



A

to

Z in QA

**QUALITY ASSURANCE AND
ACCREDITATION COUNCIL**

*(Newly Established Department of the
University Grants Commission, Ministry of Education)*

PREFACE

The concept of Quality Assurance (QA) is not a new one, but the range of the terminology and methodologies which are now used to define, develop and apply it, are relatively recent. Industrial models of QA are not easily adapted to the needs of the Higher Education sector, and accordingly, there is a large number of different perceptions of what is meant by QA in Higher Education.

This booklet presents some commonly accepted definitions in relation to QA, and is expected that it would serve as a reference point for all those who are interested in QA in Higher Education. The list of definitions given here is not exhaustive and could be added or revised to reflect the future developments.

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ACCREDITATION

An evaluation of whether an institution or program qualifies for a certain status or the actual conferring of that status. In the latter sense, it is the same as Quality Approval. The status may have implications for the institution itself (e.g. Permission to operate) and/or its students (e.g. eligibility for grants) and/or its graduates (e.g. Qualified for certain employment). In theory, the output of an accreditation is a yes/no or pass/fail decision, but gradations are possible, usually in the context of a transitional phase (towards or away from 'pass').

*In many countries, **Accreditation** is by reference to 'absolute', externally set criteria. In others, accreditation is a certification that an institution or program has educationally appropriate objectives that are being achieved. It does not indicate whether any specified standard is being achieved. It is therefore similar to Quality Audit plus the check of the appropriateness of the goals.*



CERTIFICATION

Official recognition that a specified status has been achieved or that certain privileges may be exercised.

COURSE

A course is the smallest component for which a student may enroll. A course or collection of courses, if completed successfully, results in the award of a qualification.



EFFECTIVENESS

A process is effective if its outcomes match the stated goals. Effectiveness is often seen as an aspect of quality.

EFFICIENCY

Refers to the cost in relation to the outcomes achieved. It is rarely possible to describe it in absolute terms. One process is more efficient than another if it achieves the same outcomes at a lower cost.



GLOBAL QUALITY LABEL

This is given to internationally trustworthy Quality Assurance and Accreditation Agencies (QAAAs), under the legitimacy of a consortium formed by international groups, International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) and UNESCO. It is awarded to an agency guarantees that this agency meets the internationally defined standards for trustworthy quality assurance. These include clear commitment to develop international standards of academic quality among the institutions and programs evaluated by it, fair and appropriate quality assessment procedures, well developed and publicly available protocols, published reports, etc. As a consequence, the quality mark of the QAAA signifies that the institutions and programs evaluated by this agency meet trustworthy standards of academic quality. Students, academic staff, programs and institutions wishing to cooperate with these programs and institutions in the context of various forms of internationalization of higher education, can have a reasonable confidence in their academic quality.



INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW

It focuses on the powers and responsibilities, which institutions hold for quality and standards. It is concerned with how an institution assures itself and the wider public, that the quality and standards it sets for itself are being achieved.

Institutional Review analyses and tests the effectiveness of an institution's processes for managing and assuring the quality of academic activities undertaken by the institution. It evaluates the extent to which internal quality assurance schemes can be relied on to maintain the quality of provision over time.

INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

Education involving an international dimension, including transnational education, foreign students ('on-shore'), student fieldwork in other countries ('off-shore'), international studies, research collaboration and technical cooperation.

INTERNATIONALIZATION

The process of integrating an international/intercultural dimension into the teaching, research and service functions of the institution.

ISO

An abbreviation used typically to refer to the International Organization for Standardization. Originated from the Greek word 'iso', meaning 'level' or 'straight'.



P

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

A representation - numeric or otherwise - of the state of, or outcomes from, an organization, or any of its parts or processes. Performance Indicators are, as their name suggests, indicators, subject to informed interpretation and judgment, for example, by groups such as audit/review panels. They are sometimes called management indicators, to suggest their purpose rather than their source.

PROGRAM

The collection of courses that lead to a qualification

PROFESSIONAL ACCREDITATION

Academic judgments about students and their programs of study concern the development of broad intellectual skills, together with an understanding of all dimensions of a subject, whether or not they have immediate vocational application. Accreditation by a professional body, however, has an immediate function, namely ensuring that the successful graduates of an accredited program have crossed the threshold of immediate occupational competence and merit public confidence



Q

QUALIFICATION

An award that recognizes the attainment of a level of educational achievement. It includes degrees, diplomas and certificates.

QUALIFICATION DESCRIPTORS

Summarize the student learning outcomes/objectives of the qualification at each level. They enable a distinction to be made between the attitudes and achievements of graduates from programs at different level.

