



The INQAAHE Submission to UNESCO WHEC 2022

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Acronyms

CBQA	Cross-border quality assurance
CBE	Cross-border education
EQAA	External Quality Assurance Agency
EQAB	External Quality Assurance Body
EQAP	External Quality Assurance Provider
ISGs	International Standards and Guidelines of Quality Assurance in Tertiary Education
GGP	INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practice
QA	Quality assurance
SER	Self-assessment report
SLP	Short learning programme
TE	Tertiary education: UNESCO ISCED levels 4-8
TEP	Tertiary education provider

Introduction

To be able to embrace the ever-growing diversity, tertiary education must be redefined in ways that promote equity and inclusion through recognition of diverse and flexible provisions beyond formal education. Flexible learning pathways, competency-driven curricula, and digital learning are some of the solutions to respond to the inclusion and diversification needs. The challenge that now needs to be met is that the knowledge, skills and competencies obtained through such diversified provisions are credible, relevant, and trusted. This can only be achieved if this diversity is reflected in the provision of and practices for quality assurance.

The current ***Open Knowledge Product entitled International Standards and Guidelines of Quality Assurance in Tertiary Education (ISGs)*** is the result of a broad participatory process including the rich expertise of tertiary education providers and their external quality assurance bodies globally. It recognizes the expertise and widely acknowledged proficiency in quality assurance of formal and non-formal education provisions and builds from that with the key purpose of embracing the ever-diversifying tertiary education provisions. The result is a tool that encompasses the increased diversity required for quality assurance and that supports the continuing need for capacity building towards relevant and transformative services.

As mentioned above, the primary purpose of the ISGs is to acknowledge and embrace the diversity of tertiary education provisions and promote relevance of quality assurance measures. A one-size-fits-all approach to quality assurance no longer serves the needs of diverse stakeholders. The work of quality assurance must accommodate today's socio-economic and cultural needs in the transformation of tertiary education provision and the evolving trends for lifelong learning, global democratisation of knowledge and, ultimately a global knowledge society.

The ISGs are built on the extensive application and lessons learnt from the INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practices (GGPs), and other similar procedures, standards, guidelines and principles applied at international and regional levels, which have been in operation for around twenty years. It offers a quality assurance framework specifically developed to respond to the diversified needs, including but not limited to cross-border education, cross-border quality assurance, short learning programmes (e.g. micro-credentials), distance and online provisions, among the rest.

It is with this purpose that INQAAHE embarked on a journey of transformation of its Guidelines of Good Practice (2003, revised in 2006 and 2016) into International Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Tertiary Education to address the ever-increasing diversification of learner needs to ensure no one is left behind.

About INQAAHE

The International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE), established in 1991, was the first quality assurance (QA) network to join QA providers in an effort to enhance the QA provisions in higher education worldwide. It has proven to be a trusted platform for QA enhancement and umbrella network of QA providers worldwide since then. INQAAHE was originally established under the auspices of the Hong Kong Council for Academic Accreditation, which served as its first Secretariat and hosted the first conference of the network. Later on, with legal incorporation in New Zealand, its Secretariat, in line with the internationalization principle and mission, moved around the globe with agencies in the Netherlands and Spain. Currently, INQAAHE is legally incorporated in Spain as an independent international organization.

The central purpose and role of INQAAHE is to promote and advance excellence in higher education through the support of an active international community of quality assurance providers. Its main activities evolve around research and innovation in QA, capacity building, setting quality hallmarks for quality assurance in tertiary education, external evaluation of quality assurance providers, support in the establishment of regional or special interest quality assurance networks, to name but a few.

Enjoying a membership of around 350 QA providers, INQAAHE's expertise extends beyond bridging external quality assurance systems and respective enhancement strategies. It brings unique insights into international best practice, working with a range of regional and subject specific agency networks and international strategic partnerships (e.g., UNESCO, regional QA networks, university associations, Commonwealth of Learning), on a diversity of projects and initiatives.

Rationale

In response to global disruptions and massification of tertiary education (TE), the tertiary learning paradigm has transformed to embrace diversity, predominantly due to rapid advancement and integration of technology, increasing pressures for TE to adapt to global mobility, employers' needs for a rapidly evolving workforce and flexible learning pathways, and skills-based learning and hiring practices. Linked to the TE transformational trends is a clear development of related quality assurance provisions resulting in diversification of expectations and functions (Karakhanyan & Stensaker, 2020). To ensure relevance of quality assurance to address these transformations, and to provide a robust framework for affirmation of relevance, quality, trust and credibility in TE globally, the need to establish international quality hallmarks becomes urgent.

The initial need for the international quality hallmarks emerged back in 2000, when INQAAHE introduced the first draft of its *Principles of Good Practice*. Due to its novelty, and based on the consultation with the INQAAHE members, the decision was to launch with terminology that promotes the formation and enhancement of quality assurance provisions, thus culminating in publication of the INQAAHE Principles of Good Practice (2003). Later editions reframed the principles into the Guidelines of Good Practice (2006, 2016, up to today) (INQAAHE, 2021). Since then, the INQAAHE GGPs have benefited the INQAAHE membership in their desire to align with the international guidelines of good practice, thus, promoting the cause of quality and quality culture.

Diversification trends, the related diversification of QA provisions and providers (Elken & Stensaker, 2020) (Karakhanyan & Stensaker, 2020) and the call to enhance relevance of quality assurance provisions, necessitates enhancement of the GGPs. Along with the re-design of the GGPs, the following changes are undertaken to address the problems that were identified throughout the last 20 years:

- **Transparency in the language of quality assurance:** the need to apply a universally recognised terminology given the QA specific jargon used by quality assurance professionals.
- **Quality assurance for the diversification of tertiary education provisions:** diversification of tertiary education provisions raises issues about both the providers and the provisions that need special attention if relevance is to be ensured. There is increased diversification at institutional (Teichler, 2015), programme and curriculum levels, both vertically (as per education qualifications levels, including pre- and post-level degrees) and horizontally (in terms of types, nature, design and content of the program, e.g. time-based vs. competency-based curricula, knowledge vs. skill oriented programmes, industry delivered short learning programmes culminating in award of a credential). This is further complication by the expansion of non-formal and informal education provisions (e.g. alternative education/short learning programmes/micro-credentials offered by industry) (UNESCO, in progress), resulting in growing demand for flexible learning opportunities and pathways (UNESCO, 2015). Diversification also touched modalities of delivery including but not limited to diverse methods of distance education and cross-border provisions.
- **Diversity of quality assurance providers by type:** in line with the diversification of tertiary education provisions and globalization trends, the nature of quality assurance provisions also transformed to embrace the diversity. This is reflected in the expansion of the mandates of QA providers and related functions and areas of expertise, operations and geographical coverage (Elken & Stensaker, 2020). One result is the emergence of cross-border quality assurance, among other things. Types of QA bodies currently range from an agency with a specific scope to conduct reviews (e.g., buffer body established by a government), to QA providers with an exclusive function of external reviews (e.g., accreditation councils) and QA bodies with a broader scope of enhancement, consultation, training and other related functions (the latter might or might not have an external review function). Thus, differentiation of QA bodies is also notable and must be defined and appropriately accommodated.
- **Diversification of external quality assurance providers by maturity levels:** after the 1980s, external quality assurance also witnessed massification. Forty years down the road, more than 350 QA bodies exist today, with diverse levels of maturity depending on the years of operations, accumulated expertise, and impact levels (Karakhanyan & Stensaker, 2020). For decades, quality assurance has been tacitly viewed as a tool applied for QA intrinsic purposes and for the sake of promoting and establishing quality assurance practices. The quality definition predominantly used so far – fitness

