What is Quality Assurance?

Quality Assurance (QA) is defines as the process to ensure that the quality of product or services meets some predetermined standard.

- To evaluate the quality, one has to look into all the components of the entire teaching learning process in which such technology enhanced learning courseware component is embedded.

Quality assurance involves the systematic review of educational provision to maintain and improve its quality, equity and efficiency. It encompasses university self-evaluation, external evaluation (including inspection), the evaluation of instructors and student assessments. Developing strong quality assurance systems is crucial to support high-quality, inclusive education.

Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education

The standards for quality assurance have been divided into two parts:
- Internal quality assurance
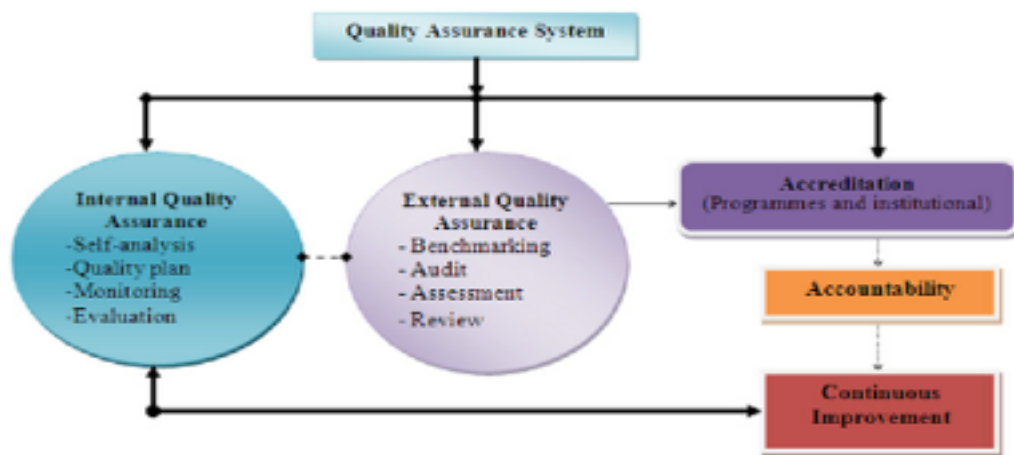- External quality assurance

Figure 1: The Quality assurance process

Part 1: Standards and Guidelines for Internal Quality Assurance

STANDARD	GUIDELINES

1. Policy for quality assurance Institutions should have a policy for quality assurance that is made public and forms part of their strategic management. Internal stakeholders should develop and implement this policy through appropriate structures and processes, while involving external stakeholders.	Policies and processes are the main pillars of a coherent institutional quality assurance system that forms a cycle for continuous improvement and contributes to the accountability of the institution. It supports the development of quality culture in which all internal stakeholders assume responsibility for quality and engage in quality assurance at all levels of the institution. In order to facilitate this, the policy has a formal status and is publicly available. The policy translates into practice through a variety of internal quality assurance processes that allow participation across the institution. How the policy is implemented, monitored and revised is the institution's decision. The quality assurance policy also covers any elements of an institution's activities that are subcontracted to or carried out by other parties.
1.2 Design and approval of programmes Institutions should have processes for the design and approval of their programmes. The programmes should be designed so that they meet the objectives set for them, including the intended learning outcomes. The qualification resulting from a programme should be clearly specified and communicated, and refer to the correct level of the national qualifications framework for higher education.	Study programmes are at the core of the higher education institutions' teaching mission. They provide students with both academic knowledge and skills including those that are transferable, which may influence their personal development and may be applied in their future careers.
1.3 Student-centred learning, teaching and assessment Institutions should ensure that the programmes are delivered in a way that encourages students to take an active role in creating the learning process, and that the assessment of students reflects this approach.	Student-centred learning and teaching plays an important role in stimulating students' motivation, self-reflection and engagement in the learning process. This means careful consideration of the design and delivery of study programmes and the assessment of outcomes.

