

This is the first in a series of policy briefs produced by the CHEA International Quality Group (CIQG) on key issues for higher education quality assurance internationally

A Government Official's Guide: Quality Assurance of Higher Education in an International Setting

WHY QUALITY ASSURANCE IS IMPORTANT TO YOU

Quality assurance, external review to affirm and enhance academic quality of higher education institutions, has emerged as a central and critical issue for governments around the world. Whether operating in-country or cross-border, it is a matter of urgency that higher education institutions offer reliable quality teaching, learning, research and service to the community. Quality higher education is essential for economic development, social equity and mobility, as well as creativity and innovation. All of these elements are vital to the future success of countries and their citizens.

1. What is quality assurance of higher education in an international setting?

- Quality assurance of higher education in an international setting is about the performance, quality and effectiveness of colleges and universities, whether operating in-country or across borders.
- Through quality assurance, students and society know which higher education institutions are reliable and legitimate. Students and society are protected from substandard education.

2. Why is quality assurance important?

Government officials need quality assurance to:

- Assure that higher education institutions operating in-country provide reliable, quality education.
- Assure that the institutions operating cross-border are providing reliable, quality education. This includes:
 - Institutions from their countries with provision in other countries and
 - Institutions from other countries with provision in their countries.
- Protect students and the public from harm by assuring that institutions are not rogue providers of higher education such as degree mills or visa mills.
- Identify and eliminate academic corruption in admissions, transcripts, degree acquisition and grades.

Quality assurance meets these needs.

3. How does international quality assurance operate?

- Almost all countries maintain quality assurance organizations that examine institutions or programs for quality. This includes in-country and cross-border provision. The level and scope of government involvement varies, from countries with decentralized approaches and limited government involvement to countries with centralized, government-driven approaches.
- In many countries, quality is defined as higher education institutions meeting the goals each has set, assuring a rich diversity of colleges and universities that are flexible and open to change and innovation.
- Multinational organizations such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the World Bank and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development offer [voluntary guidelines](#) for quality provision of higher education.

- Country-based quality assurance bodies voluntarily work together through organizations such as the [International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education](#) and the [Council for Higher Education Accreditation International Quality Group](#).

4. What are the major quality assurance tools?

- **Peer-based Quality Review:**
 - *Standards:* Expectations are established for the academic work of colleges and universities, e.g., student achievement, degree attainment, curriculum, faculty.
 - *Self-review:* Colleges and universities examine their performance against the standards.
 - *Peer review:* Professionals review the work of other professionals, based on the standards.
 - *Public Judgment and Listings:* A quality assurance organization makes public the results of reviews about the quality of a college or university.
- **Rankings:** In some countries, quality assurance bodies use or rely on national, regional or international rankings (a list of institutions arrayed according to particular criteria, e.g., research or teaching and learning).
- **Qualifications Frameworks:** In some countries, quality assurance bodies use or rely on national, regional or international qualifications frameworks (an array of expected learning outcomes or competences aligned with specific grade levels from primary through tertiary education).
- **Web-based, interactive data sets:** In some countries, quality assurance bodies use or rely on Web-based, interactive tools to assist students and the public in comparing colleges and universities with regard to price, admissions and performance. The European U-map classification system (www.u-map.eu) is one example.
- **Recognition of qualifications:** In some countries, recognition bodies rely on outcomes of quality assurance/ accreditation procedures to grant recognition of qualifications.

5. What is important for the future of quality assurance?

- Improving in-country and cross-border quality provision to meet increasing demand.
- Supporting and expanding international mobility of students.
- Increasing cross-border information-sharing about academic quality.
- Assuring that higher education meets the needs of employers.
- Strengthening online education.
- Combatting degree mills and accreditation mills.
- Improving transparency of information about academic quality.
- Contributing to “World Class” quality as defined by various institutions.

WHERE TO FIND ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- [Country-based, regional and international QA organizations](#)
- [Higher education institutions](#)
- [Glossaries of key quality assurance terms](#)
- [Ranking, qualifications frameworks, Web-based data sets, recognition bodies](#)

