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External quality assurance of higher education in Anglophone Africa

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in Anglophone Africa

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Report of an IIEP distance education course
25 September – 22 December 2006

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In line with IIEP/UNESCO's broader mandate to act as a clearinghouse of information and experience, this publication presents the outcomes of a distance education course on external quality assurance for a broader public. The report is addressed to those interested in learning about the organization and methodology of IIEP distance education courses, as well as those who wish to obtain information about the development of the external quality assurance systems in certain countries of Anglophone Africa.

The views, opinions and interpretations expressed in this report are entirely those of the course participants, and do not necessarily reflect the views of the organization they represent.

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This series of documents aims to share fresh results from IIEP's research programme with the educational planning community.

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Table of contents

List of abbreviations	6
1. Introduction	7
2. Course content and assignments	11
Module 1: Making basic choices for external quality assurance systems	19
Module 2: Conducting the process of EQA	31
Module 3: Setting up and developing the quality assurance agency	35
Module 4: Understanding and assessing quality	41
Module 5: Regulating and assuring the quality of cross-border providers of higher education	51
3. Evaluation of the course	56
4. Conclusion	58
Appendix 1. IIEP course team	59
Appendix 2. Course calendar	61
Appendix 3. List of participants	63

List of abbreviations

AAU	Association of African Universities
AUQA	Australian Universities Quality Agency
CBHE	Cross-border higher education
CHE	Commission for Higher Education
DoE	Department of Education
EQA	External quality assurance
ETQA	Education and Training Quality Assurer
HEI	Higher education institution
HEQC	Higher Education Quality Committee
HERQA	Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency
INQAAHE	International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education
MCEETYA	Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs
MOE	Ministry of Education
NAB	National Accreditation Board
NAAC	National Assessment and Accreditation Council
NBTE	National Board for Technical Education
NCHE	National Council for Higher Education
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NUC	Nigerian Universities Commission
QA	Quality assurance
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
SETA	Sector Education and Training Authority
STAA	State and Territory Accrediting Agency
TEC	Tertiary Education Council
TCU	Tanzania Commission for Universities
UGC	University Grants Committee

1 Introduction

The IIEP programme on external quality assurance

In recent decades, most higher education systems have experienced an overall trend of expansion, which, in many instances, is due to the growing social demand for higher education. As these systems have expanded, institutions of higher education have become more numerous and diversified.

Confronted by a growing demand for higher education provision, many countries have promoted the development of private education as a means of satisfying social demand within the context of a restricted budget. This has led to a tremendous growth of the private higher education sector, which, in many countries, has resulted in an unequal provision of education in terms of quality. As a result, national authorities have found it more difficult and complex to assure the quality of higher education through traditional mechanisms.

Moreover, as a direct manifestation of globalization, national governments in different countries are also faced with a new set of transnational providers of higher education. This phenomenon poses immeasurable challenges to the regulation and recognition of credentials. Inadequate information systems (and a lack of control and regulation in many countries) have resulted in new types of academic fraud – such as diploma mills, the selling of credentials, and the deliberate provision of false information on the nature and validity of credentials.

All of the trends that are affecting higher education systems worldwide have led many public authorities to review their traditional quality assurance structures or create new systems of external quality assurance (EQA). The current challenge for national policy-makers is to design a robust EQA system while taking into account its organization and methodology.

Considering this context, IIEP undertook a research programme on EQA with the objective of exploring the organizational and methodological options of different EQA systems. Within this programme, a series of publications has been undertaken. The first monographs that focused on specific objectives of EQA systems as derived from national higher education policies concerned Colombia, Hungary, India, the Philippines and the United States.

This first series of publications was followed by a project on the regulation and quality assurance of cross-border providers of higher education. This resulted in a publication of seven case studies on the regulation and quality assurance of transnational provision of higher education in Argentina, Chile, Kenya, Oman, the Philippines, Russia and South Africa.

Underlying assumptions and objectives of the course

Based on the outcomes of the IIEP research programme on EQA, the distance education course, 'External quality assurance: options for higher education managers', was developed. The purpose of this course was to help national decision-makers, managers and officials in charge of quality assurance in higher education to set up a new national mechanism for quality assurance, develop their existing systems or evaluate their current practices.

The material of the course was based on the following assumptions:

- External quality assurance systems have the potential to improve teaching, learning and research activities.
- There are many methodological and organizational options in EQA and much experimentation has taken place in different contexts.
- A number of international and regional forums (mainly consisting of quality assurance agencies) have contributed to the building of a consensus on desirable options in EQA.
- EQA systems must be managed in a professional manner through specialized structures and appropriate procedures.
- Not all countries have the same level of knowledge and understanding of EQA or indeed a structure in place. There is, thus, a great need for capacity building through structured learning programmes and the creation of communities of practice.

The more detailed objectives of this course were to:

- Provide participants with concepts, tools and options to put in place, develop and sustain their EQA systems.
- Inform participants about the implications underlying these different options and stimulate reflection about their adaptation to different institutional contexts.
- Provide a range of specific examples of international experiences concerning the options in EQA.
- Draw lessons on 'good practice' in EQA systems so that teaching and learning practices can be improved.

Course design

This distance course was based on three learning techniques:

- Independent study of materials and individual reflection on questions and exercises.
- A scheduled group session related to each module to discuss individual responses and prepare a consolidated group submission to be addressed to the IIEP course team for comments.
- Interaction with the IIEP course team and other participating organizations.

In addition, the IIEP course team (see *Appendix I*) provided guidance through a clearly established calendar of activities (see *Appendix II*). Regular communication through e-mail messages kept participants informed of the tasks to be carried out, and provided opportunities to exchange knowledge and experiences.

The approach proposed by this distance education programme provided participants with a framework for collaborative learning. On the one hand, the course allowed participants to work with colleagues of their institution while reflecting together on their EQA systems, and also being informed of different organizational and methodological options in the field of quality assurance. On the other hand, participants had the opportunity to meet and exchange information and experiences with other participants from countries of the same region in a virtual environment, as well as to learn from the feedback of the course instructors.

Course material and assignments

The course material included a guide for participants and co-ordinators, as well as the following five modules:

- Module 1: Making basic choices for external quality assurance systems.
- Module 2: Conducting the process of external quality assurance.
- Module 3: Setting up and developing the quality assurance agency.
- Module 4: Understanding and assessing quality.
- Module 5: Regulating and assuring the quality of cross-border providers of higher education.

All modules followed a similar organization. They started by presenting the learning objectives of the module, and by introducing general questions for reflection. Since the modules are intended to be used as a self-study material, they also include a series of individual activities that accompany the text. The modules end by summarizing the main concepts and ideas that participants have learnt.

The reading material included conceptual and theoretical elements as well as practical examples. In particular, case examples outlined available options in particular contexts with regard to crucial choices to be made in EQA systems.

Each module was accompanied by a different assignment and, in the case of Module 2 and Module 5, by an online debate. Through various tasks, assignments were intended to stimulate reflection of participants on different aspects of their existing (or future) EQA systems. The online debate offered participants the opportunity to share and exchange experiences among members of different organizations on selected issues related to QA.

Communication support

The course relied largely on e-mail for interaction; an e-mail address was specially created through which participants received and sent messages to the IIEP course team.

During the course, two online debates were organized to allow individual interaction among all participants. These online debates relied on SYMPA e-mail list software. Through SYMPA facilities, a message created and sent by one participant is automatically distributed to the rest of the course members.

Participants also had access to a private web site specifically created for the course. This web site contained all the course documents, the contributions to the different assignments, the comments and the synthesis reports. This virtual space allowed participants to have access to documents to be shared with other members of the course. At the end of the course, the web site became a useful database on topics related to EQA in higher education that remained available to all participants.

The participants

A total of 74 participants from 15 organizations were accepted on the course. These participating organizations are located in 14 different countries of Anglophone Africa: Botswana (Tertiary Education Council), Eritrea (Ministry of Education), Ethiopia (Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency), Ghana (National Accreditation Board), Kenya (Commission for Higher Education), Lesotho (Ministry of Education and Training), Malawi (Ministry of Education and Human Resources), Mauritius (Tertiary Education Commission), Nigeria (National Board for Technical Education and National Universities Commission), South Africa (Higher Education Quality Committee), Sudan (Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research), Uganda (National Council for Higher Education), United Republic of Tanzania (Tanzania Commission for Universities) and Zambia (Ministry of Education).

A group of from three to six participants represented each organization. In order to facilitate the working team, each group nominated a co-ordinator among its members. The co-ordinator's role consisted of organizing and scheduling the activities and assignments of the team throughout the course.

The participants of the course occupied a diversity of functions (directors, co-ordinator, researchers, administrators, deans, managers, head of division, senior experts, deputy secretary, etc.) in the area of quality assurance in ministries of education, or in quality assurance agencies. The full list of participants is presented in *Appendix III*.

2 Course content and assignments

Introductory phase: getting to know the participating institutions

Before the course officially started, a pre-course phase was organized. The purpose of this phase was to establish a sustainable communication link through e-mail with the participants, as well as to get to know each other (the IIEP course team, the participants, their teams and organizations).

In order to test communication, the course team sent a welcome message to the participants accompanied with attached files. Once participants received the message and the files, they had to acknowledge receipt, and state whether they were able to open the attachments. The attachments consisted of the list of participants with their contact details and the presentation of the course team.

The task corresponding to 'Assignment 0' consisted of the preparation of an organizational profile. This document was intended to provide information about the basic features of the participants' organization, in particular about its role and operations in the quality assurance of the higher education system of their respective countries.

With the other members of their groups, the participants had to prepare, within 10 days, their organizational profile following a guide elaborated by the course team. This guide was divided into three sections. The first section invited participants to describe the particular functions that their organizations perform in the area of quality assurance. In the second section, participants were asked to present the organizational and operational problems that their organizations are facing. Finally, in a third section, participants were invited to relate the current challenges for their organizations.

The outcomes of the assignment show that the experience in the field of external quality assurance was heterogeneous among the participating organizations. Some of them were well-established institutions with a long tradition and experience in the field (e.g. NUC and NBTE Nigeria, HEQC South Africa, CHE Kenya). Others were newly established institutions (e.g. TEC Botswana, HERQA Ethiopia), or they were in the process of being established (e.g. Malawi).

The following chart summarizes the team's responses on this first assignment, submitted by 12 of the 15 participating institutions:

Country	Organization	Functions performed	Operational and organizational problems identified	Current challenges
Botswana	Tertiary Education Council (TEC)	<p>Approve applications from persons seeking to establish private institutions (registration).</p> <p>Review and approve programmes of study in respect of private HEIs (programme accreditation).</p> <p>Institutional audit leading to institutional accreditation.</p>		<p>Developing a tertiary education policy for the effective co-ordination of the system.</p> <p>Establishing functional structures.</p> <p>Increasing its human resources capacity.</p> <p>Registering credible and self-sustaining institutions; including cross-border providers.</p>
Ethiopia	Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency (HERQA)	<p>Institutional quality audits (future) of all HEIs.</p> <p>Review requests from private HEIs for the accreditation of degree programmes and offering advice to MoE on accreditation.</p>	<p>The establishment of a positive perception and independence from the Ministry of Education.</p> <p>The recruitment and retention of well qualified and experienced academic staff.</p> <p>The development a comprehensive set of policies and establishment of protocol and working practices.</p> <p>Absence of own means of transport to accomplish the field work.</p>	<p>Establishing the autonomy of the agency.</p> <p>Recruiting, training and retaining suitable staff.</p> <p>Establishing the distinction between accreditation and quality assurance.</p> <p>Coping with the indicated growth in requests for programme pre-accreditation and subsequent accreditation.</p> <p>Developing criteria and procedures for the pre-accreditation and accreditation of different modes of programme delivery (e.g. distance education, e-learning).</p> <p>Completing the development of procedures and guidance for institutional quality audits.</p> <p>Encouraging the establishment of robust quality assurance systems in HEIs while not compromising the ability of HERQA to make judgements on quality and quality assurance systems.</p> <p>Recruiting and training institutional quality auditors.</p> <p>Carrying out a first round of institutional quality audits in all HEIs within a reasonable time period while giving HEIs adequate time to establish QA systems and complete internal quality assessments.</p>

Country	Organization	Functions performed	Operational and organizational problems identified	Current challenges
Ghana	National Accreditation Board (NAB)	<p>Accredit both public and private tertiary institutions with regard to contents and standards of their programmes.</p> <p>Determine the equivalence of diplomas, certificates and other qualifications.</p>	<p>Absence of established benchmarks in individual academic or professional disciplines used to guide the assessors.</p> <p>Difficulty in identifying the best qualified and experienced experts to undertake the assessment exercises.</p> <p>Inadequate information received on institutions and the programmes they run and lack of education on what is required of them, etc.</p> <p>The NAB instruments (questionnaire) used are not fully understood by the institutions, leading to improper responses to answers in the questionnaire.</p> <p>The NAB being a subsidized organization relies on funding from the Government of Ghana.</p> <p>The NAB is unable to amend the Legislative Instrument (LI) that regulates the activities of the Board. The LI stipulates the fees that the Board charges to perform its functions, and the Board is unable to amend the LI to increase fees.</p> <p>Lack of co-operation from institutions and organizations outside the country from whom we seek information to assist with verifying authentic certificates and their equivalences. This relates to the function of the Board with regard to establishing the equivalences of certificates.</p> <p>The ineffective records and documentation of administration due to unavailability of required personnel.</p> <p>The inability of assessors to do a thorough job due to limited time given for the assessment exercises, and uncompetitive remuneration for assessors.</p>	<p>Need to strengthen public awareness by providing information to the public on the existence of NAB and its mandate.</p> <p>Apparent rigidity of some of the provisions of the Legislative Instrument 1700 which limits the operations of the Board, especially inability to pass on full cost involved in the accreditation exercises.</p> <p>The need to build the internal capacities of the Secretariat through staff training, development of methodologies and instruments for monitoring, evaluation and accreditation.</p>