for purpose – explicitly addresses the intrinsic purposes of an External Quality Assurance Provider (EQAP) by evaluating performance as per the stated mission. While useful in establishing and evaluating quality of organizational performance, societal expectations go beyond mere fit-for-purpose review to an evaluation of the relevance and transformational power of QA. Given decades of experience in QA, it is time to provide a framework for evaluation of diverse QA providers in consideration of their maturity levels and potential for impact, thus enabling measurement of the relevance, quality and transformational capacity of the EQAPs on the TEIs, students and societies at large.

- **Affirmation of Quality Globally:** given the massification and the expanding internationalization of quality assurance provisions, data-informed guidance on the reliability and relevance of quality assurance providers is needed to support governments, tertiary education providers, students and societies at large. This need was highlighted in the focus group discussions (see below). Thus, a reliable platform for such guidance on EAQB's performance and credibility is one of the solutions. The need for public access to such information in the credential registration platforms (e.g., Credential Registry¹) is increasingly recognized as important not only for information from the QA providers, but also to connect to information about the increasingly diverse education providers and programmes that these QA providers evaluate.

One of the key changes proposed with the re-designed version of the GGPs refers to the title of the international quality hallmarks. INQAAHE's long experience with the GGPs and their continuing evolution provides a strong basis for setting international standards and related guidelines for QA providers and provisions. Initially, GGPs were intended only for the INQAAHE members and only for the assurance of alignment with the international guidelines of good practice. With the re-designed version, the intention is to expand the reviews beyond the membership and respond to the need for affirmation of quality, trust, relevance and credibility of external reviews and accreditations. Thus, the newly proposed *International Standards and Guidelines (ISGs)* are intended to promote high standards of professional practice by external quality assurance providers – INQAAHE members and non-members - that conduct external reviews of tertiary education providers within UNESCO ISCED levels 4 to 8² of formal and non-formal education.

Methodology

A robust mixed-method approach supports the development of the new ISGs. The process was launched in 2020, in response to the INQAAHE Global Study (2020), which highlighted the gaps and challenges in current practices of quality assurance in tertiary education. Thus, the ISGs development underwent the following steps and methods:

- **Literature review and document analysis:** within the frames an in-depth analysis of current standards for quality assurance of tertiary education, the practices of quality assurance were reviewed to understand the challenges and gaps.
- **Focus groups across the globe:** throughout November-December 2021, seven focus groups across the seven regions - Africa, Asia-Pacific, Arab States, Eastern Europe, Latin America and Caribbean, North America, Western Europe – were conducted to understand the needs and discuss the initial solutions for the redesigned approaches to QA. In total, 47 (24%) of countries, 58 QA bodies (~17%) and 90 QA professionals participated in the focus groups. Both INQAAHE members and non-members were engaged. The key topics for discussion evolved around the solutions to embrace the diversity (i.e., the modular approach and maturity levels). In general, there was positive feedback for “long-awaited” solutions and the potential for capacity building it represents.
- **Review of current GGPs and development on new modules to meet diverse needs:** based on the literature review and document analysis, results and inputs from the stakeholder focus groups, the initial draft of the International Standards and Guidelines was developed. The development was led by the INQAAHE Working Group established for the purpose. Where necessary, external expertise

¹ <https://credentialengine.org/about/credential-registry-overview/>

² uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/international-standard-classification-of-education-isced-2011-en.pdf

was called upon to support the developments in specific fields of standards, e.g., cross-border quality assurance, QA of cross-border education, QA of short learning programmes, and QA of distance education.

- **An online consultation with stakeholders:** the developed draft solutions were shared with a sample of QA providers from the seven regions - Africa, Asia-Pacific, Arab States, Eastern Europe, Latin America and Caribbean, North America, Western Europe. Two stakeholder consultation meetings with 16 participants from 17 countries were conducted to delve deeper into the current challenges in tertiary education provisions related to quality and relevance as well as to discuss the INQAAHE proposed solutions. The results fed into a Stakeholder Consultation report shared with UNESCO to make it available for the audience of the UNESCO 3rd WHEC 2022, in May 2022, in Barcelona. The proactive engagement of the stakeholders was a valuable input and, in totality, expressed support for the developed solutions. This support was further evidenced by the eagerness of the participants to share written feedback on the ISGs.
- **Refinement:** all the feedback has been incorporated into the current version of the ISGs, which provides a robust solution for diverse TE issues globally.

Open Knowledge Product: the International Standards and Guideline for Quality Assurance in Tertiary Education

A primary purpose of the INQAAHE International Standards and Guidelines of Quality Assurance in Tertiary Education (ISGs) is to support the ever-growing diversification of tertiary education provisions with enhancement-led, relevant and transformative quality assurance measures. The ISGs are also designed to introduce a nuanced approach to evaluation of external quality assurance providers (EQAPs), which ensures evaluation as “fit for the maturity level” of an EQAP and designed to be useful both in the internal self-evaluation and external evaluation of EQAPs.

The benefits of the ISGs are as follows:

- Providing a firm foundation for the EQAPs in their daily operations and enhancement;
- Encouraging and supporting recognition of EQAPs against internationally adopted QA standards, thus expanding potential for credibility, trust and recognition;
- Safeguarding systems from bogus QA providers, thus benefiting TE systems (formal and informal), their students and societies at large;
- Addressing diversity of QA provisions;
- Gradually enhancing the QA provisions in respect to maturity levels, moving from efficiency (fitness for purpose) to relevance and transformative capacity;
- Manifesting trustworthiness of EQA measures and systems;
- Providing a strong background for promoting mutual recognition of EQA outcomes and outputs;
- Promoting transparency in EQAPs operations worldwide.

The structure of the 2022 ISGs

The 2022 version of ISGs is designed based on a modular approach to enable due recognition of diverse tertiary education and QA provisions based on their specific profiles and consideration of maturity levels of EQAPs. Thus, the ISGs evolves around three major sections:

- **Section 1:** Baseline standards that relate to all quality assurance providers and accreditors regardless of their specific field of operations.
- **Section 2:** Sets of selective modules of standards to cater to specific profiles of EQAPs, enabling due recognition of the increasing diversity of tertiary education and QA providers.
- **Section 3:** *Guiding principles* to promote continuous enhancement and impact of EQAPs as per maturity level.

