning have improved, and increased attention is paid to students' learning outcomes and to the relationship between them and teaching methods. However, studies did not find hard evidence about actual improvements in student learning outcomes or on the overall operation of universities.

Some negative impacts were also mentioned: in many cases, institutions tend to focus on compliance rather than on quality management; QA processes also impose a heavy workload on academic staff, and in many cases, QA agencies tend to focus more on formal aspects or quantitative indicators without paying attention to the more substantive issues underlying them.

A study carried out in Latin America, Spain and Portugal (Lemaitre and Zenteno 2012), showed very similar results. It also showed that while respondents tended to identify changes such as those highlighted above with quality assurance, they ascribed actual improvements to institutional policies, not linked to the participation in QA processes.

While a direct link between quality assurance and improvement may be difficult to find, all the evidence points towards the need to promote and improve internal quality management as the major mechanism for the improvement of the different functions of higher education institutions.

It is also important to mention that QA criteria and processes are a strong driver for institutions to rethink their mission, priorities or profiles; while this is often criticized as compliance, it gives quality assurance agencies and processes a significant role in the promotion of changes in higher education.

Challenges to Quality Assurance

Higher education is changing all over the world. Contemporary students do not resemble the traditional students of 10 or 20 years ago; new programs have emerged, in different teaching and learning modes; curricula now need to cover knowledge, skills and wider and transferrable competencies in anticipation of the unknown needs of tomorrow's graduates; new providers go far beyond the mix of public and private institutions, and include both higher education institutions and a wide range of other providers.

Quality assurance has provided a needed answer to the uncertainty many countries face regarding higher education. It has provided governments with a 'soft power' regulatory tool to deal with higher education institutions, and societies with a mechanism to reduce the uncertainty regarding the quality of higher education provision. It has been accepted by most institutions, and has been around for a number of years, doing more or less the same. It now faces a number of challenges in order to take into account the needs and demands of a changing landscape.

The first challenge has to do with the focus of its work, and the contradictory requirements it needs to meet.

The expansion of enrollment and the diversification of the student body has made governments acutely concerned with the outcomes and the efficiency of higher education. The increasing diversity of institutions translates into an eroding social trust in higher education, and into the need for *someone* to provide evidence of quality. Governments are expected to assume the responsibility for quality control, and quality assurance agencies seem to be the most qualified instruments for it. This leads to an emphasis on QA's regulatory role, an insistence on the development of standardized quality criteria and indicators, and a link between accreditation and incentives (such as funding, access to student aid, work opportunities), which effectively reduce the diversity of higher education and promote compliance.

At the same time, as the studies on the impact of QA on higher education institutions show, QA is unable by itself to generate changes that will improve institutional performance. One of the main principles of quality assurance is that quality is mainly the responsibility of the institutions themselves – and this requires a strong capacity for self-regulation and for institutional quality management (Shah 2012).

An emphasis on control, as many countries are currently doing, can only reinforce the danger of developing a compliance culture, where institutions – having learnt to play the external quality assurance game – go through the motions, but are not really motivated to make any changes.

A second challenge relates to the consideration of diversity. Diversity takes many forms, some more obvious than others: mass demand for higher education translates into an increasing heterogeneity of the student population, which, in turn, drives the need for program differentiation, internal diversification at the institutional level and the segmentation of HE systems. From the point of view of quality assurance, diversity is also present in the need to assess innovative practices and the impact of technology on teaching and learning. As an

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example, the emergence of open educational resources, including but not limited to massive open online courses (MOOCs), makes it necessary to adapt current standards and criteria developed for face to face regular programs to the features and characteristics of these new types of programs (Lemaitre and Zenteno 2012).

However, even though diversity is considered a 'persistent and salient issue', most QA agencies apply the same standards or criteria to all the institutions within their system (UNESCO 2015). There are no significant changes to criteria being applied to public or private institutions; to universities with a strong research function and research based teaching and to universities focused mostly on teaching undergraduates; to university and non-university institutions and programs; to face-to-face and on-line or distance programs.

The rationale behind this homogeneity is that these criteria are applied under a 'fitness for purpose' approach, and therefore, even though they look the same, they are actually used in different ways. This is true in many cases, but insofar as this approach leaves the differences implicit and subject to the understanding of the peer reviewers – who tend to come from prestigious universities – the risk of QA promoting a traditional, academic model for higher education is great.