Country	Organization	Functions performed	Operational and organizational problems identified	Current challenges
Kenya	Commission for Higher Education (CHE)	<p>Accreditation and licensing of academic programmes.</p> <p>Accreditation and licensing of institutions (Letter of Interim Authority, Award of Charter, Certificate of Re-inspection) which is mandatory for private universities.</p> <p>Validation of diploma programmes of post-secondary school institutions.</p> <p>Grant of authority to post-secondary institutions to collaborate with universities for purposes of offering degree programmes.</p> <p>Recognition and equating of qualifications.</p> <p>Planning and establishment and development of higher education institutions.</p>	<p>Public universities are not currently subject to quality assurance by CHE.</p> <p>Inadequate funding of CHE to effectively carry out its activities and thereby recruit adequate staff.</p>	<p>Legal challenges: There are several Acts that were in operation before the existence of the Commission, which at times conflict with the Act that established the Commission.</p> <p>Rapid expansion of university education providers responding to the high demand of higher education.</p> <p>Large number of cross-border higher education providers arising from commercialization of higher education; these have entered into collaborative arrangements with non-university institutions in offering degree programmes. The facilities available in these institutions may not be adequate to support the degree programmes.</p> <p>Distance and open learning modes of university education, including e-learning and virtual university (Africa Virtual University), which has arisen due to developments in ICT. Ensuring quality in these institutions is a challenge to the Commission.</p> <p>International networking, which is necessary for international benchmarking; this requires heavy financial input for staff continually to attend international conferences.</p> <p>Developing best practices that ensure that the Commission's processes are timely, but which also ensures high quality education without interfering with the autonomy of universities.</p>

Country	Organization	Functions performed	Operational and organizational problems identified	Current challenges
Malawi	Ministry of Education and Human Resources Council for Higher Education (to be established)	<p>Responsible for registration, accreditation and quality control.</p> <p>Advice on the establishment of private HEIs.</p> <p>Assesses physical facilities.</p> <p>Accredits programmes in private tertiary institutions.</p>		<p>Absence of a unifying body such as the Council for Higher Education.</p> <p>Lack of quality audit for HEIs. The delivery system is therefore not audited, inspected or monitored to ensure compliance.</p> <p>Lack of a unified legal framework to direct and control the establishment, registration and performance of public and private institutions of higher learning. Each one emerges separately.</p> <p>Lack of capacity to determine the needs for a demand-driven higher initiative. At present, the universities produce without necessarily responding to the demands of society, hence traditional but irrelevant courses are offered.</p>
Mauritius	Tertiary Education Commission (TEC)	<p>Registration of private institutions and accreditation of their programmes.</p> <p>Determination of recognition and equivalence of qualifications.</p> <p>Making recommendations to the Minister on applications received for the setting up of private institutions or branches, centres, or campuses of overseas institutions.</p> <p>In the future: undertake quality audit.</p>	<p>Time constraint problems in the accreditation process due to institutions submitting long lists of programmes that require considerable financial and human resources.</p> <p>Recruitment of experts in certain specific disciplines for the accreditation process.</p> <p>Institutions postponing their external audit due to the absence of internal quality assurance systems or absence of resources and appropriate resource persons to lead the exercise.</p> <p>Recruitment of qualified auditors.</p>	<p>The quality assurance of private institutions offering post-secondary programmes.</p> <p>The quality assurance of cross-border providers.</p>

Country	Organization	Functions performed	Operational and organizational problems identified	Current challenges
Nigeria	National Board for Technical Education (NBTE)	<p>Accreditation of academic programmes in all TVE institutions.</p> <p>Recommendations for the establishment of private TVE institutions.</p>	<p>Limited capacity of staff and outdated procedure and techniques in the Board and institutions.</p> <p>Limited efficacy of external accreditation due to absence of internal quality assurance within the institutions, thus reducing accreditation to mere 'periodic formality'.</p> <p>Traditional discrimination against the TVE sector, which perpetuates bureaucratic neglect, demotivates personnel and causes continuous decline in enrolment.</p> <p>Curricula are undergoing review but there is severe capacity and infrastructural limitation for effective ICT-based delivery.</p> <p>Institutions tend to run old and outdated curricula with very limited linkage to industry and job market.</p>	<p>Enhancing the quality currency and international comparability of TVE qualifications in view of current global trends and extensive mobility of labour.</p> <p>Improving the performance and employability of graduates.</p> <p>Improving the responsiveness of TVE programmes to labour market demands and national development needs, particularly for agricultural modernization.</p> <p>Promoting deeper ICT integration in teaching and learning.</p> <p>Improving the policy and regulatory framework for TVE.</p> <p>Strengthening information collection and disseminations.</p> <p>Enhancing institutional capability of Technical Institutions and the NBTE.</p> <p>Providing relevant and updated TVE curricula.</p> <p>Ensuring high and adequate number of quality staff in the TVE system through continuous staff development.</p> <p>Providing a system for competency-based training and workplace assessment for the informal sector.</p>
Nigeria	National Universities Commission (NUC)	<p>Institutional licensing (private).</p> <p>Programme licensing (public and private).</p> <p>Develops minimum standards for all academic programmes and accredits them.</p>	<p>Funding problems due to diminishing of resources allocated by the government, which has impacted on the numbers of experts involved in the activities and the numbers of days spent on the site visit.</p> <p>The increasing number of institutions bring to the limelight the problem of co-ordinating and ensuring quality.</p>	<p>Ensuring that universities not only maintain standards but also enhance it, in order to attain world standards.</p> <p>Ensuring that the universities maintain standards in their part-time programmes.</p>

Country	Organization	Functions performed	Operational and organizational problems identified	Current challenges
<p>South Africa</p>	<p>Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC)</p>	<p>Programmes accreditation and co-ordination.</p> <p>Re-accreditation of existing programmes in specific disciplines through national reviews.</p> <p>Institutional audits.</p> <p>Quality assurance promotion at system, institutional and individual level.</p>	<p>Setting up and institutionalizing new quality assurance systems, within the organization and across the sector. These include innovations such as the online system for programme-accreditation submissions.</p> <p>Attracting and retaining professional and administrative staff.</p>	<p>How far the quality assurance system will actually enable institutions to develop effective quality management systems.</p> <p>How far the quality assurance system finds effect in the still-evolving higher education system characterized by massive transformation.</p> <p>There are concerns about the unevenness in the capacity of institutions to management quality effectively. What happens when an institution does not have adequate capacity?</p> <p>There are concerns that the current approach to quality assurance systems in higher education will strengthen the divide between those institutions perceived to managing quality well and those perceived not to do so.</p> <p>The cost implications (for staff time and for financial and other resources) of establishing and maintaining effective quality management systems within institutions.</p> <p>The overall quality management system of South Africa makes co-ordinating quality assurance activities in higher education a major challenge. For example, there are more than 60 organizations, other than the higher education institutions themselves operating in higher education. All of these bodies have quality assurance mandates through their Acts. As a result, higher education institutions have to respond to numerous and sometimes differing external quality assurance requirements.</p>

Country	Organization	Functions performed	Operational and organizational problems identified	Current challenges
Sudan	Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research	Setting the policies for evaluation and accreditation.	<p>Lack of experience and training in the field of external evaluation.</p> <p>Lack of human and financial resources.</p> <p>Resistance of the universities to the external evaluation in a sense that it may interfere with their independence and autonomy; this makes more work for EVAC to disseminate the culture of quality and evaluation to these institutions.</p> <p>The large number of scattered universities (33) and university colleges (60) running more than 400 academic programmes in different disciplines.</p> <p>The discrepancies between the institutions in terms of infrastructure, human and financial resources.</p>	<p>Developing national standards for evaluation.</p> <p>Training EVAC technical staff and evaluators.</p> <p>Starting pilot evaluation studies.</p>
Uganda	National Council for Higher Education (NCHE)	<p>Institutional accreditation (LIA, provisional licence, charter).</p> <p>Programme accreditation.</p> <p>Quality audit.</p> <p>Determine equivalences.</p>	<p>Limited funding is single most operational problem.</p> <p>The lack of staff at the secretariat.</p>	<p>Inadequate staffing levels (currently at only 48 per cent).</p> <p>Implementation of a quality assurance framework including credit accumulation and transfer; minimum requirements for courses of study; institutional audits and self-evaluations; accreditation of programmes.</p> <p>Determination of national human resource requirements.</p> <p>Inability to license and tame online/distance education and offshore institutions and programmes.</p> <p>Regulation of access/bridging/remedial programmes among private institutions.</p> <p>The current legislation needs a number of amendments.</p>
Zambia	Ministry of Education			To maintain quality standards in an environment characterized by an increasing number of higher education providers.

Module 1: Making basic choices for external quality assurance systems

The first module of the course gave participants an overview of the current trends in higher education that are pushing education systems to establish EQA systems. This module also provided them with basic concepts related to the EQA process, and presented the different basic organizational and methodological choices when designing an EQA system.

After reading the module, participants received 'Assignment 1'. This assignment invited them to make an analysis of the main strengths and weaknesses of their existing (or future) EQA mechanisms. Participants were asked to do this analysis taking into account the following general questions:

1. Your EQA system has been set up to fulfil certain objectives. What are these objectives? Do you think that the mechanisms put in place are successful in achieving these objectives? What else needs to be done?
2. Do you consider that there is a good alignment between the overall purpose of your EQA system (quality control, accountability and/or improvement) and the newly created mechanisms?
3. Do you consider that your EQA system is comprehensive in its coverage (public/private sector, university and non-university institutions and type of programmes)? If not, what areas of the system need to be covered?
4. Do you consider that there is a good alignment between the EQA system and the traditional existing QA mechanisms? Do you consider that they form a consistent general QA system for the higher education institutions in your country?

As certain organizations have only recently put in place new EQA mechanisms, or they are still discussing their implementation, participants in this situation were asked to refer to the existing QA mechanisms and to try to consider the possible benefit of creating new ones.

A week later, participants sent their responses to the course team. Two examples of group submissions are presented below.

**IIEP distance education course on 'External quality assurance:
options for higher education managers'**

25 September – 22 December 2006

Assignment for Module 1

**The Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency (HERQA)
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia**

R.M. Campbell (Group Co-ordinator), Tesfaye Teshome, Guesh Hadgu, Aregash Samuel,
Yohannes Woldetensae, Girma Yadessa

***An analysis of main strengths and weaknesses of the Ethiopian EQA System
Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency (HERQA)
(This analysis focuses on the EQA system now being implemented)***

1. Your EQA system has been set up to fulfil certain purposes. What are these purposes? Do you think that the mechanisms put in place are successful in achieving these purposes? What else needs to be done?

The Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency (HERQA) in Ethiopia is an autonomous agency established by the Federal Government of Ethiopia through Higher Education Proclamation (351/2003) as one of the key agencies responsible for guiding and regulating the higher education sector. HERQA has been established to help ensure a high quality and relevant higher education system in the country through EQA.

The key purposes of HERQA as prescribed in the proclamation are:

- Assessing the relevance and quality of higher education offered by higher education institutions (HEIs): quality control.
- Ensuring that the higher education curriculum supports the country's development needs: relevance.
- Providing an efficient and transparent accreditation system: quality control / accountability.
- Encouraging and assisting the growth of an organizational culture that values quality and is committed to continuous improvement: quality enhancement.
- Give information to the public about the situation and status of HEIs: accountability.

HERQA has two strands to its work and employs two distinct procedures:

- Licensing (termed accreditation in Ethiopia) private HEIs to offer degree programmes based on minimum input standards.
- Institutional quality audits of all HEIs (both public and private) that consist of: (a) assessment of the quality and relevance of programmes and of the teaching and learning environment; and (b) assessment of the appropriateness and effectiveness of the approach to quality care and management, its systems of accountability, and its internal review mechanisms.

HERQA's mechanisms for accreditation are operational but external institutional quality auditing procedures are not yet implemented. While piloting has been carried out and reported, the agency has yet to embark on its first round of institutional quality audits.

The institutional quality auditing procedures that HERQA is implementing are designed to assess quality and relevance, and also to assess the quality and functioning of the internal quality assurance systems of the HEIs audits. It is thus a hybrid system in that it uses both an external quality audit approach that focuses on institutional quality assurance systems and a standards inspection typical of accreditation exercises. The focus will be on institutions, and not on programmes, although it is recognized that one cannot audit an HEI without considering its programmes.

Unusually, the process of accreditation is distinct from that of institutional quality audit. Accreditation requirements for private HEIs were established before HERQA was founded and the responsibility for considering applications for accreditation rested with the Ministry of Education. HERQA was then given the responsibility for making accreditation recommendations to the Ministry of Education. Accreditation criteria relate to input variables, and the award of accreditation permits a programme to be offered or to be continued to be offered. Only the private HEIs must seek programme accreditation. Programmes in public HEIs are accredited by virtue of the fact that they are offered by public HEIs that are all given the powers of self-accreditation in their charters.

Quality assurance is a new concept for HEIs in Ethiopia and most institutions are at a stage of raising awareness. The following tasks have been identified as necessary in strengthening HERQA's progress and achieving its EQA purposes:

- HERQA has already established the principle that each institution is responsible for the quality of its own institutional provision. The role of HERQA will be to support the HE sector in developing its systems, and to assess how effectively each institution achieves its educational goals at institutional level, based on the institution's own self-assessment. HERQA is committed to supporting the higher education sector in the development and enhancement of quality educational provision. To this end, HERQA will need to develop training, discussion forums, guidelines, manuals and good practice reports so that HEIs are well informed about the best international practice, and how good-quality HEIs within Ethiopia manage the quality processes.
- To date, there is no legislation that links outcomes of an external quality audit to funding, or student allocations, or the continuation of programmes. The consequences of HERQA's evaluation report for an HEI, and the associated accountability issues, need further clarification and need to be explicitly addressed.
- HERQA is working on determining threshold (to ensure minimum standards) and excellence indicators (to promote improvement and quality enhancement) for each of the 10 focus areas of quality assessment. This will form the framework for HERQA's institutional quality audit.
- HERQA is required to assess relevance as well as the quality of educational provision. However, there is still a need to clarify and agree on criteria regarding the issue of relevance. There is not yet a clear procedure on how relevance might be judged. At present, there is a lack of objective data, such as a labour market survey, to base part of the relevance assessment. HERQA therefore needs to develop its research capacity of labour market analysis to enable it to supplement the limited data that may currently exist.
- HERQA has yet to complete the development of detailed guidance for staff involved with institutional quality auditing and accreditation processes.
- HERQA needs to strengthen its staffing by recruiting and training more full-time staff and part-time institutional quality auditors.