1.4 Student Admission, Progression, Recognition and Certification Institutions should consistently apply pre-defined and published regulations covering all phases of the student "life cycle", e.g. student admission, progression, recognition and certification.	Providing conditions and support that are necessary for students to make progress in their academic career is in the best interest of the individual students, programmes, institutions and systems. It is vital to have fit-for-purpose admission, recognition and completion procedures, particularly when students are mobile within and across higher education systems. It is important that access policies, admission processes and criteria are implemented consistently and in a transparent manner. Induction to the institution and the programme is provided.
1.5 Teaching Staff Institutions should assure themselves of the competence of their lecturers. They should apply fair and transparent processes for the recruitment and development of the staff.	The lecturer's role is essential in creating a high quality student experience and enabling the acquisition of knowledge, competences and skills. The diversifying student population and stronger focus on learning outcomes require student-centred learning and teaching. Higher education institutions have primary responsibility for the quality of their staff and for providing them with a supportive environment that allows them to carry out their work effectively.
1.6 Learning Resources and Student Support Institutions should have appropriate funding for learning and teaching activities and ensure that adequate and readily accessible learning resources and student support are provided.	For a good higher education experience, institutions provide a range of resources to assist student learning. These vary from physical resources such as libraries, study facilities and IT infrastructure to human support in the form of tutors, counsellors and other advisers. The role of support services is of particular importance in facilitating the mobility of students within and across higher education systems. The needs of a diverse student population (such as mature, part-time, employed and international students as well as students with disabilities), and the shift towards student-centred learning and flexible modes of learning and teaching, are taken into account when allocating, planning and providing the learning resources and student support. Support activities and facilities may be organised in a variety of ways depending on the institutional context. However, the internal quality assurance ensures that all resources are fit for purpose, accessible, and that students are informed about the services available to them. In delivering support services the role of support and administrative staff is crucial and therefore they need to be qualified and have opportunities to develop their competences

1.7 Standard Course Outline Template	Institutions should have a standard course outline template and curriculum of the institution at course level should be written according the standard course template. The template should contain: course information (course title, course code, no. of credits, department, faculty, prerequisites, course, email, telephone no., learning hours, course type, academic year), course description, course objectives, guidelines on grading and standards of assessment, course learning outcomes, course teaching and learning activities, course assessment method, course learning outcomes, essential readings, course policy, additional information and policies.
1.8 Information Management Institutions should ensure that they collect, analyse and use relevant information for the effective management of their programmes and other activities.	Reliable data is crucial for informed decision-making and for knowing what is working well and what needs attention. Effective processes to collect and analyse information about study programmes and other activities feed into the internal quality assurance system. Various methods of collecting information may be used. It is important that students and staff are involved in providing and analysing information and planning follow-up activities.
1.9 Public Information Institutions should publish information about their activities, including programmes, which is clear, accurate, objective, up-to date and readily accessible.	Information on institutions' activities is useful for prospective and current students as well as for graduates, other stakeholders and the public. Therefore, institutions provide information about their activities, including the programmes they offer and the selection criteria for them, the intended learning outcomes of these programmes, the qualifications they award, the teaching, learning and assessment procedures used, the pass rates and the learning opportunities available to their students as well as graduate employment information.
1.10 On-going Monitoring and Periodic Review of Programmes Institutions should monitor and periodically review their programmes to ensure that they achieve the objectives set for them and respond to the needs of students and society. These reviews should lead to continuous improvement of the programme. Any action planned or taken as a result should be communicated to all those concerned.	Regular monitoring, review and revision of study programmes aim to ensure that the provision remains appropriate and to create a supportive and effective learning environment for students. Programmes are reviewed and revised regularly involving students and other stakeholders. The information collected is analysed and the programme is adapted to ensure that it is up-to-date.

Standard	Guidelines
1.11. Cyclical External Quality Assurance Institutions should undergo external quality assurance	External quality assurance in its various forms can verify the effectiveness of institutions' internal quality assurance, act as a catalyst for improvement and offer the institution new perspectives. It will also provide information to assure the institution and the public of the quality of the institution's activities. Institutions participate in cyclical external quality assurance that takes account, where relevant, of the requirements of the legislative framework in which they operate. Therefore, depending on the framework, this external quality assurance may take different forms and focus at different organisational levels (such as programme, faculty or institution). Quality assurance is a continuous process that does not end with the external feedback or report or its follow-up process within the institution. Therefore, institutions ensure that the progress made since the last external quality assurance activity is taken into consideration when preparing for the next one.