A third challenge refers to the sustainability of quality assurance processes. Quality assurance is a demanding process, requiring qualified technical staff, trained external reviewers, institutional time and staff to carry out self-assessment exercises, and respected and legitimate specialists at the decision-making level. Program accreditation is evidently more demanding than institutional accreditation, but providing some measure of assurance about the content and quality of learning outcomes is an essential component for student and professional mobility, both aspects increasingly relevant in the current higher education context. Quality assurance agencies around the world are struggling with the need to balance conflicting demands for increased coverage and rising costs, and new initiatives such as the integration of institutional and learning outcomes related evaluation, cluster reviews, or risk based assessment, are currently being explored.

Cross-References

▶ Accountability in Higher Education
▶ Evaluative State, Higher Education, The
▶ Quality Assurance and Internationalization, Higher Education

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Quality Assurance: in some cases, it is equated with accreditation, quality audit, regulatory measures

▶ Quality Assurance in Higher Education, A Global Perspective

Quality Management

▶ US Accreditation and Quality Assurance, International Dimensions

Quality of Higher Education Systems

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Synonyms

Educational standards; System performance

Definition

The degree to which a system of higher education meets personal and national needs in an efficient manner.

The "quality" of a national system of higher education is a multidimensional concept. Quality is most frequently measured in terms of outcomes, but outcomes depend on the input of adequate resources and favorable public policy – themselves measures of quality as they signal government commitment to education. The relationship between inputs and outcomes provides a measure of value added or efficiency that represents a further element of quality. A well-performing system requires appropriate quality-ensuring processes to be in place at both the institutional and national level. Reputation is yet another dimension of quality. It combines a multitude of measures, but in essence it is a summary measure of past values of actual performance.

Quality must be evaluated against the missions of the system. In very general terms, the function of higher education is to educate and train a nation's people, contribute to innovation through research, and assist industry to raise productivity. A quality system of higher education is important for raising income levels and promoting what might be termed a civil society.

The desirable attributes of a system of higher education will depend in part on the nation's level of economic development. For example, in developing countries the returns from spending on health and schooling are relatively high, and this will restrict the availability of resources for higher education. Thus quality can be measured in absolute terms or relative to a country's income level.

A nation's higher education system encompasses a variety of institutions such as research-intensive universities, technical institutes, and community colleges. This calls for a fit-for-purpose concept of quality, whereby the performance of each type of institution should be judged according to its specific mission. Research-intensive universities will place particular emphasis on research publications and their impact, colleges on teaching, and technical institutions on training. Quality measures of higher education systems should reflect these institution-specific missions. But in evaluating the quality of a higher education system as a whole, it is also necessary to include features that are above the responsibilities of individual institutions. The additional features include the range of institutions, participation rates, how well the system meets the national need for skills and research, the monitoring of quality across the system, and the access to higher education by disadvantaged groups. Ideally, a quality system is one where members of society can access a form of education appropriate to their interests and abilities, and that, in turn, is also beneficial to the nation. A narrow choice of alternative forms of higher education will negate this aim, and participation rates will be lowered.

A quality system of higher education needs to be embedded in the wider society (Douglass 2016). Thus, an important group of outcomes relate to connectivity with industry and government. International connectivity is also important as it links the nation's institutions with world's best practice and new developments (Altbach 2013). Research connectivity includes joint research with industry and with international collaborators, and knowledge transfer with industry. Connectivity in teaching and training includes the international inward and outward movements of students, public lectures and media work, and the take-up of online courses (de Rassenfosse and Williams 2015).

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A system with quality outcomes may still be inefficient in that it needlessly uses more resources than are necessary to achieve the outcomes. Productivity at the national level compares national outcomes with resource inputs. Low levels of productivity can reflect both poor policy settings and institutional inefficiencies. Quality assurance safeguards are needed to promote efficiency and monitor outcomes.

Quality Assurance and Measuring System Performance

A range of stakeholders may provide quality assurance measures. The principal responsibility lies with government and institutions, but professional accreditation bodies are also important. Measures are of two interrelated types: those that aim to ensure that specified standards are being met or those whose aim is to improve quality (Woodhouse 1999). For both aims transparency of approach improves effectiveness.