- To date, HERQA has focused on ‘regular programmes’ i.e. those provided for full-time students who attend classes on campus. The agency needs to develop criteria and procedures for different modes of programme delivery (e.g. distance education, e-learning).
- HERQA is a young organization and needs to learn through strengthening and extending its links with local, regional and international agencies involved in similar work.

The traditional existing QA mechanisms (accreditation as licensing to operate based on minimum input standards) is not in line with HERQA’s strategic direction for EQA development. In due course, consideration will need to be given as to how best to move the practices in Ethiopia to come in line with those of most other countries where accreditation signifies more than meeting basic input standards. The current practice of accreditation does not carry with it recognition of the quality of the learning experience. As yet, there is no link between quality auditing and accreditation. Thus, accreditation needs to develop from the present licensing approach to incorporate institutional audit as a certification or hallmark for quality. This will constitute a shift in attention from the quality of the input to the quality of the educational process and the graduate outcome.

HERQA is based in Addis Ababa and its staff journey to HEIs in the nine regions of the country. At present, there are 9 public universities with 12 more due to open this academic year. In addition, there are just over 40 private HEIs with accredited degree programmes. It is likely that the number of private HEIs will increase. In the proclamation that established HERQA, provision was made for HERQA to decentralize and establish branch offices in the regions. In a large country where transportation is sometimes difficult, regionalization is seen as easing the logistics for field operations. More importantly, it will strengthen HERQA’s local knowledge, ease communications with HEIs, aid dissemination of information and help establish good working relationships with HEIs and other regional agencies and employers of graduates.

HERQA is aware of the need to monitor and evaluate its operations and their impact and, in particular, the accessibility, use and perceived value of its work. While we may consider that our practices will be successful in meeting our objectives, we must await the evidence.

2. Do you consider that there is a good alignment between the overall purpose of your EQA system (quality control, accountability and/or improvement) and the mechanisms put in place (licensing, accreditation, audit and assessment)?

Responsibility for quality rests with the individual HEIs. In terms of quality control, HERQA requires all HEIs to carry out self-assessments that must provide information and evaluation in 10 focus areas designated by HERQA. One of these is internal quality assurance. An EQA system is based on self-assessment, and will seek to verify claims to quality, and assess standards, relevance and internal QA mechanisms. As HERQA will report on quality and relevance, the alignment of the system with quality control could be seen to be strong. While HERQA anticipates that an HEI will respond positively to an EQA report and seek to improve its performance, at present, failure to do so is not penalized by the system. A public HEI will still be allocated students (the Ministry of Education allocates students to public universities) and a private HEI will not lose its accreditation. This aspect of EQA will need to be strengthened so that HEIs that fail to meet standards are open to sanctions.

Using various media, HERQA will make public the outcomes of its EQAs of all HEIs. The quality and relevance of the activities of the HEIs will thus be brought to the attention of their stakeholders (including – in the case of public HEIs – the Ministry of Education) and so HEIs will be made more publicly accountable.

With regard to improvement, HERQA will include in its EQA reports advice to HEIs on required, recommended and suggested improvements. On follow-up activities and/or subsequent EQAs, HERQA will seek evidence of implementation of improvements. EQA reports will also highlight good practice. HERQA plans to disseminate good practice through its workshops and conferences and via publications. While HERQA will strive to share good practice and to recommend and encourage improvement, because of the lack of linkage between accreditation and EQA, and the fact that the public HEIs do not require to be externally accredited, it is left to the professionalism of the staff of HEIs to enhance their quality, to maintain and seek to raise their standards and to ensure the relevance of their activities to the development needs of the country.

3. Do you consider that your EQA system is comprehensive in its coverage (public/private sector, university and non-university institutions and type of programmes)? If not, what areas of the system need to be covered?

The HERQA EQA system is comprehensive in its coverage in that it deals with all public and private HEIs that offer degree programmes. It thus covers universities, university colleges and colleges. It deals with undergraduate and postgraduate programmes.

As indicated earlier, the focus to date has been on standard programmes. HERQA will have to develop procedures to deal with other modes of programme delivery (e.g. distance, e-learning). It will also need to expand its coverage to deal with foreign HEIs that wish to establish a base in Ethiopia and Ethiopian institutions that wish to offer their degrees from bases outside the country.

HERQA is not mandated to provide EQA of certificate and diploma programmes offered by HEIs. These programmes are handled by the Technical, Vocational Education and Training Section of the Ministry of Education that has its own QA system.

4. Do you consider that there is a good alignment between the EQA system and the traditional existing QA mechanisms? Do you consider that they form a consistent general QA system for the higher education institutions in your country?

Systematic QA is not well developed in higher education institutions in Ethiopia. QA is very much in its inception phase. Encouraged by HERQA, HEIs are just beginning to set up QA units, centres and committees to manage QA at the institutional level. At department and faculty levels, 'academic commissions' usually oversee the curriculum. Student feedback is used to assess instructors. Student assessment is rarely subject to external examination, double marking or moderation. Grades are usually awarded based on norm referencing, and the explicit use of grade criteria is rare.

HERQA has had to develop its EQA procedures against this background of general underdevelopment of internal QA. In doing so, it has sought to involve both private and public HEIs, and to pilot procedures with institutions in both sectors. The EQA system being implemented by HERQA has been built on a restricted base of existing good practice in QA in the country. This has been somewhat of an advantage as in our consultations with providers, no HEIs have protested about non-alignment with their current practice. Indeed, it is considered that HERQA is establishing a national system that all HEIs should be able to accommodate, and which should help them maintain and seek to enhance the quality and relevance of their educational provision.

IIEP distance education course on 'External quality assurance: options for higher education managers'

25 September – 22 December 2006

Assignment for Module 1

South Africa

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An analysis of the South African higher education external quality assurance mechanisms: characteristic features, strengths and weaknesses

Introduction

The Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) is a permanent committee of the Council on Higher Education (CHE). The CHE was established by the Higher Education Act, Act 101 of 1997, as a body that takes charge of external quality assurance of higher education in South Africa. The formation of the Higher Education Quality Committee was necessary to help drive the national transformation of the South African higher education system.

Since its inception, the HEQC has been working alongside traditional quality assurance agencies that are mainly oriented towards quality assurance of professional academic programmes. The HEQC is always attempting to foster relationships with these quality assurance bodies through memoranda of understanding, to ensure that a truly single co-ordinated national quality assurance system is established. Developments are taking place at the national and institutional level, affecting quality, quality assurance, and how to ensure that quality promotion and sustainability at both institutional and organizational levels are maintained. To a large extent, these developments demand a review of our quality assurance systems and mechanisms in line with the new higher education climate. Therefore, new emerging quality assurance arrangements at systemic, organizational and institutional level are shaping the character of our entire quality assurance system, creating new challenges for the HEQC.

The HEQC approaches its external quality assurance function from the basic principle that the primary responsibility for the management of quality of education provision rests with higher education institutions themselves. In light of this, the HEQC's quality assurance mechanisms take into consideration the need for greater accountability and responsiveness by higher education institutions, and aim to encourage higher education institutions to strengthen their own internal quality assurance mechanisms. In order to achieve this, the HEQC employs different quality assurance mechanisms through its accreditation and institutional audit systems. These mechanisms are based on a combination of the following: (a) the use of self-evaluation or self-assessment; and (b) the use of peer evaluation.

The discussion below sheds light on some of the weaknesses and strengths of our EQA system and its mechanisms.

The purposes and mechanisms of the EQA system

The purposes of setting up the EQA (HEQC) in higher education were as follows:

- To support significantly the integration and unification of the South African HE system in the post-1994 period, given the inheritance of a highly uneven and divided higher education system along political and institutional lines (universities and technikons). The previous fragmentation in the higher education system necessitated a need for common ground and a stable system to be established.
- To support the South African government in its agenda to transform higher education.
- To monitor trends in higher education, and give advice to the Minister of Education on matters relating to the quality of delivery and planning purposes.
- To protect learners from poor quality delivery of programmes by ensuring that higher education of good quality is provided at all South African higher education institutions (HEIs).
- To ensure that private higher education institutions are also meeting the national requirements of quality assurance.
- To encourage and support developments in HEIs towards self-assessment and improvement.

The quality assurance system that the Higher Education Quality Committee has in place include programme accreditation and co-ordination, national reviews, institutional audits, and quality promotion and capacity development systems.

Institutional audits of public and private higher education institutions

Institutional audits seem to be stimulating higher education institution to develop, refine and improve their quality management systems. Indications are that institutions are putting in place appropriate quality management systems. The extent of the engagement of the institutions with the criteria when conducting self-evaluation in preparation for audit visits has mostly been extensive. Higher education institutions also seem to be responding to audit reports by developing improvement plans.

Programme accreditation and co-ordination

The Accreditation and Co-ordination Directorate has effectively put in place a programme accreditation system that started with the re-accreditation of academic programmes of higher education providers in 2001. Programme accreditation framework and criteria were developed as instruments together with self-evaluation guides and manuals. This has been followed by the launching and implementation of the HEQC-online system in 2004. The HEQC-online system is a web-based integrated management system that supports the HEQC in conducting its programme accreditation processes. The online system adapts the HEQC criteria for accreditation into self-assessment questions that the institutions have to answer when they apply for accreditation. So far, the accreditation and co-ordination area has proved quite successful – apart from the following organizational and systemic challenges that have been identified:

- Some technical challenges have been experienced with regards to procedures for submitting programmes online, as this is still a new system.
- Currently, the HEQC does not have its own regulations for both private and public higher education institutions.
- The Higher Education Qualifications Framework (HEQF) is not yet finalized. This impacts on providing advice and guidance to institutions as to what is expected of them during and after the process of communicating the outcomes of the evaluation of programmes and recommendations thereof.

- The existence of wide boundaries between the HEQC and other education and training quality assurers (ETQAs) is affecting the professional programmes offered by higher education institutions. The lack of a co-ordinated system leads to unco-ordinated timeframes for site visits by different ETQAs, which has huge cost implications for institutions as they have to comply with all the different external quality assurance requirements.
- Some higher education institutions take a compliance approach to accreditation rather than building their own sustainable quality assurance systems.
- Although the HEQC reflects on its work by conducting regular impact studies of its quality assurance systems and mechanisms, indications are that more regular impact studies need to be done in order to improve our systems.

Quality promotion and capacity development

The CHE has taken seriously the need to try to identify areas of work – projects, ongoing activities such as the quality managers’ forums, etc. – which can assist with promoting quality and developing capacity. Questions around such activities – in any context, not just South African CHE – include, for example, ‘What is quality promotion?’

The above discussion points to the fact that our EQA has a range of mechanisms in place with some identified areas that need further strengthening and exploring. In addition, there is a need to fast track the alignment of accreditation systems and criteria with other ETQAs operating in the higher education band to ensure the goal of creating a single co-ordinated quality assurance system across the higher education sector is realized. In that respect, there is a need to pay attention to strengthening communication channels, through organizing workshops, forums, and consistent co-ordinated site visit schedules. Effective communication channels between stakeholders, such as the departments of education and labour, need to be developed to ensure the smooth integration of the system with our national qualifications framework.

Alignment between the overall purposes of the EQA system and the mechanisms

There is a fair amount of alignment between our overall EQA purposes set out and the mechanisms in place. This is evident in the response and compliance of institutions to our mechanisms. Our accreditation system comprises programme accreditation criteria that are generic and not prescriptive to accommodate diverse institutional types found in South Africa. Yet at the same time, institutions should comply with certain requirements and meet minimum standards. The HEQC provides guidelines on the definition of quality that encompasses transformation, fitness for purpose and value for money within overarching fitness of purpose. Quality management is defined as a process that involves quality assurance, quality support, quality improvement and enhancement, and quality monitoring and review.

Concerning institutional audits, institutions conduct self-evaluation, and produce audit portfolios that form the main basis for external assessment by panels of peers during site visits. This process is similar to the accreditation process, too, whereby institutions produce self-evaluation portfolios that are assessed by an external panel of evaluators to make recommendations on the accreditation of the academic programme.

The differences between institutional audits and programme accreditation are manifested in the approaches used. The approach for institutional audits is to focus institutional assessment on both the accountability and developmental dimensions. Upon receipt of the audit report, institutions are expected to prepare improvement plans to address commendations and recommendations

that emerged from the audit. On the other hand, accreditation follows an approach that requires institutions to meet minimum standards before being granted permission to offer a programme. If the programme does not meet the prescribed criteria and minimum standards, it is not granted accreditation.

The licensing of institutions is an area that falls outside of the HEQC's jurisdiction and is a prerogative of the Department of Education, which is the final authority for approving the registration of institutions and their programmes.

Is the EQA system comprehensive in its coverage (public/private sector, university and non-university institutions and type of programmes)?

Having extensively explored and illustrated above the effectiveness of our quality assurance measures (in terms of its strengths and weaknesses), looking at the underlying challenges, we view our system to be comprehensive in its coverage. It covers the main areas of education provision, the diversity of institutions, accreditation of new and existing programmes and short courses, and there is some measure of alignment across sectors. We also conduct periodic national reviews of selected programmes – such as the Master's in Business Administration (MBA). As far as ensuring coverage across sectors, the challenge lies with respect to industry-based programmes. Industry-based short programmes, for instance, are not covered. Institutions are expected to assure the quality of their short programmes. Due to the voluntary character of the entire system itself, it does not cover all private providers because the EQA cannot assess all private providers that are not compliant with the regulatory framework.

Is there a good alignment between the EQA systems and the traditional existing QA mechanisms?

There is as yet no clear alignment between the EQA systems and those of other relevant quality assurance bodies, especially those of professional boards and councils. There are ongoing projects that are aimed at aligning systems and processes of the various accrediting bodies. This requires a Memorandum of Understanding to be put in place between parties and monitored. However, differences in quality assurance approaches and practices have delayed the process. For instance, there are differences in the purpose and methodology. The HEQC uses a peer-based evaluation system with experienced specialist evaluators in the field, whereas other quality assurance bodies use their own internal staff to conduct the evaluation. Another issue relates to priorities in terms of procedures and processes. The EQA follows rigorous procedures and processes, given the broad mandate, and some bodies tend to be specific and technical in approach. We use generic criteria for programme accreditation, and look for effectiveness, whilst their requirements do not look beyond compliance measures.