Section 1 concentrates on baseline requirements for all QA bodies and is mandatory for recognition against the ISGs. It evolves around six (6) major functional and operational dimensions of an EQAP:

- **Module 1:** Baseline Standards

- External quality assurance provider
- Tertiary education providers and the external quality assurance provider
- EQAP's review of tertiary education providers
- Internationalization and external relations
- Stakeholder engagement
- Integrity, transparency and disclosure

Section two focuses on the profiles and specific field of activity of the EQAP and is elective. It revolves around the following modules of standards, which address diversity of activities conducted by EQAPs:

- **Module 2:** Cross-border quality assurance & quality assurance of cross-border education
- **Module 3:** Quality assurance of short learning programme
- **Module 4:** Quality assurance of distance education

Section 3 enables continuous enhancement and benefits from external reviews of EQAPs by outlining *guiding principles* for each cycle of reviews/maturity levels. The *guiding principles* aim to incentivize the EQAPs to continually strive for greater levels of impact, beyond demonstration of fit-for-purpose within the jurisdiction of their operation, with each cycle of external reviews.

- **Maturity level I: Efficiency**
- **Maturity level II: Relevance**
- **Maturity level III: Transformation.**

The maturity levels are designed to enable both diagnostic and formative, including self- and external review of EQAPs, and are based on a continuous improvement approach to move the focus from compliance with organizational performance standards to impact on tertiary education and, ultimately, driving transformations in student learning.

Section 1: Baseline standards

Table 1 lays out baseline standards and guidelines for EQAPs. This section is mandatory for all the applicants for international recognition against the ISGs.

Table 1: Module 1: Baseline standards

Standards		Guidelines			
1	The External Quality Assurance Provider	1.1	Mission, Governance & Organization: The EQAP is a recognized, credible organization, trusted by key stakeholders - the government, TE providers and public at large. The governance, structure and operations enable effective and efficient operations in line with its mission.	1.1.1	The EQAP has an established legal basis and is recognized by key stakeholders – government, TE providers and public at large. The EQAP is guided by principles of good practice in formulating its policies and practices (e.g. independence, objectivity, autonomy).
				1.1.2	The EQAP has a clearly articulated mission statement and a set of objectives that explicitly provide that external quality assurance of tertiary education is a key function of the organization, describe the purpose and scope of its activities and can be translated into verifiable policies and measurable performance indicators. Interest of students and the society are at the forefront of its aspirations.
				1.1.3	The EQAP has a well-articulated governance model consistent with its mission and objectives and adequate mechanisms to involve relevant stakeholders at pertinent levels of governance and management.
				1.1.4	The composition of the decision-making body and/or its regulatory framework ensure trust, independence and impartiality in decision-making. A clear policy and adequate mechanisms preventing conflict of interests is in operation and applies to its staff, its decision-making body, and the external reviewers.
				1.1.5	The EQAP’s organizational structure makes it possible to carry out its external review processes effectively and efficiently.
				1.1.6	The EQAP’s activities are premised on a robust strategic planning. Adequate mechanisms are in place to assess its progress, impact and plans for future developments.
		1.2	Resources: the EQAP has adequate resources – physical, financial and human - to carry out its mission.	1.2.1	The EQAP is equipped with a well-trained, appropriately qualified staff to enable external evaluation effectively and efficiently in accordance with its mission statement and its methodological approach. The staff has the needed skills to carry out the functions associated to external QA. The EQAP provides systematic opportunities for the professional development of its staff.
				1.2.2	The EQAP has established, maintains and enhances a robust pool of qualified external reviewers supported by necessary recruitment, on boarding, training and professionalization opportunities.

			1.2.3	The EQAP has adequate physical, virtual and financial resources needed to fulfil its goals and carry out the activities that emerge from its mission statement and objectives. The funding approach instils trust and sustainability in operations. It is equipped with the necessary technological resources to carry out efficiently its processes: including the database of external reviewers, and a respective platform for managing its evaluation procedures, etc.	
	1.3	Internal QA and Accountability: The EQAP has in place policies and mechanisms for its internal quality assurance, which demonstrate a continuing effort to improve the quality and integrity of its activities.	1.3.1	The EQAP has a clear policy for its own internal and external quality assurance linked to organizational planning, funding and performance. The outcomes are evidenced through robust accountability measures to the TE community and society it serves to.	
			1.3.2	The EQAP has robust internal quality assurance mechanisms that enable it to review its own activities in order to respond to the changing nature of tertiary education, the effectiveness of its operations, and to maintain its relevance and its contribution towards the achievement of its objectives.	
			1.3.3	The EQAP periodically conducts a self-review of its own activities, including consideration of its own effects on the system(s) it operates within and the values it brings. The review is premised on reliable data collection and analysis, to inform decision-making and trigger improvements.	
			1.3.4	The EQAP's plan for internal and external evaluation of its policies and practices identifies and integrates its practices in reviewing diverse modalities of delivery (e.g. distance education provision, hybrid) and UNESCO ISCED levels 4-8, as applicable. For example, while assessing postgraduate programs, necessary dimensions, such as research capacity should form the core of evaluation, the links between research and learning through an integrated approach to external QA review.	
			1.3.5	The EQAP is subject to external reviews at regular intervals, ideally not exceeding five years. There is evidence that any required action(s) is implemented and disclosed.	
			1.3.6	There is a strong evidence of a well-established and robust quality culture, which drives enhancement, relevance of and trust in the EQAP. The evidence is present throughout all the functions of the EQAP, as per its mandate.	
2	The EQAP's framework for external review	2.1	The relationship between the EQAP and TEPs: The EQAP	2.1.1	The EQAP recognizes that institutional and programmatic quality and quality assurance are primarily the responsibility of the tertiary education providers themselves and respects the specific feature of each TEP and their academic freedom and organizational autonomy.

of quality of TEPs	recognizes TEPs as having primary responsibility for quality and relevance and supports in promoting trust and credibility.	2.1.2	The EQAP promotes development, appropriate implementation and continuous enhancement of the TE IQA system in accordance with the understanding that the primary responsibility for assuring quality resides with the providers.
		2.1.3	The EQAP is mindful of the level of workload and cost that its procedures will place on TEPs and strives to make the procedures as time and cost effective as possible.
		2.1.4	The EQAP provides tertiary education providers with clear guidance on the requirements for self-assessment and external review processes.
		2.2	The EQAP's standards for external quality review: the standards value diversity of provisions and promote trust, relevance, enhanced quality of TE provisions, thus promoting quality culture.
2.2		2.2.1	The EQAP recognizes and values diversity of providers and translates this valuation into standards that take into account the TEP's identity and mission.
		2.2.2	The standards adopted by the EQAP have been subject to reasonable consultation with stakeholders and are revised at regular intervals to ensure relevance to the needs of the system.
		2.2.3	The standards explicitly address the areas of TEP's activity that fall within the EQAP's scope, (e.g., governance and management, program design and approval, teaching and learning process, student admission, progression and certification, research, community engagement) and on the availability of necessary resources (e.g., finances, staff and learning resources).
		2.2.4	The standards take into account and provide for an effective internal follow up on the outcomes of the external reviews.
		2.2.5	The EQAP has a clear policy that specifies the way in which standards are to be applied and the types of evidence needed to demonstrate that they are met.
		2.2.6	The EQAP standards adequately address and promote academic integrity.
2.3	The EQAP's external review process: the external review framework has a clear set of procedures for each type of review.	2.3.1	The EQAP carries out an external review process that is driven by a publicly available and reliable methodology ensuring independence, trust, relevance to the context and credibility in the procedures. Where applicable, the EQAP should demonstrate its capacity to conduct reviews in both virtual and in-person modes supported by purpose-built methodology. The distinction should be clear to avoid any issues of misconduct.
		2.3.2	The EQAP has published documents clearly articulating expectations from TEPs, in the form of quality standards and procedures for each step/phase of the external review.
		2.3.3	The external review process is carried out by a panel(s) of experts consistent with the characteristics of the provider/provision under review. Experts can provide input from various perspectives, including those of institutions, academics, students, employers or professional

