ISG

International
Standards & Guidelines

International Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Tertiary Education

2022 Edition

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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
QE	Quality enhancement
SLP	Short learning programme
TE	Tertiary education: UNESCO ISCED levels 4-8
TEP	Tertiary education provider

Introduction

To be able to embrace its 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 INQAAHE *International Standards and Guidelines of Quality Assurance in Tertiary Education (ISGs)* are the result of a broad participatory process including the rich expertise of tertiary education providers and their external quality assurance bodies globally. They recognize the expertise and widely acknowledged proficiency in quality assurance of formal and non-formal education provisions and build 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.

The primary purpose of the ISGs is to acknowledge and embrace the diversity of tertiary education provisions and promote the 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 external review procedures based on the *Guidelines of Good Practices* (GGPs), and other similar procedures, standards, guidelines and principles applied at international and regional levels that have been in operation for around twenty years. They offer a quality assurance framework specifically developed to respond to a diversity of needs, including but not limited to cross-border education, cross-border quality assurance, short learning programmes (e.g. micro-credentials), and distance and online provisions, among the rest.

It is with this purpose in mind 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 that 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 combine 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 an 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. Subsequently, with legal incorporation in New Zealand, its Secretariat, in line with the internationalization principle and mission, moved around the globe with host 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, and 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 practices, 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 the massification of tertiary education (TE), the tertiary learning paradigm has transformed to embrace diversity, predominantly due to the rapid advance 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 the diversification of expectations and functions (Karakhanyan & Stensaker, 2020). To ensure the relevance of quality assurance to address these transformations, and to provide a robust framework for the 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 consultation with INQAAHE members, the decision was to launch with a 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 overall INQAAHE membership in their design 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 the relevance of quality assurance provisions, necessitates an enhancement of the GGPs. Along with the re-design of the GGPs, the following changes have been undertaken to address problems identified throughout the last 20 years including:

- **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 qualification levels, including pre- and post-qualification credentials, e.g. pre-master) and horizontally (in terms of types, nature, design and program content, e.g. time-based vs. competency-based curricula, knowledge vs. skill oriented programmes, and industry delivered short learning programmes culminating in the award of a credential). This is further complicated 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 a growing overall diversity. This is reflected in the expansion of the mandates of QA providers and related functions and areas of expertise, along with general operations and expanded geographical coverage (Elken & Stensaker, 2020). One result, among others, has been the emergence of cross-border quality assurance. Types of QA bodies currently range from an agency with a specific scope to conduct reviews (e.g., a

buffer body established by a given government), to QA providers with an exclusive function of providing external reviews (e.g., accreditation councils) and QA bodies with a broader scope of enhancement, consultation, training and other related functions (in which the latter might or might not have an external review function). Thus, the differentiation of QA bodies is also notable and must be defined and appropriately accommodated as a critical element of diversification.

- **Diversification of external quality assurance providers by quality enhancement levels:** Subsequent to the 1980s, external quality assurance also witnessed extensive massification. Forty years down the road, more than 350 QA bodies with diverse levels of maturity exist today, depending on their years of operation, accumulated expertise, and impact levels (Karakhanyan & Stensaker, 2020). For decades, quality assurance has been tacitly viewed as a tool applied for intrinsic QA 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 institution's stated mission. While useful in establishing and evaluating the quality of organizational performance, societal expectations go beyond a mere fit-for-purpose review to include an evaluation of the enhancement capacity of the QA systems, thus their relevance and transformational power. Given decades of experience in QA, the evaluation of diverse QA providers as per their enhancement capacity and potential for impact at the system and societal level becomes paramount. Thus, the new ISGs are specifically designed to enable and empower the QA bodies in their quest for continuous enhancement, relevance and transformational power.