Once the course team received the submissions, the instructors in charge of the module prepared a document to summarize the responses. The synthesis prepared is shown below.

IIEP distance education course on 'External quality assurance: options for higher education managers'

25 September – 22 December 2006

Summary of the assignments for Module 1

The first assignment requested teams to make an analysis of the main strengths and weaknesses of their existing (or future) EQA mechanism(s). On 13 October, 12 submissions had been received. The present synthesis was drawn from these 12 submissions. Four questions were asked to guide the reflection on national EQA systems.

As a first question, participants were asked about the objectives with which their EQA systems were set up, and whether they thought that the mechanisms put in place were successful in achieving these objectives.

In all of the 12 submissions, it was reported that either very recently, or even some years ago, a specific structure for EQA had been created. In most cases, this structure is a permanent committee, either under the Ministry of Education (MOE) or more frequently under an equally newly created higher education buffer organization. Only few such structures function with already consolidated mechanisms, while most EQA systems have been put in operation only recently, or are still under development.

Nearly all submissions mentioned that their existing EQA systems envisage embracing the full spectrum of underlying purposes, i.e. quality control, accountability and improvement. When taking a closer look at the mechanisms put in place, it seems that in most cases the quality control purpose has been the first priority to be addressed, where private providers requested permission to start their operations. With this in mind, many newly created EQA structures in the region are starting their work by putting in place a licensing scheme, sometimes called accreditation.

In some countries, however, a decision has been made to separate the regulatory (licensing, recognition) and the QA (accreditation, quality audit) function, whereas in other countries both are located under the QA structure. A separation may be preferable, because this allows separating the technical capacity from the decision-making function. However, in some contexts, the size of the country and the available expertise does not allow this.

The accountability purpose is also frequently addressed with an accreditation scheme. Most accreditation schemes focus on programmes (i.e. Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa), which is certainly a very effective mechanism to ensure minimum standards throughout a higher education system.

Some submissions also refer to other purposes of quality assurance, in addition to the three main purposes mentioned above, such as to achieve an overall co-ordination of the higher education system. QA is seen as an effective tool to harmonize standards when the higher education sector is growing and becoming more diversified.

Quality assurance is also understood as an effective tool to enhance student mobility. When linked with qualification frameworks established at the national and regional level, programme accreditation helps to implement such qualification frameworks. Quality assurance thus becomes an essential mechanism for an integrated, well-articulated and readable higher education provision.

As a second question, participants were asked whether they considered that there was a good alignment between the overall purpose of their EQA system (quality control, accountability and/or improvement) and the newly created mechanisms.

While most submissions report that quality improvement is one of the suggested purposes, not many EQA structures are yet operating mechanisms that emphasize this purpose. Quality audit can be seen as the preferred option for quality improvement, since it investigates and makes recommendations on an HEI's capacity for internal quality assurance. Several of the newer EQA systems (HERQA in Ethiopia, TEC in Botswana, NCHE in Uganda, etc.) envisage putting in place a quality audit mechanism later. One submission emphasizes that quality improvement needs more than quality assurance, but a quality management approach that encompasses quality support, enhancement, monitoring and review. With this in mind, the South African HEQC has established a quality promotion and development directorate.

All submissions show that the purposes of EQA are multi-faceted, and that they cannot be implemented with one mechanism only, but that a combination is necessary to cover different purposes. This is why most QA structures operate different mechanisms, which are put in place one after the other over time, but usually they begin with the most pressing need (which is frequently quality control as mentioned already).

What should be avoided is trying to achieve diverging purposes with one mechanism only, for instance improvement and control purposes. This is likely to fail because it will be difficult to engage HEIs in a developmental process when they feel that their survival (or that of some of their programmes) is threatened.

Some submissions mentioned the danger of overloading HEIs with too many and too frequent QA mechanisms, which in the end will be counterproductive to a quality provision of higher education. In particular, in systems where there are other QA actors (for instance professional organizations), in addition to the newly created EQA structure, it will be necessary to co-ordinate mechanisms with other actors to avoid duplication or inconsistency. It may also be envisaged to alleviate the burden of some mechanisms (e.g. programme accreditation) when other mechanisms have established that an HEI has a proven capacity to manage the quality of its own programmes. In addition, the use of technology for providing information leading to re-accreditation may be envisaged, as has been tried by the South African HEQC. Finally, reaccreditation may only look into the problematic areas, which were identified in an earlier accreditation process, in order to alleviate the reaccreditation process.

As a third question, it was asked whether participants considered that their EQA system was comprehensive in its coverage (public/private sector, university and non-university institutions and type of programmes). If not, what areas of the system need to be covered?

This question was answered positively by the majority of submissions. Depending on the EQA mechanisms, some tend to focus on private providers only (such as licensing procedures, or in some cases accreditation schemes); some other mechanisms are comprehensive and cover both public and private. Several submissions point out that they decided first to concentrate on the control of private providers first, but then shifted to mechanisms that cover the whole spectrum of public and private institutions.

Several countries organize their QA systems for the whole tertiary education sector, i.e. university and higher professional institutions. This option depends very much on the prevailing traditions in the governance of the tertiary education system. Many countries with a long-standing higher professional sector, used to have a co-ordination body in charge of quality assurance. In the

university sector, this is a new phenomenon, and the responsibility for QA lies traditionally with the institutions themselves. Given the differences in governance, most QA systems concentrate either on the university, or on the higher professional sector. Again, the size of the system may be a decisive factor in choosing an integrated approach or not. When the binary divide has recently been abolished, QA may be used as a mechanism to integrate and articulate both segments of the higher education provision.

Most submissions mention that there are an important number of professional courses offered by private providers that do not lead to nationally recognized qualifications. The quality of this offer is frequently not assured, with the assumption that the consumers (firms, their staff or individuals) should be capable of making informed user choices.

A fourth question was asked concerning the alignment between the EQA system and the traditional existing QA mechanisms. Teams were asked whether they considered that their existing mechanisms formed a consistent general QA system for the higher education institutions in their country.

Different interpretations were made here of the concept of consistency. Several submissions understood here the consistency between internal and external QA mechanisms. They found that such a consistency existed because their EQA system was based on the fundamental assumption that the prime responsibility for quality assurance lies with the higher education institution, and that EQA should only reinforce institutional capacity for QA.

Other interpretations looked at the consistency of EQA with other existing mechanisms for QA at the national level. It was clearly recognized that EQA is a new element that has to insert itself into a network of existing organizations with different responsibilities for QA, some that may have overlapping responsibilities. This issue is best resolved through a revision of the higher education legislation, which clearly defines the framework of responsibilities of the different entities working at the national level.

Many of the submissions directly or indirectly refer to the difficulty of implementing a quality assurance scheme for a university sector with a long-established tradition of institutional autonomy. This tradition again points to the necessity to create a legal basis for the operation of a QA system so that the QA structure is entrusted with clear responsibilities and tasks. The creation of a legal basis may, however, be preceded by an experimental phase so that a legal basis does not become a straightjacket in the process.

Module 2: Conducting the process of EQA

Module 2 consisted of a presentation of the different options in the organization of the quality assurance process. This module invited participants to reflect on the contextual factors that may influence the choice of these options in different countries, as well as to analyze their various implications.

The core elements of the ‘three step process’ in the external quality assurance process were identified in this module. These elements consist of the preparation of the self-assessment report, the external review, and the decision-making and reporting of the outcome. Within the framework of the process, the external quality assurance agencies choose among various options that may serve different purposes. These options are related to the establishment of initial conditions; the definition of the criteria; the self-assessment, the external review, the decision-making and the reporting by the agency, the implications of the outcome and the follow-up.

The assignment corresponding to this module was an online discussion. The general objective of this discussion was to share experiences among professionals on the *selection and training of external reviewers for peer visits*. This topic is of crucial importance for any external quality assurance system, since the credibility of an EQA system is highly dependent on the professionalism and the reliability of the external reviewers. In particular, the debate aimed at identifying desirable practices in this area and analyzing their managerial implications.

To begin with, participants were invited to consult the INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practice (<http://www.inqaahe.org/docs/GGP%20for%20printing.doc>) to provide them with a broad framework of desirable practices in EQA, which have been validated by agencies from 65 countries. These guidelines have established 10 areas of good practice, which remain relatively generic, however, because of the wide consultation on which they are based.

One of the 10 areas of good practice (point 4 in the guide) is related to external reviewers (called external committee). It mentions the following three items as examples of good practice in the area:

- Procedures for nomination and appointment of experts, including criteria.
- Methods and materials used for briefing and training experts.
- Description of the division of labour between the agency staff and the external panel/team/committee.

The online debate mainly focused in the discussion of the following questions:

- Is the selection and training of external reviewers an area of concern in your organization, and for what reasons?
- What are the procedures and criteria used by your organization to select the reviewers to carry out the external visit? (Alternatively, what do you think they should be?)
- What types of induction/training/materials do you use to ensure compatibility of your work processes with your standards and to reduce reviewer subjectivity?
- What difficulties (if any) do you find in selecting and training experts?

- What advice can you give to your colleagues on successful approaches that have been identified?

For a period of two weeks, participants discussed these different issues assisted by a moderator that provided them with a synthesis of the main items discussed, and with additional information to enrich the discussion. At the end of the debate, the main conclusions reached by the participants were presented in the document below:

IIEP distance education course on 'External quality assurance: options for higher education managers'

25 September – 22 December 2006

Online debate 'Selection and training of external reviewers'

Various interesting issues regarding the selection and training of the peers were brought into the debate by the participants. Many good practices and different perspectives were shared during the two-week discussions.

Concerning the selection of peers or reviewers, one of the challenges identified by the participants was the *selection of reviewers in certain subject areas*, such as computer sciences, design, etc. The fact that the number of potential reviewers with high expertise and competency is limited in specific areas of study makes their selection difficult. A participant from Ethiopia outlined three possibilities regarding the reviewers' selection. One was to invite HEIs to recommend potential, competent and credible candidates. Another consisted of advertising positions based on specific criteria. A third one was to establish a database of potential reviewers that include reviewers from academia and industry. In some countries, a selection of *reviewers with a certain contextual understanding* is necessary, and this issue came up during the discussions. In South Africa, where institutions were going through transformation, the selected reviewers required an understanding of the reform process. Reviewers should have expertise and experience in areas such as organizational development and change management in order to understand institutional changes and make meaningful contributions to transformation. Overall, the participants understood the difficulties involved in relation to some subjects and national contexts and some good practices to balance these considerations were shared.

Conflicts of interest were another subject of debate among participants. In small countries, such as Mauritius, selecting reviewers is not a problem. However, considering that most people know each other, conflicts of interest may emerge. In other countries, such as South Africa, the reviewers may be associated to certain institutions, and are therefore seen as 'competitors'. The acceptance or rejection of reviewers by the HEIs was of concern to some participants. A participant from Sudan pointed out that HEIs should be provided with the names and functions of the review team, and should be asked whether they were willing to accept them or not. In general, while appreciating the difficulties involved in eliminating conflicts of interest, groups noted the good practices followed by other agencies.

The *qualification of the reviewers* was of great concern during the debate. All participants agreed that reviewers should have high academic qualifications. However, they considered that for certain programmes or areas of studies (such as accountancy, tourism, engineering, etc.) a Ph.D. should not be a requirement. In countries such as Kenya, they require a Ph.D. to accredit a programme at degree level. For non-degree programmes, a Ph.D. is not required, but professional experience is critical. Some participants also recognized that the requirement of a Ph.D. could disadvantage

potential reviewers that are experienced and competent but do not hold a Ph.D. Others pointed out that, even though peers hold a Ph.D., they may not be talented as reviewers. A participant from Botswana underlined the importance of not simply having a Ph.D., but also knowledge in the discipline of educational evaluation. There seemed to be a consensus that both qualifications and qualities are essential, and the QA agency should consider the ability of the reviewer to apply the evaluation skills in the field.

Another issue related to the reviewers' selection was the *gender composition of the reviewers' team*. The problems mainly arose in countries where male professionals are predominant, or where certain disciplines are gender specific, i.e. where women traditionally predominate (e.g. secretarial studies, hotel management) or men (e.g. engineering, etc.).

Certain participants were interested in the *contractual agreements* for reviewers. In Botswana, a contractual agreement is being considered by the TEC as a measure of quality assurance and control on the exercise of external review. This agreement covers: (a) the nature and scope of the exercise; (b) the responsibility of the assessor; (c) the responsibility of the TEC as regards training and technical support and remuneration; (d) confidentiality and intellectual property; (e) duration of the exercise and declaration; and (f) termination. The good practices of TEC were found to be very helpful for many participants.

The *payment of reviewers* was also an important issue of debate. Some of the participants questioned if the reviewers should be paid over and above the salary they receive from their full-time jobs. Others participants considered that the reviewers should be well paid. In countries such as Nigeria, low payment becomes an obstacle to obtain qualified and experienced evaluators. One participant from Ethiopia focused the attention of participants on the case of overseas experts: Should they be paid according to local or international rates? Another aspect related to payment was whether the reviewers are paid the same fees or whether they vary depending on the type of activity. The payment of reviewers brought up another issue of concern: how to afford high-cost QA agencies in countries with financial restrictions. The general understanding is to promote the concept of academic collegiality where the reviewers would extend their service to the country without burdening the system, with an understanding that even the nominal payment may be made reasonable enough to get the services of quality reviewers.

A participant from Ethiopia brought to the debate a question about the *compatibility of team recommendations with that of Board recommendations*: Are there frequent cases in which team recommendations are overturned by Board recommendations? A participant from Zambia replied that if there is a set of minimum standards to respect, it should not happen. However, political issues may override all decisions. Another participant from South Africa commented that even though the Board has the authority to overturn the recommendations made by the peers, in 99 per cent of cases their recommendation is accepted by the Board. *Disagreement among reviewers* was also an issue of concern. However, the groups mostly agreed that different points of view are natural, and guiding standards can be helpful to minimize such a conflict.