			practitioners. Experts represent a balance of diversity, equity, and inclusion as appropriate for the mission of the EQAP.
		2.3.4	The EQAP has clear specifications on the characteristics and selection of external reviewers, who must be supported by appropriate training and relevant materials such as guidelines/handbooks and manuals for evaluation.
		2.3.5	External review procedures include effective and comprehensive mechanisms for the prevention of conflicts of interest and ensure that any judgment(s) resulting from external reviews are based on explicit and published criteria.
		2.3.6	The EQAP's system has mechanisms in place that ensure each TEPs or program is evaluated in a consistent way, even if the external panels, teams, or committees are different.
		2.3.7	The EQAP carries out the external review within a reasonable timeframe to ensure that information is current and updated.
		2.3.8	The EQAP ensures the tertiary education providers have an opportunity to correct any factual error that may appear in the external review report.
		2.3.9	The EQAP provides clear guidance to the providers in the application of each step within the external review procedure, the solicitation of assessment/feedback from the public, students, and other constituents, or the preparation for external review as necessary and appropriate.
	2.4	Regular Systemic Reviews	the EQAP conducts regular systemic/thematic reviews to inform its stakeholders and public at large on the systemic issues/developments and trends.
		2.4.1	Where applicable, the EQAP conducts regular systemic/thematic reviews within the domain it operates in and makes the reports on the trends and impact publicly available for broader use by stakeholders.
		2.4.2	The EQAP prepares and disseminates periodically integrated, system-wide reports on the overall outcomes of QA processes, impact on the TE system and its performance and of any other relevant activities.
3	EQAP's Review of TE Providers:	3.1	Evaluation: the evaluation conducted
		3.1.1	The evaluation criteria are clearly articulated and supported by a robust methodology.
		3.1.2	The evaluation criteria and methodology are consistently applied across the cases.

Evaluation, Decision Making and Appeals		by external panel is based on a clearly articulated and publicly available criteria and methodology.	3.1.3	The EQAP provides full and clear disclosure of its policies, procedures, criteria and methodology for evaluation and judgements of TE performance publicly available prior to its application.
	3.2	Decision-making: The EQAP has policies and procedures in place that ensure a fair and independent decision-making on the review cases.	3.2.1	The EQAP decisions take into consideration the outcomes of both the provider’s internal review process and the external review panel while considering any other relevant information, provided this has been communicated to the provider.
			3.2.2	The EQAP decisions are based on published standards and procedures and can be justified only with reference to those standards and procedures.
			3.2.3	The EQAP decision-making process is impartial, rigorous, and transparent. The approach to decision-making and actions for imposing recommendations for follow up by TEPs are consistent throughout all the procedures.
			3.2.4	The EQAP makes its decisions and/or review reports public. The content and extent of reporting is in line with the cultural context and applicable legal and other requirements.
			3.2.5	The EQAP has mechanisms to facilitate a fair public understanding of the reasons supporting decisions taken.
	3.3	Appeals and Complaints: the EQAP deploys clear policies and procedures for appeals and complaints.	3.3.1	The EQAP has procedures in place to deal with complaints about its procedures or operation in a consistent way.
			3.3.2	The EQAP has clear, published procedures for handling appeals related to its external review and decision-making processes.
			3.3.3	Appeals are conducted by an independent panel/commission that was not responsible for the original decision and has no conflict of interest; appeals need not necessarily be conducted outside the EQAP.
	4 Internationalization and External Relations	4.1	Internationalization: The EQAP has a robust internationalization strategy that leads to enhanced effectiveness and efficiency in its operations.	4.1.1
			4.1.2	The EQAP is open to international developments in quality assurance and tertiary education at large and has mechanisms that enable it to learn about and analyze the main trends in the field thus enhancing relevance.
			4.1.3	The EQAP collaborates with other QA bodies internationally where possible, in areas such as exchange of good practices, capacity building, and review of decisions, joint projects, or staff exchanges.
4.2		External relations: the	4.2.1	The EQAP appropriately coordinates and communicates with other national, regional international government and non-government organizations in the oversight of its provisions.

		EQAP effectively promotes its collaborations with key players in the national, regional, international contexts.		The EQAP external relations, partnerships and collaborations promote its mission and successful implementation of its strategies.
5 Integrity, Disclosure and Transparency	5.1	Integrity: The EQAP operates with integrity and professionalism and adheres to ethical and professional standards.	5.1.1	The EQAP has a clear policy and procedure in place to underpin integrity in its functions and manifests it openly and transparently. Integrity is integral to the culture of the organization and is consistently respected in all the modes of delivery of services (face-to-face; distance; hybrid; cross-border).
	5.2	Transparency: the EQAP has robust systems in place to ensure transparent and trustworthy operations.	5.2.1	The EQAP's policies and procedures on external evaluation of tertiary education providers and provisions underpin the transparency principle in dealing with reviews and decision-making.
			5.2.2	The EQAP has a robust information management system, which supports transparent, efficient, data driven and reliable decision-making. The EQAP has a process for data collection and reporting about their review/accreditation activity for all types of modalities and reviews (e.g., online/distance education provisions, cross-border education, short programs) which are consistent and comply with national/governmental requirements.
	5.3	Disclosure: the EQAP ensures disclosure at different levels of its activity in line with the culture within which it operates.	5.3.1	The EQAP's policies and procedures on external evaluation of tertiary education providers and provisions underpin adequate disclosure of its reviews and related outcomes/decisions made, based on consideration of the local and regional culture, while ensuring alignment with the international best practice.
			5.3.2	The EQAP makes public its policies and decisions about its own performance and disseminates reports on outcomes of its QA processes. The EQAP discloses to the public the decisions about the EQAP resulting from any external review of its own performance.
	6 Stakeholder role and engagement	6.1	Stakeholder profile: the EQAP is clear in its expectations from each stakeholder group.	6.1.1
6.2		Stakeholder engagement: the EQAP	6.2.1	The EQAP's policies ensure pro-active stakeholder engagement in the matters related to standards, procedures, reviews, and decision-making. The EQAP, where applicable should

ensures meaningful and impactful stakeholder engagement in its functions.	demonstrate an inclusive approach to stakeholder engagement, e.g., in its procedures in terms of ensuring gender, geographical balance, and other non-discriminatory policies. <hr/> 6.2.2 To ensure meaningful engagement, the EQAP has targeted induction, training and professionalization measures, which are consistently applied and regularly enhanced as needed.
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Section 2: Field specific modules

Section 2 outlays international standards and guidelines grouped in modules as per profile of an EQAP and aim to address the increased diversification of QA provisions and highlight relevance of the external reviews conducted by the EQAPs. The following modules are selective in nature and are applicable to the EQAPs that engage in the activities listed below.