Part 2: Standards and Guidelines for External Quality Assurance

Standard	Guidelines
2.1 Consideration of Internal Quality Assurance External quality assurance should address the effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes described in Part 1.	Quality assurance in higher education is based on the institutions' responsibility for the quality of their programmes and other provision; therefore it is important that external quality assurance recognises and supports institutional responsibility for quality assurance. To ensure the link between internal and external quality assurance, external quality assurance includes consideration of the standards of Part 1. These may be addressed differently, depending on the type of external quality assurance.
2.2 Designing Methodologies Fit for Purpose External quality assurance should be defined and designed specifically to ensure its fitness to achieve the aims and objectives set for it, while taking into account relevant regulations. Stakeholders should be involved in its design and continuous improvement.	In order to ensure effectiveness and objectivity it is vital for external quality assurance to have clear aims agreed by stakeholders.

2.3 Implementing Processes External quality assurance processes should be reliable, useful, pre-defined, implemented consistently and published. They include - a self-assessment or equivalent; - an external assessment normally including a site visit; - a report resulting from the external assessment; - a consistent follow-up.	External quality assurance carried out professionally, consistently and transparently ensures its acceptance and impact. Depending on the design of the external quality assurance system, the institution provides the basis for the external quality assurance through a self-assessment or by collecting other material including supporting evidence. The written documentation is normally complemented by interviews with stakeholders during a site visit. The findings of the assessment are summarised in a report written by a group of external experts. External quality assurance does not end with the report by the experts. The report provides clear guidance for institutional action. Agencies have a consistent follow-up process for considering the action taken by the institution. The nature of the follow-up will depend on the design of the external quality assurance.
2.4 Peer-review experts External quality assurance should be carried out by groups of external experts that include (a) student member(s).	At the core of external quality assurance is the wide range of expertise provided by peer experts, who contribute to the work of the agency through input from various perspectives, including those of institutions, academics, students and employers/ professional practitioners. The involvement of international experts in external quality assurance, for example as members of peer panels, is desirable as it adds a further dimension to the development and implementation of processes.
2.5 Criteria for outcomes Any outcomes or judgements made as the result of external quality assurance should be based on explicit and published criteria that are applied consistently, irrespective of whether the process leads to a formal decision.	External quality assurance and in particular its outcomes have a significant impact on institutions and programmes that are evaluated and judged. In the interests of equity and reliability, outcomes of external quality assurance are based on pre-defined and published criteria, which are interpreted consistently and are evidence-based. Depending on the external quality assurance system, outcomes may take different forms, for example, recommendations, judgements or formal decisions.

2.6 Reporting	The report by the experts is the basis for the institution's follow-up action of the external evaluation and it provides information to society regarding the activities of an institution. In order for the report to be used as the basis for action to be taken, it needs to be clear and concise in its structure and language and to cover
Full reports by the experts should be published, clear and accessible to the academic community, external partners and other interested individuals. If the agency takes any formal decision based on the reports, the decision should be published together with the report.	- context description (to help locate the higher education institution in its specific context); - description of the individual procedure, including experts involved; - evidence, analysis and findings; - conclusions; - features of good practice, demonstrated by the institution; - recommendations for follow-up action. The preparation of a summary report may be useful. The factual accuracy of a report is improved if the institution is given the opportunity to point out errors of fact before the report is finalised.
2.7 Complaints and Appeals Complaints and appeals processes should be clearly defined as part of the design of external quality assurance processes and communicated to the institutions.	In order to safeguard the rights of the institutions and ensure fair decision-making, external quality assurance is operated in an open and accountable way. Nevertheless, there may be misapprehensions or instances of dissatisfaction about the process or formal outcomes. Institutions need to have access to processes that allow them to raise issues of concern with the agency; the agencies, need to handle such issues in a professional way by means of a clearly defined process that is consistently applied. A complaints procedure allows an institution to state its dissatisfaction about the conduct of the process or those carrying it out. In an appeals procedure, the institution questions the formal outcomes of the process, where it can demonstrate that the outcome is not based on sound evidence, that criteria have not been correctly applied or that the processes have not been consistently implemented.