Another issue brought up in the debate by some participants was the idea of sending reviewers outside their region, state or country in order to *minimize subjectivity* in their judgements. One other participant suggested reducing subjectivity by avoiding using the team reviewers more than twice in the exercise of external revision.

The *participation of different stakeholders* seems to be of capital importance for some participants. Nigeria NBTE involves different groups such as universities, polytechnics, professional bodies, the industry and employers in the selection of reviewers. In particular, the *participation of students*

in the review process was a key issue treated in the debate. Some agreed that students should participate in the external review process, as they are the major stakeholders in the institutions. They suggested that their participation be made through interviews conducted by reviewers. A participant from Botswana suggested that their opinions would be very helpful in improving the quality of institutions. Some other participants did not think that student participation in the review team would be appropriate, as they are the products of the system to be reviewed. Under Tanzanian law, membership of the TEC includes two student representatives. Students are involved in discussions with external evaluators, but they are not considered evaluators. Most participants supported the participation of the students in the review process, but there was reservation about using them as full reviewers.

Regarding the *training of reviewers*, in some countries such as Nigeria (NUC) the training for the accreditation process included simulation exercises that helped them to anticipate future practice. In South Africa, the auditors go through a training period of about two days before starting the audit. Some issues related to this preparation include: (a) understanding the HEIs self-evaluation process; (b) understanding the nature and role of 'evidence'; (c) the on-site process of the audit; and (d) the role of the auditors in relation to compiling the audit report.

The Uganda CHE trains internal and external reviewers helped by experts from South Africa and the Netherlands. Some good practices were shared by participants about how training is facilitated in their context. Focus on 'seeking for evidence', 'evaluation process' and 'reporting' were prominent in the discussions on training.

Charging fees to institutions for the services provided by the QA agencies was also discussed. Should the agency charge fees? Should the institutions cover all costs or should the cost be shared by the agency and the institution? In Kenya, the CHE has set different rates for different EQA activities (programme accreditation, institutional inspection, re-inspection, etc). However, some rates are subsidized as the CHE bears the cost related to the payment of reviewers, their accommodation, transport, etc. South Africa also charges for programme accreditations, but only to private institutions.

Another issue treated in the debate was the *constitution of an African pool of reviewers*. A participant from Ethiopia suggested that this pool would help countries experiencing difficulties in selecting peers, as well as helping establish continental norms. Another participant from Botswana considered this initiative as an opportunity to promote Africa's uniqueness and best accommodate people's cultural diversity and values. Related to this topic on networking among quality assurance initiatives, the *African Network of Quality Assurance Agencies* was a subject of interest for many of the participants. A participant from Nigeria NBTE underlined, among others, its importance for mobility of labour and the need for greater co-operation among African nations. The concretization of this initiative has been initiated by the Association of African Universities (AAU) in collaboration with other organizations. There was support for regional networking and participants were enthusiastic about extending their co-operation and discussion beyond this online debate.

Overall, the debate resulted in some agreements on what would be a preferred strategy for selection and training of reviewers. It also highlighted how national contexts differ, and therefore strategies require some adaptation. Many good practices were shared on problem areas and on aspects where some participating agencies were evolving their procedures and others had established procedures of proven merit.

Module 3: Setting up and developing the quality assurance agency

Module 3 highlighted the different options when establishing, managing, organizing and controlling a quality assurance agency, and the major functions it has to perform. The options described in the module referred to areas such as the affiliation, the functions, the structure, the credibility and accountability of the agency.

The assignment for Module 3 was a case study on the South African Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC). This case study provided participants with an overall view of the functioning of the agency. It consisted of a description of the processes conducted by HEQC and its support structure.

The Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) was created as a permanent sub-committee of the Council on Higher Education (CHE) through the Higher Education Act of 1997. According to the legislation, the mandate of this independent statutory body is to:

- (a) promote quality assurance in higher education;
- (b) audit the quality assurance mechanisms of higher education institutions; and
- (c) accredit programmes of higher education. The HEQC was formally launched in 2001.

Since then, it is responsible for the quality assurance of all universities, agricultural colleges, private providers and any other providers whose programmes and qualifications fall under its jurisdiction. The quality assurance system of the HEQC covers the three core functions of higher education – teaching, research and community engagement.

The quality assurance processes carried out by the HEQC follows a three-stage process that comprises a self-evaluation by the institutions, an external visit by an external review team and a final decision by the agency based on the review team's recommendations. The outcomes of this process form part of a comprehensive database that contains all the self-assessment reports of the institutions, as well as the reports with the recommendations of the peer teams and the decisions coming out of the quality assurance process, etc. The HEQC also publishes a summary of the findings of the audit and accreditation processes on the CHE web site.

The HEQC conducts its activities within the broader framework of regulations pertaining to other national bodies. In particular, it operates within the framework of the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) whose Act makes provision for regulations governing the accreditation of all education and training quality assurance bodies (ETQAs), including the CHE. The SAQA is in charge of formulating the policies and criteria for the registration and accreditation of bodies responsible for establishing education and training standards, as well as for monitoring and auditing their achievements.

The SAQA is the body in charge of developing the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). The objectives of the NQF are to create an integrated national framework for learning achievements, to enhance the quality of education and training, and to promote equity within the education system.

The HEQC also works jointly with the Department of Education on issues concerning the regulation of public and private providers. As a condition of registration, the DoE registers only those private institutions that have been accredited by the HEQC. As for public institutions, the DoE approves the programmes and funds them only once they have been accredited by the HEQC.

The HEQC also works collaboratively with professional councils and sector education and training authorities (SETAs). These are economic sector-based education and training quality assurance bodies.

To carry out its activities, the HEQC is divided into four directorates and the office of the Executive Director. The four directorates are directly related to the functions performed by the HEQC. They are: the Accreditation and Co-ordination Directorate, the Institutional Audits Directorate, the Quality Promotion and Capacity Development Directorate, and the National Reviews Directorate. Its structure also comprises a governance board consisting of 13 members who are selected by the CHE. Their selection is made through an open call for nominations by interested parties in higher education.

The HEQC reports on a regular basis to the CHE about the performance of its activities. As far as financial issues are concerned, a majority of the funds of the CHE comes from the state, but there are also extra-budgetary funds generated from donations and fees charged to private providers for accreditation services, and for institutional and programme review. At the end of each financial year, the CHE is audited by the Auditor General. The CHE, within six months after the end of each financial year, must also report to the minister on the performance of its functions during the past financial year. The minister must submit copies of the report to the parliament.

After reading the case study, participants were asked to respond to the following questions:

1. Taking into account the different types of affiliation of the quality assurance agencies described in Module 3, identify the affiliation of the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC). What do you think would be the advantages and the risks of this type of affiliation in your own country and why?
2. As it is briefly described in the case study, HEQC responds to certain accountability measures. Do you consider these mechanisms comprehensive and sufficient? What differences and similarities do you find between these measures and those (if any) put in place for your organization?
3. In general, what lessons have you learnt from the HEQC case study, both in terms of QA processes and support structure? What would be useful for your own system and organization?

Participants had to submit their assignment within a week. One example of a group submission, followed by the comments of the instructor of the module, is presented as follows:

**IIEP distance education course on 'External quality assurance:
options for higher education managers'**

25 September – 22 December 2006

Assignment for Module 3

**Commission for Higher Education
Nairobi, Kenya**

Rispa Achieng' Odongo (group co-ordinator), Joel Muriuki Mberia,
Joyce Mwikali Mutinda, Beatrice Achieng Odera Kwach

Taking into account the different types of affiliation of the quality assurance agencies described in Module 3, identify the affiliation of the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC). What do you think would be the advantages and the risks of this type of affiliation in your own country and why?

Affiliation

The Higher Education Quality Committee of the Council on Higher Education is a quasi-government, autonomous agency. It is established by an Act of Parliament and its mandates and autonomy are elaborated therein.

Advantages of this affiliation

- The quality assurance agency is assured of direct government (public) funding through the national budget. This ensures sustainability of its approved programmes with the in-built autonomy.
- The agency readily enjoys support of the relevant government/public organs in enforcement of its rules, regulations and decisions. The case would be different for an agency not directly associated with government.
- There is implied public assurance and acceptance by the public with regard to the activities of, and decisions taken by, the agency.
- If the QA agency seeks external funding, then government would readily play guarantor. There is likely to be more goodwill from external partners for mobilization of resources.
- The agency would benefit from capacity-building programmes that government puts in place for the 'public sector'.

Risks

- Government involvement could easily limit the autonomy of the QA agency.
- There could be overemphasis on control vis-à-vis quality improvement due to the civil service regulatory attitudes.
- Changes in policy could be slowed down by bureaucracy thereby delaying improvement.

As it is briefly described in the case study, HEQC responds to certain accountability measures. Do you consider these mechanisms comprehensive and sufficient? What differences and similarities do you find between these measures and the ones (if any) put in place for your organization?

Accountability measures

The Kenya team finds the accountability measures to which HEQC responds to be comprehensive and generally sufficient. CHE Kenya has the following measures in common with the HEQC:

- The composition of the Board allows for representation of diverse interests/stakeholders. Regular reports are written and presented to the relevant authorities (and made available to stakeholders).
- Reports and decisions are published and publicized for public information (sometimes in the form of abstracts).
- The processes of accreditation and quality assurance are made known to the public through various modes.
- There is provision for an appeal system with regard to reports on either HEIs or programmes. However, the mechanism in the two agencies differs significantly. The Kenyan approach has more stages of consultation than the South African one.
- Finances of the agency are subjected to 'public sector' audit.

Significant differences

- The Kenya agency final reports are not subject to appeal by the HEI concerned.
- CHE Kenya signs annual performance contracts with government whereby minimum achievements are stated in advance. A system of preparing quarterly performance reports that culminates in annual performance evaluation has been implemented.
- CHE Kenya is part of a regional network of East African Higher Education Regulatory Agencies as from July 2006. This extends CHE accountability to ensure its practices and procedures meet the regional expectations.

In general, what lessons have you learnt from the HEQC case study, both in terms of QA processes and support structure? What would be useful for your own system and organization?

With regard to programmes: CHE Kenya has always insisted on accrediting degree programmes (in private universities) before they can be mounted, while at the diploma level programmes are validated when they are already running. The latter seems to be the practice for all programmes in South Africa. There may be a case for review of procedures in Kenya in order to reduce the 'waiting time'.

With regard to structures: The HEQC is embedded in the CHE South Africa, but exercises autonomy and authority that is provided by law. Further, the directorates of the HEQC appear to be very well defined and aptly empowered. The interaction between HEQC and other organs dealing with accreditation and quality assurance are clearly stated. There is need to restructure the CHE Kenya to take into account developments in the local and global higher education environment over the past 20 years.

**IIEP distance education course on 'External quality assurance:
options for higher education managers'**

25 September – 22 December 2006

Assignment for Module 3

Comments on the group's submission

**Commission for Higher Education
Nairobi, Kenya**

Rispa Achieng' Odongo (group co-ordinator), Joel Muriuki Mberia,
Joyce Mwikali Mutinda, Beatrice Achieng Odera Kwac

Dear team from CHE Kenya,

Thank you for your submission in relation to the exercises in Module 3 of this course.

You are right in identifying the HEQC as a quasi-governmental autonomous agency whose mandates and powers are elaborated in a legislative Act of Parliament. You are also correct in identifying as advantages a guaranteed budget from the public purse, which makes for stability of functioning and sustainability of agency programmes, especially where programmes are multi-year and span different financial years; that the agency's work is backed up by the regulatory authority of the state; and that public accountability measures, e.g. annual financial audit, annual report to parliament are ensured by government, thus creating public confidence in the governance and operations of the agency. However, it is important to remember that these are only potential/hypothetical advantages for a quasi-governmental agency and that for them to be realized, much depends on, for example, availability of government funds to support the work of the agency, as well as the nature of the relationship between the agency and the relevant government department.

You are clearly aware of the risks stemming from the relationship with government, for example, to the autonomy of the agency and the agency's ability to set its own approach to QA. You have rightly identified a balance between quality control and quality improvement as a decision that an agency could legitimately make, flowing from an analysis of what the higher education environment requires, and that substantial attention to quality improvement may not necessarily fit into the regulatory demands of government. However, is quality control only valued by government or is it also likely to be supported by students, parents, etc.? Where external QA systems are relatively new, and where higher education itself is in a state of reconstruction or revitalization, capacity development for quality improvement is an important function for a QA agency. There are, however, many challenges associated with taking on quality improvement as a substantial agency function: For example, what is the right balance between control and improvement, given that the mandate of the agency is often primarily or only quality assurance – this choice has an impact on resourcing, staff capacity, and time and attention of the agency. Sometimes the providers are keen on an agency prioritizing improvement over control since the consequences of control are more threatening to poor quality provision: Is very little quality control always in the interests of students and parents? Are the providers themselves or other higher education sector organizations playing a role in quality improvement? As you can see, an analysis of advantages and risks in relation to the agency's relationship with government is a much more complex issue than appears at first sight. All the stakeholder relationships of the agency carry advantages and risks for the agency in carrying out its work in a professionally credible way, not just the relationship with government.

From your submission, it is clear that CHE Kenya has many accountability measures in its system. As you are aware, these have to be continuously monitored and safeguarded to ensure that they are given proper effect and that they remain credible for the relevant stakeholders. Your operation within a performance contract system is also potentially a useful accountability measure. It is not clear to me how comprehensive and time-consuming an annual performance evaluation by government is, and how it affects your operations. Would it be worth considering an annual performance review by your own Board and a three yearly performance review by government? Your QA work conducted in a way that takes the regional dynamic into account is very interesting. I was wondering whether it required an alignment of the evaluation systems of the different participating countries, whether you use peers from other country systems, and whether Kenya and other participating countries have ratified the Arusha Convention in relation to the recognition of qualifications of graduates from the participating countries.

One clarification pertaining to the accreditation of programmes by the HEQC: Any public or private provider that wishes to offer a new programme must apply to the HEQC for accreditation. However, many thousands of programmes that were already running before the work of the HEQC started are in the system under the auspices of some HEQC predecessor accreditation arrangement. High-impact high-volume programmes among these are chosen for a national review – in other words, a re-accreditation exercise.