- **Module 2:** Cross-border quality assurance and quality assurance of cross-border education
- **Module 3:** Quality assurance of short learning programmes
- **Module 4:** Quality assurance of distance education

Table 2: Module 2: Cross-border quality assurance and quality assurance of cross-border education

Module 2.1: Cross-border quality assurance

This module applies to the external quality assurance providers that conduct external reviews transnationally.

Standard			Guidelines	
1	Mandate	1.1 Mandate, mission and strategies: The EQAP has a clear mandate to conduct QA activities across international borders.	1.1.1	The EQAP's mission, vision, objectives and strategies clearly specify its cross-border profile and remit to conduct quality assurance across the borders. The role and extent of contribution of the cross-border quality assurance provider to QA culture promotion within its remits and/or across the international borders is well articulated.
			1.1.2	The rights and obligations of the cross-border EQAP and the tertiary education units it evaluates are clearly established and well known by the parties.

		1.1.3	The EQAP adheres to laws and regulations within the jurisdictions it operates in. When engaging in external reviews in a specific context, the EQAP should seek to liaise with the relevant quality assurance and regulatory authority with the purpose to both inform its due diligence about the reviewed TE provider and also explore ways in which it might be possible to cooperate in the quality assurance activity, if applicable.		
	1.2	Alignment with international directives: the EQAP takes into consideration relevant international reference points.	1.2.1	The EQAP operates in line with the internationally recognized principles for cross-border provisions and demonstrates clear evidences of effectiveness and continuous enhancement within the given context (e.g., UNESCO/OECD guidelines).	
2	Policies and procedures	2.1	Clarity and relevance: The EQAP has clearly specified policies and procedures relevant for cross-border quality assurance.	2.1.1	The EQAP has clear policies relating to assuring quality across the borders. These policies take into account characteristics of tertiary education providers within a given context.
				2.1.2	The EQAP has clear procedures for conducting cross-border quality review, including appeals and complaints. The EQAP should consider whether its procedures remain the same when it engages in a cross-border quality assurance and if necessary specific adaptations should be in place as per the requirements of the local legal framework, education system’s traditions and structure.
		2.2.	Resources: the EQAP should ensure relevant expertise while engaging in cross-border quality assurance.	2.2.1	The EQAP should ensure transparent and appropriate selection, training and professional development of the external experts to relevantly and effectively work in an unfamiliar context. In particular, its pool of reviewers would need to have demonstrated inter-cultural awareness and knowledge of and experience of international education systems, whenever possible.
				2.2.2	The EQAP has adequately qualified and trained staff to engage in cross-border quality assurance.
				2.2.3	The EQAP must have measures in place to ensure that its assessment is based on a sound understanding of the ways in which the education provider operates, and is therefore accurate and fair, including any specific language requirements. This might include measures for securing translations of documents and meetings, and bilingual reviewers and has implications for the composition of the team of experts and procedure coordinators assigned by the EQAP.
				2.2.4	The EQAP makes clear to providers and the public the status of its cross-border quality assurance activity. In particular, it should state clearly whether engaging in cross-border

			quality assurance processes will confer any status to the education provider and its provision with regard to either the national education system of the EQAP (if applicable) or the national education system of the education provider (if applicable) or the regional/international education community.		
3	Relevance of EQAP Standards	3.1	Equivalent provisions: the EQAP standards promote equivalent level in the quality of provisions across borders.	3.1.1	The EQAP standards take into consideration the specific aspects related to different modes of provision, such as national and cross-border education, distance or online programmes or tertiary short learning programs as relevant to the context in which they operate.
				3.1.2	The EQAP has a clear set of specific standards/criteria, policies and procedures based on which it conducts its cross-border reviews and decision-making within an international context. The EQAP conducting cross-border reviews should ensure that the standards they use are equivalent, and at least no lower than, those of similar provision within their own jurisdiction/context, whilst acknowledging that receiving jurisdictions might include additional expectations consistent with their priorities and education systems.
		3.2	Context & Culture: the EQAP standards take into consideration of the local context and culture.	3.2.1	The EQAP takes into consideration cultural and contextual peculiarities of the tertiary education provisions under scrutiny. The EQAP approaches to reviews should be sensitive to cultural and contextual differences.
4	Recognition	4.1	Recognition of outcomes: EQAP ensures the outcomes of its reviews are recognized in the context they operate in and internationally.	4.1.1	The EQAP cooperates with appropriate governments and local QA bodies within the contexts in which it operates. This cooperation is oriented to improve mutual understanding, to have a clear and comprehensive account of the regulatory framework and to share good practices.
				4.1.2	The EQAP seeks ways to cooperate with other QA providers for the purposes of mutual recognition.
				4.1.3	Students and other stakeholders receive clear and complete information about the standards and results of external reviews, awards delivered and their recognition prospects.
				4.1.4	The EQAP undergoes external reviews against standards specific for cross-border QA providers on a regular basis.

Module 2.2: Quality assurance of cross-border tertiary education

This module applies to the external quality assurance providers that conduct quality assurance of cross-border tertiary education (nationally or across the borders).