- **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 assist governments, tertiary education providers, students and societies at large. (This need was highlighted in the focus group discussions reported on below.) Thus, a reliable platform for such guidance on EAQP's performance and credibility is one of the solutions to the problematic that framed these discussions. The need for public access to such information in the credential registration platforms (e.g., Credential Registry[1]) is increasingly recognized as important not only for gaining information from the QA providers, but also to connect to information about the reality of increasingly diverse education providers and the 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 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 the UNESCO ISCED levels 4 to 8[2] of formal and non-formal education.

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[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

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 of 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 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 solutions to embrace the existing 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 they represent.
- **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, an initial draft of the International Standards and Guidelines was developed. This development was led by the INQAAHE Working Group established for the purpose. Where necessary, external expertise was called upon to support developments in specific fields of standards, e.g., cross-border QA, 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 their relevance as well as to discuss the INQAAHE proposed solutions. The results were fed into a Stakeholder Consultation report shared with UNESCO to make it available for the audience of the UNESCO 3rd WHEC 2022, held 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 evinced by the eagerness of the participants to share written feedback on the ISGs. A second round of this stakeholder consultation to ensure wider engagement of key stakeholders – members and non-members – was initiated in April 2022. The target audience were government and non-government organizations, QA bodies, regional and special interest QA networks, student associations, TE institution associations, and other strategic partners of INQAAHE. A total of 108 respondents from 50 countries participated in this consultation. On average, there was an 8.5 agreement (on a scale from 0 to 10) with the changes introduced.
- **Refinement:** All the feedback has been incorporated into the current version of the ISGs, which provides a robust solution for diverse TE issues globally.

The International Standards and Guidelines 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 the evaluation of external quality assurance providers (EQAPs), which ensures evaluation as "fit for the maturity level" of an EQAP and is 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 the 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 with 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 the ISGs is designed with a modular approach to enable appropriate recognition of diverse tertiary education endeavours and QA provisions based on their specific profiles including consideration of the enhancement continuum of EQAPs. Thus, the ISGs evolve around three major sections:

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

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

Module 1: Baseline Standards
    (1) Legitimacy of the external quality assurance provider
    (2) The EQAP's framework for external review of quality of Tertiary Education Providers (TEPs)
    (3) The EQAP's review of TEPs: evaluation, decision making and appeals
    (4) Internationalization and external relations
    (5) Integrity, disclosure and transparency
    (6) Stakeholder role and engagement.

Section 2 is focused on the profiles and specific field of activity of the EQAP and is elective for recognition. It revolves around the following three standard modules that address the 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 program
Module 4: Quality assurance of distance education (online and blended).

Section 3 enables the process of continuous enhancement and benefits overall from external reviews of EQAPs by outlining *guiding principles* for quality enhancement levels of the EQAP itself and its transformational power on the tertiary education provisions under their purview. The quality enhancement continuum is expressed through three stages:

- **Efficiency**
- **Relevance**
- **Transformation**

The Quality enhancement continuum is designed to enable both diagnostic and formative assessment of an EQAP's performance, including self- and external review of EQAPs, and is based on a continuous improvement approach designed to move the focus from compliance with organizational performance standards to gauging the impact on tertiary education and, ultimately, assessing the transformations driving student learning and society at large.

Section 1: Baseline Standards

Table 1 contains baseline standards and guidelines for EQAPs. This section is mandatory for all applicants for international recognition utilizing the ISGs.

Module 1: Baseline standards

	Standards			Guidelines	
1	**Legitimacy of the External Quality Assurance Provider (EQAP)**	1.1	**Mission, Governance & Organization:** The EQAP is a recognized, credible organization, trusted by key stakeholders: the government, TE providers (TEPs) and public at large. Its 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 the 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 state that the 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. The interest of students and 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 its 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 are in operation and apply to its staff, its decision-making body, and 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 with 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 to fulfil its goals and carry out the activities that emerge from its mission statement and objectives. Its funding approach instils trust and sustainability in operations. It is equipped with the necessary technological resources to carry out efficiently its processes including a database of external reviewers, 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 that demonstrate a continuing	1.3.1	The EQAP has a clear policy for its own internal and external quality assurance linked to organizational planning, funding and performance. Outcomes are evinced through robust accountability measures available to the TE community and the society it serves.