In conclusion, you are right to point to the need for QA agencies to take account of local and global developments in higher education. This allows one to be responsive to new needs and priorities, to benchmark one's work accordingly, and bring in innovative systems and procedures to improve efficiency and credibility. However, all new strategies under consideration should proceed from a rigorous analysis of whether they are appropriate to one's contextual imperatives, whether they are sustainable, and whether they will add value to the work of the agency as well as of the higher education institutions themselves.

Module 4: Understanding and assessing quality

Module 4 described the various ways of understanding and defining quality. It also defined basic concepts used in the assessment of quality and invited participants to identify and analyze the different methods used in quality assessment.

The assignment corresponding to this module invited participants to analyze the quality assessment models used by two quality assurance agencies and compare their approaches. The two quality assurance agencies considered are the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) and the National Assessment and Accreditation Council of India (NAAC).

Participants had to browse the web sites of these agencies and complete a comparative chart keeping in mind the following items: (a) main functions; (b) scope of assessment (areas of analysis); (c) type of quality criteria; (d) degree of reliance on quantitative assessment; (e) role of reviewers; and (f) degree of reliance on peers' judgement.

After completing the chart, the participants were invited to analyze and describe the most striking differences and commonalities between the institutions as well as to reflect on what elements of these two systems would be applicable to their national context.

The approaches to assess quality used by the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) and the National Assessment and Accreditation Council of India (NAAC) present some similarities as well as significant differences.

A similarity between these two agencies is that they both use the institution as a unit of analysis. However, while NAAC carries out the accreditation of institutions and conveys a quantitative grade in addition to the accreditation label, AUQA conducts a quality audit of institutions and produces an assessment report with identified strengths and weaknesses. Another difference between the two is that, while NAAC looks at the 'quality of the education offered in an institution', AUQA looks at the 'quality assurance arrangements' in place to ensure the quality of education.

Regarding the methodology to assess quality, NAAC has identified seven criteria against which it assesses the quality of the institution. Under each criterion, specific indicators are listed, and the format for preparing the self-study report gives a detailed list of questions to be answered. For the peer review process, benchmarks are attached to each indicator, which provide a quantitative measure of what is desirable practice. AUQA, on the contrary, suggests only 'an indicative scope' listing a few core aspects that its audits should cover and does not provide a format. However, it insists very much on the training of reviewers whose role is to assess to what degree HEIs fulfil their set objectives and to identify what are desirable institutional practices.

The two agencies also make the report of quality assurance public through their web sites. However, while all NAAC reports follow the pattern set by the seven criteria, AUQA reports are generally structured around a self-review document called 'Performance Portfolio' structure. In the case of AUQA, the report is the only outcome of the audits. NAAC gives a grade on a nine-point scale.

The quality model and the freedom that reviewers have to assess quality widely condition the role of the reviewers in both systems. The reviewer in the Indian system is very much guided by the use of criteria, indicators and benchmarks that he/she uses to establish the evidence of quality. The reviewer in the Australian system has to rely much more on his/her subjective understanding of what are 'good institutional practices', which are assessed in the light of the particular context of each higher education institution.

Participants worked with the other members of their team and, within a week, sent their submission to the course team. An example of a submission received is presented below.

IIEP distance education course on ‘External quality assurance: options for higher education managers’

25 September – 22 December 2006

Assignment for Module 4

**Tertiary Education Council
Gaborone, Botswana**

Philemon Themba Ramatsui (group co-ordinator), Margaret Baiketsi, Helen Bannie Kupe, Abraham T. Nyoni, Kagiso Kobedi

Browse the NAAC and AUQA web sites and complete the following chart:

	NAAC	AUQA
Main functions	NAAC is responsible for:	AUQA is responsible for:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessing and accrediting institutions of higher education in the country. • Grading institutions of higher education and their programmes. • Stimulating the academic environment and quality of teaching and research in these institutions. • Helping institutions realize their academic objectives. • Promoting necessary changes, innovations and reforms in all aspects of the institutions. • Encouraging innovations, self-evaluations and accountability in higher education. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conducting quality audits of self-accrediting Australian higher education institutions and state as well as territory government higher education accreditation authorities on a five-yearly cycle. • Providing public reports on the outcomes of these audits. • Commenting on the criteria for the recognition of new universities and accreditation of non-university higher education awards, as a result of information obtained during the audits of institutions and State and Territory accreditation processes. • Reporting on the relative standards and international standing of the Australian higher education system and its quality assurance processes, as a result of information obtained during the audit process.

	NAAC	AUQA
Scope of assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Curricular aspects.</i> The focus of this criterion is to collect information on how the design of the curriculum affords learners the diversity and flexibility of programme offerings. The criterion also seeks to find out information on what practices the institution has in place for initiating and reviewing courses to align them with regional and national needs. • <i>Teaching, learning and evaluation.</i> This criterion seeks to establish how the institution makes provision for appropriate teaching/learning experiences for learners as well as how it ascertains the adequacy and competency of the faculty staff who handle the various programmes and how efficient are the methods of evaluation employed by the institution. • <i>Research, consultancy and extension.</i> This criterion seeks information on activities that facilitate the institution's research, consultancy and its extension services / outreach programme. • <i>Infrastructure and learning resources.</i> This criterion requires data on the adequacy and efficient utilization of facilities as a measure of quality control. The data collected also has to demonstrate how all members of the institution's community benefit from the use of the facilities. • <i>Student support and progression.</i> Here the emphasis is on the effort made by the institution to provide for fulfilled student experiences that facilitate progression in their studies. The criterion also requires information on student and alumni profiles. • <i>Organization and management.</i> Here data collected is on the institutions' policies that cover their planning practices, human power requirements, recruitment, training, performance and finance management. • <i>Healthy practices.</i> Here the focus is on the contribution made by innovative and unique practices within the institution. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organizational leadership and governance, planning. • Teaching and learning (all modes); processes for programme approval and monitoring; comparability of academic standards in onshore and offshore programmes. • Research activities and outputs, including commercialization. • Community service activities. • Internationalization, including contracts with overseas partners. • Support mechanisms for staff and students • Communication with internal and external stakeholders. • Systematic internally initiated reviews (e.g. of departments, themes), including the rigour and effectiveness of the review mechanisms employed. • Administrative support and infrastructure.
Type of quality criteria	The type of quality criteria used is of quantitative nature that employs a weightage formula, for grading and/or classifying institutions.	The type of quality criteria used is largely of qualitative nature, which relies largely on professional judgement of the review team on academic activities.
Degree of reliance on quantitative assessment	Highly reliant on weightage formula, which is quantitative, and the scores are used to determine the decision for grading institutions.	It relies to a lesser extent on quantitative assessment, but relies more on qualitative assessment (professional judgement).

	NAAC	AUQA
Role of reviewers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Criterion-wise assessment</i> For each of the seven criteria, the peers look for evidence not only to validate the claims in the self-study report, but also judge the standing of the institution and record the appropriate percentage scores. While arriving at the criterion-wise final assessment, the performance of the institution with respect to the criterion statements is evaluated. During the site visit, keeping in mind the philosophy of the NAAC, the peer team does an objective assessment of the quality of education through three major activities – visiting departments and facilities, interacting with various constituencies of the institution and checking documentary evidence. • <i>Application of weightages to calculate the overall grade</i> The validation and the subsequent assessment lead to an overall institutional grade and a detailed report, which begins with the team agreeing on the criterion-wise scores. Taking cognizance of the variance in types of institutions, different criteria have been allotted differential weightages, which are used for calculating the institutional score. The institutional score is then used by the NAAC to get the overall grade. However, the role of the peer is to give only the institutional score to the NAAC with the detailed report for follow-up decision-making and pronouncement. • <i>Draft report of the peer team</i> This report is the basis on which the NAAC takes a decision, and hence the NAAC emphasizes that it should be specific about commendations, weaknesses and suggestions for improvement. Moreover, the report has to be shared with the institution at the end of the visit itself. This makes the report writing a serious mission to accomplish. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Panel members are selected on the basis that the panel as a whole possesses the expertise and experience to enable the audit to be carried out effectively. Members may translate their different perspectives into different emphases in their attention to the process, and a concentration on certain aspects of the audit. Nonetheless, members should not attempt to apply pre-conceived templates to their consideration of the auditee, nor appear to address enquiries from entirely within the perspective of their own specialty, or the practices of their own organization. The panel must come to clear and well-founded conclusions in the context of AUQA's terms of reference, the nature of the audit and good practice that are defensible both within and outside academia. • Another point to be particularly emphasized is that panel members are expected to read thoroughly the 'Performance Portfolio' and associated documentation provided. This should result in a firm grasp of the range of issues to be addressed, the main issues to be explored in more detail as well as the scope of decisions or conclusions that are indicated. Adequate exploration of issues by the audit panel depends on its members being thoroughly familiar with the Performance Portfolio. The credibility of the audit is at risk of being undermined if panel members' remarks or questions reveal ignorance of the information provided.
Degree of reliance on peer's judgement	It relies highly on national peer judgement, in which the peer team produces a report that is the basis on which the NAAC takes a decision, and hence the NAAC emphasizes that it should be specific about commendations, weakness and suggestions for improvement. Moreover, the report has to be shared with the institution at the end of the visit itself. This makes the report writing a serious mission to accomplish.	AUQA relies to large extent on international and national peer review for funding decisions. However, the AUQA is also highly reliant on the self-evaluation/self-review report from the institution as its information forms the basis for the audit, and can bring about improvement to the institution even without the involvement of AUQA.

Analyze the chart and describe the most striking differences and commonalities between both agencies

Commonalities

- Functions: (a) both assess and accredit higher education institutions; (b) both utilize peer review and self-evaluation for decision-making.
- Both ascribe to the fitness for purpose approach in the methods of quality assurance.

Differences

- NAAC appears to rely more on quantitative assessment in grading institutions whereas AUQA relies more on professional judgement (qualitative) for making funding decisions.
- NAAC is set up under the quasi-governmental system whereas AUQA is an entity that operates independent of government. It is therefore assumed that the AUQA would be more autonomous than the NAAC in terms of operationalization of mandate/functions.

What elements of these two systems would be applicable to our national context?

Both systems would be applicable to the Botswana TEC context in the areas of funding, self-study and peer review. As would be recalled from the TEC institutional profile, the council is responsible for quality assurance in terms of registration/licensing of institutions to operate, programme accreditation (with particular reference to the private providers) as well as funding of public tertiary institutions.

Therefore, the TEC's external quality assurance mechanisms lead to decisions with implications for approval of institutional registration/licensing, programme accreditation as well as funding of public tertiary institutions. The scope of assessment, especially with reference to the one used by the NAAC closely relates to the criteria that have been adopted by the TEC for the Botswana tertiary education system. It is also clear that given the type of criteria that have been adopted for use by the TEC as well as the Regulations for Accreditation and Norms and Standards guiding establishment of tertiary institutions, our system's decision-making should be both quantitatively and qualitatively based.

After receiving the group's assignment, a synthesis was prepared by the member of the course team responsible of the module. This synthesis is presented below:

IIEP distance education course on 'External quality assurance: options for higher education managers'

25 September – 22 December 2006

Summary on the assignments for Module 4

The assignment was based on the QA models that operate in India and Australia – the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) of India and the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) of Australia respectively. There were 13 submissions: Each submission had four parts – a summary chart on major areas of the two QA systems, similarities between the two QA systems, differences in the two systems and aspects of the systems that might be relevant to the national context.

The summary of major aspects of the two QA systems presented as Chart A of the submission was very good. Most of the points given under 'Main functions', 'Scope of assessment', and 'Role of reviewers' indicate that the 13 teams that made submissions have a good understanding of the two QA models. There are differences in the way the teams perceived aspects such as 'degree of reliance on quantitative assessment', 'type of quality criteria' and 'reliance on peer judgement'.

The commonalities and differences highlighted in the submissions demonstrate good group reflections. Some submissions have made very broad comparisons and the others have identified specific practices and elements of the two models. Teams that are yet to experience a QA process were brief in commenting on this section. However, the teams that reflected on this with their own background experience analyzed how some of the key elements are similar or different to what they do in their own systems.

Elements that have been identified as relevant for the national context varied a lot, but in most cases due to the difference in national context, they were appropriate to those specific situations.

The following themes emerged in the submissions and the comments that followed.

Similarities and differences

The responses recognized that the *administration of the QA processes and decision-making in QA* are similar in the two QA systems. Role of the reviewers and focus on quality improvement were seen as similarities by some teams. The compilation of similarities covered aspects such as *whole-of-institution approach* by both agencies, and the *public nature of the QA report*.

The teams acknowledged the difference in the *size of the higher education sectors*. NAAC operates in a huge higher education sector, while AUQA has a manageable number of higher education institutions and State and Territory Accrediting Agencies (STAAs) to audit.

Difference in *clientele* was also noted by the teams. While NAAC covers all universities and colleges of India, AUQA covers the STAAs as well. Since higher education is a state subject, Australia has developed National Protocols to ensure consistency in the higher education approval processes of the states. AUQA audits STAAs to ensure that the STAAs adhere to the protocols consistently.

The comparison on *scope of assessment and type of quality criteria* seemed to be a bit overlapping in many responses but that is how agencies use terms interchangeably.

The '*degree of reliance on quantitative assessment*' was touched upon by most of the submissions. The teams were advised to look at quantification with caution. Quantification might guide peer assessment and it might equally become the point of contention. Quantification can be a good guide to support the peers in their professional judgement. However, it would also make it very hard for agencies to justify the scores. The reason for giving a score of 57 instead of 60 might become contentious. Whether we use quantification extensively or to some extent with caution, the success of QA depends on the skills and credibility of the peers.

The difference in the *role of the agency staff* was noted in some submissions. The agency staff of AUQA participate in audit panels as full members of the panel and are also known as 'auditors' (in fact the designation itself is 'audit director'). The agency staff of NAAC do not join the review teams as members. While the audit report is written by the audit director at AUQA, which is possible due to the audit director's role as full member of the audit panel, in the case of NAAC it is the reviewers who write the report. This is a difference that evolved due to the size of systems, with NAAC having thousands of HEIs under its purview while AUQA has a manageable number of institutions to be audited.