Standard		Guidelines	
1	Mandate	1.1 Mandate, mission and strategies: The EQAP has a clear mandate to conduct QA activities of cross-border TE.	1.1.1 The EQAP's mission, vision, objectives and strategies clearly specify its remit to conduct QA of cross-border education. Its role and extent of contribution to QA culture promotion within its remits and/or across the international borders is clearly articulated.
			1.1.2 The rights and obligations of the EQAP and cross-border tertiary education provider and its quality assurance are clearly established and well known by the parties.
			1.1.3 The EQAP adheres to laws and regulations within the jurisdictions it operates in and as applicable to cross-border education. When engaging in quality assurance activity of cross-border providers the EQAP should seek to liaise with the relevant quality assurance and regulatory authority in the jurisdiction in which the reviewed provider is based. The purpose is to both inform its due diligence about the reviewed provider and explore ways in which it might be possible to cooperate in the quality assurance activity, if applicable.
		1.2 Alignment with international directives: the EQAP takes into consideration relevant international soft regulations.	1.2.1 The EQAP operates in line with the internationally recognized principles for cross-border education and its quality assurance and demonstrates clear evidences of effectiveness and continuous enhancement within the given context (e.g., UNESCO/OECD guidelines).
2	Policies and procedures	2.1 Relevance of policies and procedures: The EQAP has clearly specified policies and procedures relevant for	2.1.1 The EQAP has clear policies relating to both imported and exported tertiary education. These policies take into account the characteristics of the providers and the receivers, and refer to all types of cross-border provisions (in-bound and out-bound).
			2.1.2 The EQAP has clear procedures for review of the CBE provider, including appeals and complaints. The EQAP should consider whether its procedures remain the same in an

	the CBE provisions.		international context and if necessary specific adaptations should be in place as per the requirements of the local legal framework, education system’s traditions and structure.
	2.2. Resources: the EQAP should ensure relevant expertise while conducting quality assurance of CBE provision.	2.2.1	The EQAP should ensure transparent and appropriate selection, training and professional development of its external experts relevant to the context in which the evaluation of CBE provision is to be conducted. Specific training and briefing is ensured for the experts selected to work in an unfamiliar context. In particular, its pool of reviewers would need to have demonstrated inter-cultural awareness and knowledge of and experience of international education systems.
		2.2.2	The EQAP has adequately qualified and trained staff to conduct quality assurance CBE providers.
		2.2.3	When engaging in quality assurance activity of cross-border education providers operating in a language different to that in which the EQAP operates, the EQAP must have measures in place to ensure that its assessment is based on a sound understanding of the ways in which the education provider operates, and is therefore accurate and fair. Thus, the EQAP should clarify any language requirements in conducting review of a CBE provision. This also has implications for the composition of the team of experts. This might include measures for securing translations of documents and meetings, and bilingual reviewers.
		2.2.4	The EQAP makes clear to CBE providers and the public the status of its quality assurance activity. In particular, it states clearly whether engaging in the quality assurance process will confer any status to the CBE provider and its provision with regard to either the national education system of the EQAP (if applicable) or the national education system of the education provider (if applicable) or the regional/international education community.
3	Relevance of EQAP Standards	3.1	Equivalent provisions: the EQAP standards promote equivalent level in the quality of CBE provisions.
		3.1.1	The EQAP standards take into consideration the specific aspects related to cross-border education provision, such as distance or online programs or tertiary short learning programs as relevant to the context in which they operate.
		3.1.2	The EQAP has a clear set of specific standards/criteria, policies and procedures based on which it conducts its reviews and decision-making on CBE provision, locally and within an international context. The EQAP conducting reviews of CBE providers should include the expectation that the standards of CBE provision should be equivalent, and at least no lower than, those of similar provision offered by the reviewed CBE provider in its home campus, whilst acknowledging that receiving jurisdictions might include additional expectations consistent with their priorities and education systems.
		3.1.3	The EQAP makes clear that the awarding body is responsible for ensuring the equivalent quality of the education offered, that the CBE provider takes into consideration the

			regulatory frameworks of the home/host jurisdictions, and ensures clear information on the CBE provisions and their characteristics.
	3.2	Learner experience: the EQAP standards promote equivalent learner experience.	3.2.1 The EQAP standards ensure the admission, student assessment, and graduation requirements as set by a CBE provider are comparable to the home country and across all modalities and ensure achievement of the intended learning outcomes. They ensure CBE quality assurance systems include the expectation that the nature of the program of study and the type of engagement with the CBE awarding body is made clear by CBE providers to students at recruitment stage, including the recognition prospects of the resulting qualifications.
			3.2.2 The EQAP standards address student-learning experience and ensure it is comparable to that of the home country in terms of the exposure to the faculty qualifications, body of knowledge, resources for learning, achievement of intended learning outcomes and application of knowledge and internships. They include the expectation that all CBE students should receive the required support to allow them to achieve the standards expected for their program of study, whilst acknowledging that the CBE student experience might differ in a number of aspects from that of students studying on similar programs in the home campus.
	3.3	Context & Culture: the EQAP standards take into consideration the local context and culture.	3.3.1 The EQAP takes into consideration cultural and contextual peculiarities of the tertiary education provisions under scrutiny. The EQAP approaches to reviews of CBE provisions should be sensitive to cultural and contextual differences.
			3.3.2 When within the scope of the EQAP, its standards should ensure the CBE provider takes into account the socio-economic needs in the delivery of teaching and learning, research and services to society.
4	Recognition	4.1 Recognition of outcomes: EQAP ensures the outcomes of its reviews are recognized in the context they operate and internationally.	4.1.1 The EQAP cooperates with appropriate governments and local QA bodies in the exporting and importing jurisdictions and with international networks. This cooperation is oriented to improve mutual understanding, to have a clear and comprehensive account of the regulatory framework and to share good practices.
			4.1.2 The EQAP seeks ways to cooperate with other external quality assurance providers in advancing the cause of cross-border education provision and its recognition, for example through mutual recognition of external review decisions.
			4.1.3 Students and other stakeholders receive clear and complete information about the standards and results of external reviews, awards delivered and their recognition prospects.
			4.1.4 The EQAP undergoes external reviews against standards specific for quality assurance of cross-border education on a regular basis.

Table 3: Module 3: Quality assurance of short learning programmes

This module applies to external quality assurance providers that conduct reviews/accreditation of short learning programmes (e.g. micro-credentials)

Standards		Guidelines	
1	Mandate	1.1 Mandate, mission and strategies: The EQAP has a clear mandate for external reviews/accreditation of tertiary short learning programs and/or their providers.	1.1.1 The EQAP’s mission, vision, objectives and strategies clearly specify its role in the external review/accreditation of tertiary short learning programs and providers.
			1.1.2 The mandate includes tertiary short learning programs, respective modalities (e.g., face-to-face, online, hybrid) and levels of delivery (as per UNESCO ISCED).
2	Policies and procedures	2.1 Clarity and relevance: The EQAP has a clear set of relevant policies and procedures for external review of short learning programs and/or providers.	2.1.1 The EQAP has an effective set of policies and procedures, in line with its mission, vision and objectives, based on which it conducts its external review and decision-making on tertiary short learning programs and its providers.
			2.1.2 The policies and procedures are consistently applied and demonstrate a solid evidence of independence, effectiveness, relevance and trustworthiness in the performance.
3	Relevance of External QA Standards	3.1 Relevance: The EQAP has adopted a set of robust standards relevant for evaluation of short learning programs.	3.1.1 The standards cover such areas of short learning programs as the provider, the developer, the assessor, the credential awarding process and any platform based on which credentials are issued. There should be strong evidence of robust measures of evaluation, ensuring relevance and instilling trust in the provisions.
			3.1.2 The standards should cover respective arrangements and assess the quality of short learning programs’ ability to ensure flexible learning pathways, and any recognition of learning required for such flexibility, e.g., allowing stack-ability and portability of the short learning program and providing clear and flexible learning pathways to link with and feed into a full qualification.
			3.1.3 The standards should ensure robust processes for development, approval, monitoring and review of the proposed credential.