		effort to maintain and improve the quality and integrity of its activities.		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 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 its over-riding values. 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, focused on 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 to exceed five years. Evidence of any required action(s) is (are) implemented and disclosed.
				1.3.6	Strong evidence exists 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	2.1	**The relationship between the EQAP and Tertiary Education Providers (TEPs):** The	2.1.1	The EQAP recognizes that institutional and programmatic quality and quality assurance are primarily the

external review of quality of TEPs		EQAP recognizes TEPs as having primary responsibility for quality and relevance and providing support in promoting trust and credibility.		responsibility of the tertiary education providers themselves and respects the specific feature of each TEP.
			2.1.2	The EQAP ensures that the core values of tertiary education - equitable access, accountability, academic freedom, institutional autonomy, and social responsibility - are respected and promoted.
			2.1.3	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.
			2.1.4	The EQAP is mindful of the level of workload and related costs that its procedures will place on TEPs and strives to make the procedures as time and cost effective as possible.
			2.1.5	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, and thus promote a quality culture.	2.2.1	The EQAP recognizes and values the diversity of providers and translates this institutional aspect 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 a TEP's activity that fall within the EQAP's scope, (e.g., governance and management, program design and approval, teaching and learning processes, student admission, progression and certification, research, and 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 how 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 existing context and credibility of its procedures. Where applicable, the EQAP should demonstrate its capacity to conduct reviews in both virtual and in-person modes supported by purpose-built methodology. This 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 TEP or program is evaluated in a consistent way, even if the external panels, teams, or committees differ.
		2.3.7	The EQAP carries out the external review within a reasonable time-frame 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 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 reports on trends and impacts publicly available for broader use by stakeholders.
		2.4.2	The EQAP prepares, and periodically disseminates, integrated, system-wide reports on the overall outcomes of

					QA processes, impacts on the TE system and its performance, and of any other relevant activities.
3	**The EQAP's Review of TE Providers: Evaluation, Decision Making and Appeals**	3.1	**Evaluation:** The evaluation conducted by external panel is based on a clearly articulated and publicly available criteria and methodology.	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 all cases.
				3.1.3	The EQAP provides full and clear disclosure of its policies, procedures, criteria and methodology for evaluation and judgements of TE performance, made publicly available prior to its application.
		3.2	**Decision-making:** The EQAP has policies and procedures in place that ensure fair and independent decision-making on the review cases.	3.2.1	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	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 procedures.
				3.2.4	The EQAP makes its decisions and/or review reports public. The content and extent of reporting accords 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	3.3.1	The EQAP has procedures in place to deal in a consistent way with complaints about its procedures or operations.

			deploys clear policies and procedures for appeals and complaints.	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 not responsible for the original decision and has no conflicts of interest. Appeals need not necessarily be conducted outside the EQAP.
4	Internationaliza-tion 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	The EQAP abides by an *internationalization principle* in its functions and operations as applicable and which accord with its mission.
				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, review of decisions, joint projects, and/or staff exchanges.
		4.2	**External relations:** the EQAP effectively promotes its collaborations with key players in national, regional, international contexts.	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.
				4.2.2.	The EQAP's 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 procedures 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	**Disclosure:** The EQAP ensures disclosure at different levels of its activity in line with the culture within which operates.	5.2.1	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 cultures, while ensuring alignment with international best practice.
				5.2.2	The EQAP makes public its policies and decisions and disseminates reports on outcomes of its QA processes. The EQAP publicly discloses decisions about the EQAP resulting from any external review of its own performance.
		5.3	**Transparency:** The EQAP has robust systems in place to ensure transparent and trustworthy operations.	5.3.1	The EQAP's policies and procedures on the external evaluation of tertiary education providers and provisions underpin the transparency principle in dealing with reviews and decision-making.
				5.3.2	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 its 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.
6	**Stakeholder role and engagement**	6.1	**Stakeholder role:** The EQAP is clear in the expectations of each stakeholder group.	6.1.1	The EQAP clearly defines its internal and external stakeholders along with comprehensive statements of expectations and level of impact from each stakeholder group.