The '*reliance on peers*' captured the attention of many teams, some teams considered this aspect as a difference between the two systems, and many others have considered this aspect as a similarity. Both systems have the reviewers in the core of the QA decisions. While NAAC has developed quantitative guiding points due to its requirement to translate the peer judgement into scores to classify the institutions into nine categories, AUQA does not need that extra step. The quantitative guiding points are to be applied by the peers and in that sense, there still is significant reliance on peers.

There was some discussion on how the two agencies have been established differently and its impact on *autonomy*. QA agencies attempt to ensure their autonomy in different ways. Having a governing board with representation from various sectors of HE is the predominant way the QA agencies follow to ensure their autonomy. Both agencies follow that pattern. In India, the University Grants Commission (UGC) has the power to establish autonomous bodies and NAAC was established under that provision as a registered society. In Australia, the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA), has the provision to establish independent not-for-profit companies and AUQA was established under that provision. In both systems, the QA body has been initiated by the government but with a representative independent board to govern the QA related functions. AUQA's establishment as an independent company does not give it additional autonomy, since the company's objectives are decided by the owners of the company who are the nine ministers responsible for higher education. Much depends on how the autonomy works in practice and the national context has a lot of influence on that. In India and Australia, autonomy of the QA bodies has been well protected.

Sharing the report with HEIs by the end of the visit in the case of NAAC, has appealed to many teams. The pros and cons of sharing the draft report with the institution before the panel leaves the campus was pointed out, and a set of questions were raised to reflect on those issues: Will it result in reports written with very diplomatic expressions and sugar-coated evaluations? Does it give enough time to the panel to confer on evidence to support major evaluative remarks? How much evaluation and supporting evidence can go into the report, when panels spend the whole day on site visit activities? To facilitate sharing of report on the last day, if panels start preparing draft reports even before they visit the institution, will it condition the thinking of the reviewers and is there a risk of the evaluation becoming biased by their preconceived notions?

Another difference that came out of some of the submissions is the coverage of ‘*offshore programmes*’ by AUQA. Since international engagement is a very important aspect of the Australian universities, AUQA ensures that its audit covers both onshore as well as offshore quality arrangements. Australian institutions have to demonstrate that the quality of the programmes are of equal standard wherever they are offered and by whichever mode they are offered, and AUQA audits the arrangements in place. In the case of NAAC, perhaps due to the national context as a predominantly receiving country, the international engagement is seen as one of the initiatives of the institution being assessed. However, the situation is changing. Many Indian HEIs have become active in the cross-border provision of higher education in the Middle East where there is a significant Indian diaspora.

Aspects relevant to the national context

The team from South Africa reflected on its national context and the current system they have in place, and raised very relevant questions about the ADRI model and the role of stakeholders. The team was clear why certain elements of both the models may not be applicable to South Africa and how it has a system built on good principles of QA, but giving regard to the national context.

One of the submissions noted that the *discussion between the review panel and the institution on the last day* in the process of NAAC was appreciable and would be applicable to their context. It was brought to their attention that such sessions are not ‘question and answer’ sessions. The institution cannot argue with the panel, but can explain how it differs from the views of the panel. The purpose is to listen to the institutional inputs and see whether the panel was on the right track. Most QA systems have an element of providing some limited feedback to the institution by the end of the review, and also an opportunity to the institution to give its views. AUQA gives an oral feedback to the institution about the major audit conclusions before the panel leaves the institution and then sends the draft report for institutional comments on errors of fact and emphasis.

The *link between funding and QA decisions* was indicated as a relevant aspect in one of the submissions. It was brought to the team’s attention that both NAAC and AUQA do not recommend on funding decisions, and that their QA decisions do not directly determine funding levels. In Australia, for any HEI that seeks funding from the federal government, it is a condition that they are audited once in five years by AUQA. This is applicable to both public and private HEIs. The two private universities of Australia – Bond University and Notre Dame University – have undergone quality audit by AUQA to maintain their eligibility to obtain federal funding. A similar situation exists in the case of NAAC. The University Grants Commission (UGC) of India has been insisting that HEI’s funding should undergo NAAC’s QA processes, but there are still a large number of HEIs that have not complied with that. Direct funding based on QA outcome depends on the national context and there are arguments for and against it.

The way NAAC classifies the HEIs was considered akin to *ranking* by one of the teams and that team found this as a relevant aspect to their context. It was pointed out that NAAC does not consider this as a ranking exercise. In fact, most QA agencies are against the use of rankings. The typical outcome of ‘assessment’ results in a multi-point grade – numeric or literal or descriptive. Assessment asks: “How good are your outputs?” and from that point of view, what NAAC does is ‘assessment’. Ranking is used with a specific connotation where placing institutions at a specific position of merit is involved. However, NAAC only classifies the HEIs into nine groups based on the level of achievement. What the team intended to state may be ‘assessment’ or ‘classification based on levels of QA outcome’.

The team from Ethiopia found the following as applicable to the Ethiopian context: (a) institutional self-evaluation; (b) institutional visit; (c) peer assessment based on professional judgement; and (d) public reporting of QA report.

The team from Zambia has identified the following as relevant to their national context: (a) quantification for comparison purposes as in NAAC; (b) AUQA and NAAC procedure of selecting peers; and (c) NAAC's process of providing the draft report to the head of the institution before peers leave the institution.

Ghana has identified the QA decision-making process and the role assigned to the reviewers in the NAAC's process as applicable to the Ghanaian context.

NUC of Nigeria states that elements applicable to their national context are self-study, peer review process, on the site visit and exit meeting, in very broad terms.

TEC, Botswana is of the opinion that both systems would be applicable to the TEC context in the areas of funding, self-study and peer review. The criteria that have been adopted by the TEC are similar to NAAC's and the team states that their decision-making should be both quantitatively and qualitatively based.

EVAC of Sudan feels that they would benefit from the NAAC model, and that fitness for purpose is more suitable for developed countries and institutions that have a great extent of autonomy and are well established.

NBTE of Nigeria considers the following as elements applicable to their national context: (a) clear quality criteria; (b) quantitative guidelines; and (c) reliance on reviewers.

Eritrea is yet to develop its QA agency. The team considers that many aspects of the two systems would be applicable to Eritrean context, such as establishment as an independent body, self-assessment practices, visit by reviewers, accrediting HEIs, and making the report public.

The team from Uganda considers that at present it is difficult to have programme accreditation but that institutional accreditation is suited to the national context. It supports quantitative assessment in the accreditation process, as well as peer reviews.

The team from Kenya has stated that both QA approaches (standard-based and fitness-for-purpose) are applicable to them – standard-based approach for initial institutional and programme accreditations, and fitness-for-purpose approach for re-accreditation.

As Malawi's HE QA system is in the process of being developed against a backdrop of emerging private providers, the team sees the QA criteria adopted by NAAC as appropriate in Malawi's context.

The team from Mauritius indicated that except the criteria that are very specific to self-accrediting institutions, other elements of the two QA systems are applicable to Mauritius and that the current framework for quality assurance of Mauritius is based on the criteria of these two institutions, amongst others.

Overall, the submissions were well thought out responses to the issues raised in the assignment. Comments were made to teams with a view mainly to bring to attention the other side of some of the points noted in the submissions. Further, there may be details that might not be very explicit in the reading and reference material suggested for the assignment, and it might be interesting to look at those additional details. Some comments were given to teams with that perspective.

Module 5: Regulating and assuring the quality of cross-border providers of higher education

Module 5 focused on the regulation and quality assurance of cross-border providers. This module intended to make participants aware of the particular forms of cross-border higher education in developing countries and the challenges that they pose to higher education systems. It presented the different options, approaches and instruments for designing regulatory and quality assurance systems, as well as examples of policies implemented in different countries.

The assignment corresponding to this module consisted of an online debate. The objective of this online discussion was to exchange experiences and points of views among participants on the challenges regarding cross-border education in their country and the different options put in place for its regulation and quality assurance.

During the online debate, participants were invited discuss the following questions:

- What cross-border providers are currently operating in your country and what are the challenges that they pose to the national higher education system in terms of quality and equity?
- What are the measures put in place in your country to regulate and assure the quality of cross-border provision in higher education?
- Are these measures in line with the UNESCO/OECD guidelines on cross-border higher education, in particular from the ones addressed to national authorities and quality assurance and accreditation bodies, and what do you consider useful to your country?

Participants could access these guidelines on the UNESCO web site <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001433/143349e.pdf>. These guidelines on cross-border higher education are a joint initiative of UNESCO and OECD aiming to protect students and other stakeholders from the low quality of cross-border higher education provision, as well as to encourage the development of quality cross-border provision that meets human, social, economic and cultural needs.

After two weeks of exchanges and discussions, a document summarizing the main issues taken up during the online debate was elaborated by the course team. This document is presented below:

**IIEP distance education course on 'External quality assurance:
options for higher education managers'**

25 September – 22 December 2006

**Online debate 'Regulation and quality assurance
of cross-border providers in higher education'**

During the online debate, participants discussed a series of issues related to cross-border higher education (CBHE) in their respective countries. A course team member moderated the debate, highlighting and summarizing the main issues discussed. In addition, two experts, one from the AAU and the other from UNESCO, intervened providing enriching information to the discussion.

The debate mainly focused on identifying CBHE institutions operating on the continent, the challenges that CBHE poses to regulatory and QA systems, and the different aspects to take into account when regulating and assuring the quality of CBHE providers.

Cross-border providers in Africa

The number of CBHE providers operating in Africa has grown recently, resulting in a high number and a growing complexity. These providers are either African or foreign universities. Some of the African cross-border institutions operating on the continent are the African Virtual University, the Open University of Tanzania, the Open University of Nigeria and the University of South Africa. Among the foreign universities, we find the Colombia Southern University, the Edinburgh Business School, the Heriot-Watt University and the University of Delaware. Other foreign institutions operating on the African continent are from Canada, Egypt, India, Jordan, etc.

In addition to institution mobility, franchised higher education has also become a prominent feature of CBHE. Many foreign providers offer their programmes under a franchise agreement, where the involvement of the local HEI varies from simply providing the facilities to involvement in curriculum design, teaching, quality control and assessment and certification.

CBHE is also organized widely through distance education, which poses its own particular challenges in terms of regulation and quality assurance. In addition, in many countries, CBHE operates through agents that register with national trade authorities, and so bypass the quality control of national educational authorities.

Challenges posed by CBHE providers to QA agencies

How to justify the refusal of granting accreditation to a programme offered by well-known international universities accredited in their home country was one of the first challenges identified by participants. This problem was mentioned by the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) in Mauritius as well as by the other QA institutions. One of the problems that the TEC is currently facing in this respect is that its panel of experts has determined that some of these programmes offered by CBHE providers did not reach the required standards. Among the reasons for not accrediting these programmes, the experts determined that the foreign institutions did not have the necessary infrastructure and human resources, and their programmes were, in some cases, outdated or did not respond to the socio-economic needs of Mauritius.

Taking into account the experience of the Commission for Higher Education (CHE), a participant from Kenya reflected on the possible reasons why some programmes could not be accredited in certain countries while they are recognized in the sending country. This participant drew the attention of the other participants to the following: (a) in some disciplines, the curriculum that is acceptable in one country would not be accepted in another due to environmental and cultural differences; and (b) the minimum standards used in one country may differ from those used in another.

In order to avoid divergences in the judgement of different QA agencies, the need for collaboration between the QA agency where the cross-border provider comes from and the QA agency of the receiving country was highlighted during the online debate. This collaboration will mainly allow both agencies to build on each other's QA processes, resulting in a co-ordinated regulation of CBHE.

Another challenge mentioned by participants was the identification of CBHE providers operating in a country. Nowadays, not many countries have an updated database providing this kind of information. The availability of this information depends on whether registration and licensing procedures are compulsory or not, and the type of information contained in the database is related to whether these procedures apply to the whole of the CBHE provision or not (both the university and non-university level; institutions and programmes). Having a complete register or database of CBHE providers was identified as a crucial issue by the participants in order to protect consumers and other stakeholders from low-quality education provision.

As in most countries the regulation of all CBHE providers does not apply comprehensively throughout the HE provision; it is very important that students are made aware of the risks involved in studying with CBHE study programmes and institutions not accredited by QA institutions. In Kenya, for example, the public has been advised to check with the CHE before registering in those programmes. In South Africa, an initiative has been put in place consisting of informing secondary schools and future graduates about the aspects they may need to look for to assess the credibility of private providers (including CBHE).

Many participants highlighted that another challenge of QA systems is that CBHE providers have no physical presence, but frequently operate by offering distance education and franchised programmes in different countries. One of the initiatives to regulate franchised programmes put in place by the Tanzania Commission for Universities (TCU) was to ask local institutions for a copy of the memorandum of understanding signed with the foreign provider. This initiative is a recommended good practice to make sure that contractual arrangements are in line with what is desirable. In this memorandum, it is also recommended that QA agencies check whether students studying in franchise programmes will be accepted to continue their studies at the home institution. This is an important aspect in order to make sure that institutions are willing to take full responsibility for what they offer in another country.

Participants mentioned the specific challenges that CBHE providers pose to the country in terms of equity. The first one is that many students cannot afford to pay CBHE tuition fees, and are deprived of access to this kind of education. The second one is that the high dependence on the ICT may attract students from urban areas and will encourage the immigration of families from rural towards main cities. The third one is that CBHE increases an often already unequal distribution of higher education opportunities that are concentrated in major urban locations.

Participants insisted also on the need to request CBHE to be relevant for national development and sensitive to local contexts and educational requirements. This is a clear task for quality assurance at the programme level.

Aspects to be considered when regulating CBHE

All participants agreed on the need of setting up a quality assurance regime for CBHE providers whose characteristics should be sensitive to the local context and development agenda. During the online debate, they also discussed different aspects that should be considered when setting up this kind of regime.

One of these aspects was whether CBHE providers should be approved and their quality assured by the receiving country, the sending country, or both. Most participants agreed that both the receiving and the sending countries should be responsible for ensuring the quality of CBHE. On one hand, CBHE should be approved and the quality assured in the receiving country in order to safeguard local consumers and the interest of national development. On the other hand, it is also the moral responsibility of the sending country to ensure that its exports are of quality equal to local programmes. It was emphasized, however, that not all sending countries have themselves an operating quality assurance or accreditation scheme. In this case, the minimum criteria should be recognition of a higher education provision in the sending country.