QUALITY

- *The totality of essential features expressing the nature and specifics of a thing.*
- *Conformance to requirements [Crosby].*
- *Fitness for purpose [Juran]. Here, purpose has to be interpreted broadly, to include mission, goals, objectives, specifications etc. This is an inclusive definition, as every organization or activity has a purpose, even if it is not always precisely stated. Fitness for purpose means that an organization has procedures in place which are appropriate for the specified purposes, and that there is evidence to show that these procedures are in fact achieving the specified purposes.*
- *Quality in Higher Education is a multi-dimensional concept, which should embrace all its functions and activities: teaching and academic programs, research and scholarship, staffing, students, buildings, faculties, equipment, services the community and the academic environment. Achieving quality in education involves two steps. The first step is for institutions to set objectives that embody what is expected and required by the stakeholders, in addition to responding to broader issues, such as the demands arising from the characteristic nature of academic activity and the rapid development of knowledge. The second step is for the institution to ensure that it attains its objectives.*

QUALITY ASSESSMENT

The process of external evaluation undertaken by an external body of the quality of educational provisions in institutions or departments, in particular the quality of the student experience. There may be a pass/fail boundary somewhere along the grade spectrum. Quality Assessment may be criterion-referenced to (supposed) 'absolutes' (that is, standards rather than quality), norm-referenced (across institutions or the discipline), or criterion-referenced to the institution's own specifications or goals. The first two of these permit comparison to be made between institutions or programs, with the first being more attractive because it produces absolute results. In practice, such absolutes are difficult both to define and to measure, so the second two options are more common.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

The means (i.e. the policies, attitudes, actions, procedures etc.), by which an institution can guarantee with confidence and certainty, that the standards and quality of its educational provision are being maintained and enhanced. It includes checking whether the Quality Control procedures are in place, are being used and are effective. It requires actions internal to the organization, but may also involve actions of external bodies.

QUALITY AUDIT

The process of examining institutional procedures for assuring quality and standards and whether the arrangements are implemented effectively and achieve stated objectives. The underlying purpose of Continuation Audit is to establish the extent to which institutions are discharging effectively their responsibilities for the standards of awards granted in their name and for the quality of education provided to enable students to attain standards. It is a systematic and independent determination whether the planned arrangements (that is, the quality control and assurance procedures) are suitable to achieve the objectives; the actual quality activities conform to the planned arrangements and the arrangements are being implemented effectively.

QUALITY CONTROL

The verification procedures (both formal and informal) used by institutions in order to monitor quality and standards to a satisfactory standard and as intended. In Industry, where Quality Control is implemented at operational level, if the checks and measurements show that the specifications are not being achieved, the items are destroyed or re-worked. In Higher Education, the equivalents of these two actions are to fail a student, or to provide remedial work and a further opportunity to meet the standards.

QUALITY CULTURE

The creation of a high level of internal institutional quality assessment mechanisms and the ongoing implementation of the results. Quality Culture can be seen as the ability of the institution, program etc to develop quality assurance implicitly in the day to day work of the institution and marks a move away from periodic assessment to ingrained quality assurance.

QUALITY ENHANCEMENT

The process of positively changing activities in order to provide for a continuous improvement in the quality of institutional provision.

QUALITY MANAGEMENT

All aspects of the management function that determine and implement the intentions and direction of an organization as regards quality matters.

QUALITY MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

The set of procedures for determining and implementing the intentions of an organization as regards quality.

QUALITY SYSTEM

The organizational structure, responsibilities, procedures, processes and resources for implementing quality management. May include the quality documentation, which is used to correlate the various activities that implement the quality policy. It encompasses quality management (the functions) and the quality management system (the procedures).



R

REVIEW

An institution (or any part thereof) may be reviewed for any purpose, and the term 'Quality Review' is a useful neutral term that can embrace any checking mechanism, whether it is assessment, audit or accreditation, internal or external, and so on.

**SELF-ACCREDITING INSTITUTION**

An institution of higher education that has been authorized to introduce new courses and programs without seeking approval from an external body.

STAKEHOLDERS

Any individual, group or organization having a valid interest in a field or matter. Stakeholders in Higher Education include students, parents, employers, the government, the community, professional associations, graduates and academic and non-academic staff etc. The term is neutral and descriptive, and is valuable in emphasizing the breadth of responsibility of educational institutions, but its use should not obscure the fact that different groups of Stakeholders (for example, students, employers) have quite different interests or needs.

STANDARDS

A level or grade of performance, such as an explicit level of academic attainment by a student, or the amount of student support provided by an institution. One function of standards is to measure the criteria by which quality may be judged. Standards are difficult to define with precision in advance although every attempt should be made to communicate what is expected of students to help guide their preparation.

Another use of the term Standards may be called a procedural or Quality Assurance (QA) Standard, to distinguish it from student Standards. QA Standards focus on what educational providers, teachers and trainers must meet when developing and delivering educational programs and assuring the quality of their educational activities. QA Standards typically involve compliance to standard definitions, standard formats and standard procedures. QA Standards exist to support learner achievement of student standards.

SUBJECT REVIEW

It evaluates the quality of education within a specific subject or discipline and is focused on the quality of the student learning experience and on student achievement.

SUBJECT BENCHMARKING

A policy device aimed at improving the capacity of subject communities to regulate their academic standards. It achieves this by creating subject based information that can be used by teaching teams as a prompt for self-critical reflection and further development. Subject Benchmark Statements provide a set of reference points to show how the key features of a program, its intended learning outcomes and the standards that derive from these intended outcomes, relate to what is deemed appropriate by the subject community.

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