The main drivers of government interest in the performance of higher education are (i) the role that tertiary institutions play in economic development and (ii) accountability for government funds allocated to the sector. The internationalization of education has led to an international convergence of quality practices (Blanco-Ramirez and Berger 2014) and turned attention to quality assurance measures for cross-border higher education (OECD 2005).

Governments monitor performance both directly and indirectly. Direct measures include control over the registration of institutions, quality audits of institutions, and performance-based funding. Some countries adopt a national qualifications framework (Harvey and Williams 2010a: 10–11). Indirect quality assurance is achieved by requiring institutions to set up quality control and reporting systems and monitoring their implementation. The European Standards and Guidelines (Bologna Process 2009) provide for quality assurance at both the system and institutional level.

At the institutional level, the emphasis is on measures aimed at improving quality. These include monitoring of research performance, student and peer evaluation of teaching, continuous quality improvement management plans, monitoring student retention and engagement, reviews of management, and external reviews of disciplines (Harvey and Williams 2010b: 81–85). These quantitative and qualitative data are used to meet both external reporting requirements and to support university decision-making and planning. There is a large literature on institutional policies and procedures that is described generically as institutional research (Webber 2016).

Quality assurance is data dependent. Within and across countries, there exist various types of data collection that differ in the extent to which they are integrated or fragmented. This poses challenges to evidence-based national policy making and international comparisons. National data are most comprehensive in developed countries with a codified national system of data collection. Data are less comprehensive in those federations where collection is the responsibility of subnational governments. Data for developing countries is patchy; the most common omission is information on private expenditure on higher education. Data limitations are a particular problem for international comparisons although through the efforts of international organizations such as the OECD, World Bank, and UNESCO, working in collaboration with national agencies, the quality, coverage, and comparability are improving over time.

Empirical Studies

Measurement of quality has traditionally been at the institutional level, dating from the first *U.S. News and World Report* in 1983. These national score cards (van Dyke 2005) are designed primarily to help students in their choice of institutions, and so the data consist of quality measures of academic staff, incoming students, undergraduate and graduate programs, and the level of resources. The more recent international rankings of universities commenced in 2003 with the work of the education faculty at Shanghai Jiao Tong University. Internationally comparable data are

limited for the teaching-learning activities of institutions with the result that the international measures are primarily indicators of research. However, the OECD's (2013) Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies provides data on the competencies and skills of graduates in participating countries. A wide set of measures are included in the European Union's U-Multirank (www.umultirank.org) project. In an attempt to control the quality of the rankings themselves, the Observatory on Academic Ranking and Excellence (IREG) has developed a set of guidelines for ranking, the so-called Berlin principles, and provides evaluations of rankings (www.ireg-observatory.org).

The first international ranking of systems of higher education, commissioned by *Universitas 21*, an international group of universities, appeared in 2012 (Williams et al. 2013). Quality is measured under four headings: two input measures (resources and environment) and two measures of outcomes (connectivity and output). An auxiliary ranking takes account of differences in GDP per capita.

There is a growing consensus that the best performing national tertiary education systems are those in which governments set the broad parameters and monitor performance but allow institutions much internal autonomy (Aghion et al. 2010; Hoareau et al. 2013; Salmi 2007). Measures of the extent of institutional autonomy in four areas (organizational, financial, staffing, and academic) have been compiled by the European University Association (www.university-autonomy.eu). Competition is also an important spur to improvement. Harvey and Williams (2010a: 8) note that "[r]esearch has shown that external quality assurance can stimulate but also create obstacles for institutional improvement."

The empirical evidence shows that a range of policy frameworks can produce quality systems: the USA and the Nordic countries have high-quality systems, but the role of government differs greatly in jurisdiction and funding (Enders et al. 2013; Universitas 21 2016). What is clear, however, is what produces a higher education system of low quality: strong government control over the operations of institutions but limited government funding.

Cross-References

- ▶ Higher Education and National Development, Meanings and Purposes
- ▶ Higher Education and the Public Good
- ▶ Private Higher Education
- ▶ Public Higher Education
- ▶ Understanding Institutional Diversity
- ▶ World-Class Universities

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Quality Review: external review, peer review, external evaluation

▶ Quality Assurance in Higher Education, A Global Perspective