Another aspect discussed was whether the sending or the receiving country should set the standards for CBHE. Participants pointed out that the receiving country should be especially concerned about setting the standards for CBHE. To do so, participants agreed that QA systems should take into account the principles of good practice set by INQAAHE as well as the OECD/UNESCO guidelines on cross-border provision, adapting them to the local cultural, linguistic, economic and educational policies and legislation.

A third aspect brought to light during the online debate was whether there should be one standard for all types of CBHE. Participants highlighted that there should be minimum quality standards that all CBHE providers should meet. However, there should be certain flexibility in the requirements depending on the type and nature of the institutions and programmes offered.

A fourth aspect discussed was the importance of setting up a regulatory and quality assurance framework for CBHE in order to protect consumers (students, parents, employers, etc.) from low-quality or even fraudulent educational provision, especially when a great number of CBHE providers are motivated by income generation and profit making. A participant from Kenya drew the attention of the other participants to the quality of some CBHE institutions operating in Africa that try to maximize profit by admitting unqualified students, offering programmes that are not acceptable in their own countries, hiring unqualified local personnel and providing false information about international recognition of their offerings.

To safeguard the interest of consumers, the regulation and quality assurance of CBHE is becoming a priority in different countries. As Stamenka Uvalic-Trumbic commented, UNESCO is contributing to this initiative by launching a project to create a worldwide portal of recognized higher education institutions. This portal, whose feasibility has been confirmed, and will start to be developed in 2008-2009, will be hosted by UNESCO, but the information will be provided and updated by competent national authorities. The pilot project is also considering including in this portal a list of recognized EQA agencies, as one of the participants from Botswana suggested during the debate.

Finally, the debate concentrated on the issue of implementing a regulatory framework for CBHE. A number of basic questions pertain to the implementation of a regulatory framework:

- Should a regulatory framework be enacted through legislation or is administrative action enough? Can existing laws be amended?

- What measures need to be conceived to ensure compliance with the regulatory framework? Are incentives enough (access to student financing scheme for instance) or what penalties are necessary?
- What body should be in charge of implementing the regulatory framework (is it possible to rely on existing organizations or do new ones need to be created)?
- Who should pay for the implementation (taxpayer or CBHE providers)?

Most participants agreed that administrative action is not enough and the creation of legislation is necessary to enact a regulatory framework for CBHE. A participant from Kenya suggested that the enactment of the regulatory framework would depend on the nature of the higher education system.

Regarding the measures to ensure compliance with this regulatory framework, the participants considered that incentives are not enough, and should be accompanied by penalties. These penalties can vary from financial penalties to the closing down of the provision.

From the participants' point of view, the bodies that should be in charge of implementing the regulatory framework are the existing QA agencies. They suggested that taxpayers, and fees for registration and accreditation requested from CBHE institutions, should cover the cost of its implementation.

3 Evaluation of the course

During the last week of the distance education training, participants were asked to fill out an evaluation form. Of the total participants initially registered on the course, 13 groups successfully completed it. Two groups (Lesotho and the United Republic of Tanzania), of six participants each, had to withdraw from the course due to heavy workloads that included fieldwork and frequent periods of absence from their office. Sixty-two participants completed the course and 53 submitted their evaluation form.

Objectives

The objective of this evaluation was to get to know the degree of satisfaction of the participants regarding: (a) the course objectives; (b) the course organization and schedule; (c) the course design and content; (d) the communication; (e) the course web site and (f) the forum/online discussions held during the course. In addition, participants were invited to express their general opinion of the course and to give suggestions for improvement. The last section of the evaluation was exclusively addressed to the co-ordinators of the groups.

Methodology

The evaluation form consisted of a nine-page questionnaire, divided into eight sections, which aimed to evaluate the different aspects of the course. Each section contained different multiple-choice questions. Most of these questions invited participants to add their personal comments and opinions.

Results

A report with the outcomes of 53 evaluation forms received was elaborated by the IIEP course team. Some of the most relevant conclusions reached by this report are the following:

- Of the respondents, 98 per cent considered that their personal expectations before starting the course had been 'very well' and 'well' met throughout the course.
- Of the respondents, 69 per cent considered that their experience participating in the course was 'excellent', 29 per cent of them that it was 'good' and 2 per cent that it was 'poor'.
- Of the respondents, 81 per cent found the schedule of the course appropriate in terms of time needed to read the modules, and 77 per cent considered that the schedule was appropriate in terms of time allocated to complete the assignments.
- Most participants enjoyed working in a team as it allowed them to share ideas, encouraged them to work and helped them to reflect on their EQA systems.
- Of the respondents, 98 per cent found that the content of the course was 'very much' and 'much' related to their professional goals.
- Participants highly appreciated the content of the course. Module 1, 'Making basic choices for external quality assurance systems', was considered 'very useful' by 81 per cent of the respondents. Module 2, 'Conducting the process of external quality assurance', was considered as 'very useful' by 85 per cent of the respondents. Of the participants, 83 per cent agreed

that Module 3, 'Setting up and developing the quality assurance agency', was 'very useful'. Module 4, 'Understanding and assessing quality', was considered 'very useful' by 81 per cent of the respondents. In the case of Module 5, 'Regulating and assuring the quality of cross-border providers', 75 per cent of the respondents determined this module 'very useful'.

- Of the respondents, 81 per cent felt that the assignments of the course 'very much' improved their understanding of the course content.
- Of the respondents, 87 per cent considered the feedback of the IIEP course team provided during the course was 'very useful' and 13 per cent said that it was 'useful'. Some participants described this feedback as 'elaborated', 'helpful', 'timeous' and 'encouraging'.
- Of the participants, 84 per cent that filled out the evaluation form found the online debates 'very useful'. The interaction with other participants and the intervention of the moderators was also highly appreciated by most respondents.
- Of the respondents, 75 per cent considered e-mail an 'excellent' way to communicate. Of the total respondents, 63 per cent did not experience problems with sending and receiving e-mails, or accessing the web site, while 36 per cent experienced 'occasional problems', and 2 per cent 'frequent problems'. The most common difficulties identified by participants were poor local Internet service, technical problems with the local networking, and low-speed internet connection.
- When participants were asked about the strengths of the course, they mainly highlighted the course material, the course team and the international perspective of the course.
- When participants were asked about the weaknesses of the course, they particularly mentioned the limited amount of time they could allocate to the course as they could not always be liberated from their current professional duties.
- To conclude, the participants suggested a wide range of different ideas to improve the course, such as: give more time for work on the instructional modules and the assignments, incorporate the assignments to the instructional modules, incorporate an online discussion on each module, include individual tasks, include participants outside Africa, select participants that belong to institutions with similar degrees of development, incorporate face-to-face interaction, develop more advanced courses, etc.

4 Conclusion

The results of the evaluation show that, from the participants' point of view, the course has been successful in meeting their professional training needs and in contributing to deepen their knowledge on issues related to external quality assurance. They also expect that the course will impact positively on the development of their respective EQA systems.

The experience of working in a team provided the participants with a rare occasion for the joint exploration with their colleagues of their institutional situation and an opportunity to discuss and to reflect on their EQA system. In this sense, the team working experience can be considered an essential component towards the reinforcement of institutional capacity building.

The exchanges among teams also allowed participants to share information and experiences with participants of other countries. These exchanges have been particularly enriching for the teams who have still not established EQA systems in their countries, who benefited from the information generated, and from the contributions of other participants belonging to institutions with more developed EQA systems.

The distance course provided participants with a wide range of information on the EQA process through the course materials. In addition, throughout its development, the course has also become a space for generating knowledge of the different experiences of certain countries in Anglophone Africa in the field of EQA. All this enriching information was made permanently available to participants on the IIEP course web site.

The course materials were accompanied by assignments that provided participants with insights into the course content. The feedback from the IIEP course team, as well as from the other participants, complemented the assignments, broadening their understanding on different issues related to EQA.

The outcomes of the evaluation were important as they allowed the course team to reflect on the functioning of the course while taking into account the participants' point of view. This information, and in particular the suggestions for improvement, will be analyzed by the course team and taken into account in order to improve future distance education courses on EQA.

Appendix 1. IIEP course team

Michaela Martin (course co-ordinator)

Michaela Martin has been a member of the IIEP staff since 1990. Since she joined the IIEP, she has directed research and teaching programmes on management, planning and policy-making on higher education, for which she designed several distance courses. Michaela Martin is also currently in charge of the quality assurance and accreditation programme of the IIEP. As part of her activities for this programme, she has co-ordinated the publication of a series of monographs on quality assurance systems in different countries around the world, and most recently a comparative study of seven national case studies on regulation and quality assurance of cross-border providers.

Her academic background includes advanced studies in economics and public administration in Germany, Belgium and France.

Michaela Martin was in charge of the preparation of Modules 1 and 5, and she was also responsible for the co-ordination of this course. She provided feedback on the assignment related to Module 1, and was the moderator of the online debate related to Module 5.

Jimena Pereyra (in charge of communication)

Jimena Pereyra completed her studies in education at the University of Buenos Aires (Argentina) and she is currently working on her Master's degree in international co-operation in education at the Sorbonne University in France. As part of her studies in France, she has worked as an intern at the IIEP, on the accreditation programme. Prior to this, she worked in the field of higher education as a research assistant for the Argentine Ministry of Education. She was in charge of co-ordinating all communications for this course.

Mala Singh (instructor)

Mala Singh is the Interim Chief Executive Officer of the Council on Higher Education (CHE) in South Africa. Previously, she was the Founding Executive Director of the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) of the CHE. Her professional background also includes two terms as member of the Board of the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE).

Mala Singh has completed post-doctoral research at the University of Cologne (Germany) and Yale University (United States) and she is currently visiting professor at the Centre for Higher Research and Information at the Open University, in the United Kingdom. She is author of a large number of publications in the fields of philosophy, higher education and quality assurance.

On this course, Mala Singh provided feedback on the submissions related to Module 3.

Antony Stella (instructor)

Antony Stella is Audit Director of the Australian Universities Quality Agency. Previously, Antony Stella was one of the first staff members of the National Assessment and Accreditation Council of India (NAAC). She has participated actively in the development of its activities since 1996,

when she joined the institution as Deputy Adviser. With a Ph.D. in educational technology, Antony Stella is the author of more than 75 articles and four books on assessment and accreditation in higher education, including a monograph for IIEP-UNESCO about external quality assurance in India. She has also co-edited two books on international perspectives and developments in quality assurance.

Antony Stella was in charge of preparing Modules 2, 3 and 4 of this course. For this course, she was the moderator of the online debate related to Module 2 and provided feedback on the assignments related to Module 4.

Christine Edwards (secretarial assistant)

Christine Edwards is a Franco-American from Atlanta, Georgia. She is a graduate from the University of Georgia, having studied Studio Art and the French language, and also a graduate from the Catholic Institute of Paris, France, which has provided her with a certification to teach French as a foreign language. Christine joined the Higher Education Unit at the IIEP in May 2003 as the secretary of Michaela Martin.

Appendix 2. Course calendar

Pre-course phase	Testing of communication, welcome and introduction to the course
4-8 September	Testing e-mail communication Welcome message and introduction of the IIEP team and participants
11-21 September	Preparation of the institutional profile, description of the current difficulties and challenges faced by the institutions
21 September	Group response 1 Submission of the institutional profile
Weeks 1 and 2	Module 1: Making basic choices for external quality assurance systems
25-29 September	Individual task Read Module 1 with the questions for reflection in mind
29 September to 5 October	Group task Preparation of Assignment 1
5 October	Group response Submission of Assignment 1
Weeks 3, 4 and 5	Module 2: Conducting the process of external quality assurance
9-13 October	Individual task Read Module 2 with questions for reflection in mind
16-27 October	Online debate on the guidelines of good practice in quality assurance prepared by the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE)
Weeks 6 and 7	Module 3: Setting up and developing a quality assurance agency
30 October to 3 November	Individual task Read Module 3 with questions for reflection in mind
3-9 November	Group task Preparation of Assignment 3 Set of questions on the HEQC (South Africa) case study
9 November	Group response Submission of Assignment 3
Weeks 8 and 9	Module 4: Understanding and assessing quality
13-17 November	Individual task Read Module 4 with questions for reflection in mind
17-23 November	Group task Preparation of Assignment 4 Comparative analysis of the quality models used by the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) and the National Assessment and Accreditation Council of India (NAAC)

23 November	Group response Submission of Assignment 4
Week 10	Module 5: Regulating and assuring the quality of cross-border providers
27 November to 1 December	Individual task Read Module 5 with questions for reflection in mind
4-15 December	Online debate on the Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-border Higher Education
Week 13	Concluding phase
18 December	Individual task Participants receive a questionnaire to evaluate their experience in the course
22 December	Individual response Submission of evaluation questionnaire

Appendix 3. List of participants

BOTSWANA

Tertiary Education Council (TEC)

Philemon Themba Ramatsui	Director, Quality Assurance and Regulation
Margaret Baiketsi	Researcher
Helen Bannie Kupe	Co-ordinator, Quality Assurance
Abraham T. Nyoni	Administration Officer, Registration
Kagiso Kobedi	Researcher/Statistician

ERITREA

Ministry of Education

Zekeria Abdulkerim Zekeria	Dean, College of Marine Science and Technology
Ali Suleman Abdella	Head, Faculty of Affairs, Eritrea Institute of Technology
Abraham Tecele Ghebrekidan	Director, Monitoring and Quality Assurance Division, MOE
Semere Amlesom	Dean, Hamelmalo College of Agriculture

ETHIOPIA

Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency (HERQA)

R.M. Campbell	Senior Expert and Adviser
Tesfaye Teshome	Director
Guesh Hadgu	Higher Education Relevance and Quality Audit Expert
Aregash Samuel	Expert
Yohannes Woldetensae	Senior Expert
Girma Yadessa	Expert, Accreditation and Pre-Accreditation

GHANA

National Accreditation Board (NAB)

Stella Ofosu Nti	Senior Assistant Secretary
Utuka Godwin	Assistant Secretary
Suzette Boahemaa Asafu-Adjaye	Assistant Secretary

KENYA

Commission for Higher Education (CHE)

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