		3.1.4	The EQAP should ensure that clear and specific information about characteristics (e.g., workload, ISCED level) of the short learning program, including the competencies and skills assessed is made public.
3.2	Links with labor market/industry/partnerships: the EQAP's standards promote a strong link with labor market/industry to ensure relevance.	3.2.1	The standards should promote relevance and currency of the credential through robust links with the labor market and industry partner engagement in developing the learning programs. Evidence of skills and competencies required in the market and their reflection in terms of the required learning outcomes should be manifested.
3.3	Assessment of student achievement: the EQAP's standards ensure adequate assessment of student achievement.	3.3.1	EQAP's standards should ensure that the assessment of learning outcomes is suitable and examinations and other evaluative techniques adequately measure achievement of the stated learning objectives. Academic integrity should be at the core of related policies, activities and practice.
3.4	Recognition of Outcomes: the EQAP has measures to ensure that the awarded credential is recognized.	3.4.1	EQAP's standards should ensure that intended learning outcomes are clearly defined and are aligned with ISCED level 4 to 8 in order to meet the definition of tertiary SLP. The EQAP standards should evaluate the recognition of the SLP as valid and relevant by respective educational and/or industry organizations.
3.5	The Methodology & Modality: the EQAP's standards are relevant for the design and delivery modalities of short learning programs.	3.5.1	The EQAP standards cover the design of the program adequate for tertiary SLPs.
		3.5.2	The EQAP standards cover the modalities in which the short learning program is delivered (e.g. face-to-face, online, hybrid), the expected workload, related authentication and evaluation methodologies.
3.6	Resources for delivery of short learning programs: the EQAP standards ensure adequate resources for	3.6.1	The EQAP standards cover the resources necessary to deliver the short learning program: adequate number of instructors, learning facilitators, curriculum developers, assessors and training development staff possess appropriate qualifications and experience in their positions and roles.
		3.6.2	The EQAP standards should promote a learning environment that supports and enhances the attainment of necessary knowledge and skills.

		successful learner experience.	3.6.3	The standards ensure the learner records are accurate, confidentiality is ensured, and access is appropriate.
4 EQAP Resources	4.1	Human resources: the EQAP is equipped adequately with staff and experts to conduct successful review of SLPs.	4.1.1	The EQAP has adequately qualified staff and specially trained external reviewers to conduct QA reviews of tertiary short learning program providers to address specific modalities and levels of programs.
			4.2.1	The EQAP has a special approach for professionalization of its staff and external reviewers as per its specific profile.

Table 3: Module 4: Quality assurance of distance education

Standard		Guidelines		
1 Mandate	1.1	Mandate, mission and strategies: The EQAP has a clear mandate for the inclusion of distance provisions within the scope of its external review/accreditation responsibilities	1.1.1	The EQAP’s mandate, mission and strategies authorize inclusion of distance education provisions within the scope of its external review responsibilities, or its mandate is inclusive of all forms of teaching and learning regardless of modality.
	1.2	Relevant Expertise: The EQAP has the appropriate expertise and capacity to conduct reviews of distance education provisions.	1.2.1	The EQAP provides training to staff to evaluate distance education quality regardless of technological approach and determine whether students are achieving the stated learning objectives in the distance education courses/programs offered by the TEP.
			1.2.2	The EQAP uses peer reviewers with appropriate training and experience to conduct external reviews of distance education provisions.
2 Policies and procedures	2.1	Relevance: The EQAP provides clear definitions for distance education and how	2.1.1	The EQAP policies include a definition of distance education that explains how distance education courses/programs are distinguished from on-campus courses/programs.
			2.1.2	Based upon its definition of distance education, the EQAP has clear and published policies for how TEPs may apply for approval for distance education courses/programs. The policies and

		TEPs may apply for approval.	protocols ensure TEPs affirm that distance education is appropriate for the delivery of curriculum and content within the courses or programs that a TEP is providing or proposes for approval of distance education.
	2.2	Authorization: The EQAP has established and transparent policies for TEPs to seek authorization for distance education within existing recognitions.	2.2.1 The EQAP has clear and published policies about what it required for initial notification and/or authorization for a TEP’s provision of distance education and any subsequent schedule for authorization, if required, of distance/online education provision. 2.2.2 The EQAP has clear and published policies about removal of such authorization.
3	Relevance of Standards	3.1 Equivalency: The EQAP has standards to ensure TEPs can and do provide relevant learning experiences for distance education students.	3.1.1 The EQAP has standards and/or practices to ensure TEPs have identified how distance/online education is consistent with or appropriate to their mission, their students and other stakeholder needs. 3.1.2 The EQAP has standards and/or practices to ensure TEP governance systems support and integrate distance education courses/programs into the institution. 3.1.3 The EQAP has standards and/or practices that require TEPs have financial resources, staffing and expertise (including experience, training and professionalization), technology infrastructure, data security, relevant student identity authentication tools and other organizational capacity to provide distance education. 3.1.4 The EQAP has standards and/or practices to ensure TEPs are clearly and appropriately communicating information about computer equipment, software, internet access, online library subscriptions, and any other technology requirements and policies that are relevant for distance education courses/programs to prospective and current students. 3.1.5 The EQAP has standards and/or practices to ensure TEP’s are appropriately preparing and supporting faculty for distance education and are periodically evaluating faculty effectiveness in 1) providing instruction; and 2) assessing student progress in distance education courses/programs. 3.1.6 The EQAP has standards and/or practices to ensure TEPs are appropriately preparing and supporting students for distance education 3.1.7 The EQAP has standards and/or practices to ensure TEPs can demonstrate equivalency in learning resources and outcomes between on-campus and distance education students, including a) library and research resources that are equivalent to the resources that are available to support on-campus instruction; b) achievement of student learning outcomes

	3.1.8	The EQAP has standards and/or practices to ensure that distance education provided by the TEP is overseen by an individual qualified to supervise and monitor education quality in a distance education course or program.
	3.1.9	The EQAP has standards and/or practices to ensure TEP's have adequate policies and practices for academic integrity, verification of student identity, and data security and privacy of their distance education provisions. Recognition of the conferred qualification nationally or internationally should be considered in the policies and procedures.
3.2	Quality:	The EQAP has standards to ensure TEPs are evaluating and reporting on their distance education courses/programs.
	3.2.1	The EQAP has standards and/or practices that require TEPs to periodically review their standards and procedures for evaluating distance education courses/programs.
	3.2.2	The EQAP has standards and/or practices that require TEPs to periodically report on course/program outcomes for distance education programs and the equivalency of these outcomes to courses/programs offered on-campus.

Section 3: Maturity levels

Section 3 enables continued relevance of periodic external reviews of EQAPs by outlining *guiding principles* for each new cycle of reviews/maturity levels. The *guiding principles* aim to incentivize the EQAPs for continuous and more superior impact at system level with each cycle of external reviews.

– Maturity level I: Efficiency

- **Guiding Principle:** For EQAPs that have been in operation for fewer than 10 years and/or have not had a baseline review against the Basic International Standards, **Quality and Efficiency of the EQAP must be the baseline expectation**. The core principles guiding the review across the relevant ISGs (baseline as mandatory and selective modules as per the EQAP’s profile) are defined as below:
 - **Definition of Efficiency:** at the first maturity level, quality is defined as “*fitness-for-purpose*” and supported by *efficiency*. Harvey (2004) defines efficiency as the extent to which an activity achieves its goal whilst minimizing resource usage. OECD (OECD, 2008) defines it as the extent to which objectives are achieved economically by the development intervention measured by the utilization ratio of the resources used. Capitalizing on the definitions, efficiency of external EQAPs is viewed from functional, financial and operational perspectives. As the INQAHE Global Study demonstrates, regardless of the long history of operations many EQAPs still suffer from a lack of clear vision and expectations ultimately resulting in redundant QA systems, thus overburdening TEIs and causing accreditation fatigue (Karakhanyan & Stensaker, 2020). Thus, the benefits of the first rounds of external reviews would evolve around shaping and framing efficient and fit-for-purpose EQA provisions.
 - To ensure quality and efficiency in operations the EQAP should be able to demonstrate the capacity of its own internal quality assurance system. At the *Efficiency Level*, the EQAP should be able to demonstrate an internal quality assurance system, its formation, development and operationalization and the extent to which the IQA approaches promote efficiency and quality in the delivery of services. There should be enough evidence on planning, documenting, implementing and monitoring the EQAP’s performance. At the initial stage, the nature could be reactive rather than systemic, however pre-requisites for turning into a systemic phenomenon should be evidenced. Leadership should have enough capacity to promote a quality culture in all areas of the organisation, with a special emphasis on establishing the culture of trust and accountability. Due to its beginning stage, there could be limited evidence of the system-wide impact and enhancement, however, the organization has a promising capacity for such an impact and invests significantly in promoting efficiency and quality of the TE system under its purview. The *Efficiency Level* is achieved as the EQAP develops enough capacity to demonstrate its financial, functional and operational efficiency and target enhancement to benefit the TE provisions in terms of enhanced quality and efficiency.

– Maturity level II: Relevance

- **Guiding Principle:** For EQAPs that have been in operation for 10-19 years and/or have successfully performed in a previous review against the Basic International Standards, **Relevance, Quality, Enhancement and Trust** become the focus for the next review. The core principles guiding the review across the relevant ISGs (baseline as mandatory and selective modules as per the EQAP’s profile) are defined as below.
 - **Definition of Relevance:** OECD (OECD, 2008) defines relevance as the extent to which the aid activity is suited to the priorities and policies of the target group, recipient and donor. In the case of EQAPs and systems, the priorities and policies are set by such key stakeholders as governments, professional associations, TE institutions, students, labour market, various international soft regulations. Thus, the EQAPs/systems that can demonstrate the relevance of their practices, most importantly the standards applied for external reviews and respective impact on the system enhancement would be able to successfully qualify for this particular maturity level.

Glossary of terms

Term	Definition
Cross-border Tertiary Education	Cross-border tertiary education, for the purposes of this document, is the delivery of tertiary education beyond the borders within which the tertiary education provider/the qualification awarding body is legally incorporated. This definition of cross-border tertiary education refers only to the education provisions crossing the border and does not cover the cases when students cross the borders for obtaining a tertiary education qualification.
Cross-border Quality Assurance	Quality assurance services offered by EQAPs beyond the borders in which the EQAP is legally incorporated.
Distance Education	<p>Distance education (DE) is education that uses one or more types of technology to deliver instruction to students who are separated from the instructor and to support regular and substantive interaction between the students and the instructor synchronously or asynchronously. Different types of technology may be used for distance instruction, including internet, satellite or wireless communication; and audio and video conferencing.</p> <p>(source: National Centre for Education Statistics in the USA)</p>
Flexible Learning Pathways	Entry points and re-entry points at all ages and all educational levels, strengthened links between formal and non-formal structures, and recognition, validation and accreditation of the knowledge, skills and competencies acquired through non-formal and informal education (UNESCO, 2015: 33)
Internationalization	Internationalization at the national sector and institutional levels is defined as the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of postsecondary education (Knight, 2003). For the purposes of external quality assurance provisions, internationalization is defined as the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery into quality assurance practices.
Maturity Levels	Maturity levels are a measure to define the status of a QA body in terms of its performance and capacity for a system-wide enhancement, impact and ultimately, driving transformations. Maturity level depends on such factors as extent of organizational optimization, self-optimization, and continuous improvement and enhancement, capacity to accomplish the organization's objectives in due manner. It depends on the leadership type at all levels and to what extent it promotes a healthy quality culture, culture of trust and accountability. The development stage of internal QA system of the organization, its extent of effectiveness and efficiency to measure, manage, quality check and enhance all key processes and outputs and the culture of external reviews it subjects itself to are key to define the maturity level. Last, but not least, maturity is judged upon based on the extent to which the processes are well documented and continuously improved, the level of advancement of the tools and technology applied, their extent of integration, and the extent to which these technologies and tools accelerate and enhance performance.
Quality Assurance Agency	Agency is, in the context of quality in tertiary education, shorthand for any organisation that undertakes any kind of monitoring, evaluation or review of the quality of tertiary education. QA agency refers to a buffer body or a

business that represents one group of people when dealing with another group, e.g. governments establishing a buffer body/agency to conduct external reviews (e.g. accreditation, audits) of TEIs or programs.

Quality Assurance Body

QA body, in the context of quality in tertiary education, is a generic term encompassing all types of services (e.g., reviews, trainings, consultations) offered to enhance quality of provisions and promote quality culture. The services may range from external reviews to providing training, workshops, soft regulations, guidelines and the like. The QAB may or may not serve as a QA provider.

Quality assurance Provider

QA provider is a generic term that refers to an organization that is established to offer services aiming to enhance and verify quality of TE provisions through reviews of tertiary education processes, offerings and/or performance, e.g., private (for-profit and non-for-profit) accreditors.

Quality Assurance of Cross-Border Education

QA of CBE refers to the external QA providers that conduct quality assurance/accreditation of education units who operate across the borders of their legal incorporation.

Quality Culture

A quality culture embodies professional reflection as a learning community: a community that includes all the participants. It is intrinsic to a way of life, a way of thinking and a way of coming to understand. A quality culture is not something that can be codified in a manual (Harvey, 2009), borrowed, or imposed from outside.

Short Learning Programme

A set of activities shorter than a full degree (e.g., course, courses, modules, assessments, micro-credentials) that culminates in learner assessment and award of a credential. Short learning programmes are designed in line with UNESCO ISCED levels 4-8; however, they are built around specific skills and competencies. Short learning programmes can be offered by formal tertiary education providers or outside formal education, e.g., industry, government, NGOs, and the like.

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