| | 6.2 | **Stakeholder engagement:** The EQAP ensures meaningful and impactful stakeholder engagement in its functions. | 6.2.1 | The EQAP's policies ensure pro-active stakeholder engagement in matters related to standards, procedures, reviews, and decision-making. The EQAP, where applicable, should demonstrate an inclusive approach to stakeholder engagement, e.g., in its procedures in terms of ensuring gender and geographical balance, and other non-discriminatory policies. |
| | | | 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. |

Section 2: Field specific modules

Section 2 sets out international standards and guidelines grouped in modules relevant to the particular profile of an EQAP. This approach aims to address the increased diversification of QA provisions and highlights the areas of practical application of external reviews conducted by EQAPs. The following modules are selective in nature and are applicable only where EQAPs 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 (online and blended)

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 external quality assurance providers that conduct external reviews across country borders/jurisdictions.

	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 reviews of tertiary education providers operating in countries/jurisdictions different from the one in which the EQAP is based. The role and extent of the contribution of an EQAP to international QA culture promotion within its remits and/or across the international borders is well articulated in a mandate given to them by their government, higher education sector, or some other authoritative third party.
				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. This is provided through a clearly defined and publicly available CBE assessment methodology from the EQAP which makes the obligations of the tertiary education units to meet the

				requirements of their domestic quality systems, as well as those of the country in which they are operating, clear and unequivocal.
			1.1.3	The EQAP adheres to laws and regulations within the jurisdictions it in which operates. 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 demonstrate its due diligence with respect to the reviewed TE provider, and also to 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 accord with the internationally recognized principles for cross-border quality assurance provisions and demonstrates clear evidence of effectiveness and continuous enhancement within the given context (e.g., UNESCO/OECD guidelines and any applicable local guidelines in both sending and receiving nations).
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 borders. These policies take into account characteristics of tertiary education providers within their particular contexts of sending and receiving tertiary education providers.
			2.1.2	The EQAP has clear procedures for conducting cross-border quality reviews, including appeals and complaints. The EQAP should consider whether its procedures remain appropriately consistent when it engages in a cross-border quality assurance review and if necessary specific adaptations should be in place to meet the requirements of the local legal framework, and its education system's traditions and structure.
	2.2.	**Expertise:** 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 external experts to relevantly and effectively work in the contexts of the EQAP's cross border activities. In particular, its pool of reviewers should have demonstrated inter-cultural awareness and knowledge

					of and experience with international education systems, whenever possible. The EQAP should consider supplementing its reviewer pool with local expertise to provide insight, context and color to cross border review teams where necessary and/or desirable.
				2.2.2	The EQAP has adequately qualified and trained staff to engage in cross-border quality assurance.
				2.2.3	The EQAP has measures in place to ensure that its assessments are based on a sound understanding of the ways in which an education provider operates, and is therefore accurate and fair, including any specific language requirements. This could include measures for securing translations of documents and meetings and providing 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 a specified 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 equivalence in the quality of provisions across borders.	3.1.1	The EQAP has a clear set of specific standards/criteria, policies and procedures on which it conducts its cross-border reviews and decision-making within an international context. The EQAP in conducting cross-border reviews should ensure that the standards it uses are equivalent, and at least no lower than those of similar provision within their own jurisdiction/context, while acknowledging that receiving jurisdictions might include additional expectations consistent with their priorities and education systems.
				3.1.2	The EQAP standards consider all quality aspects related to different modes of provision, such as national and cross-border education,

					distance or online provisions or tertiary short learning programs, as relevant to the context in which they operate. It should ensure the standards are equivalent and consistently applied across all the jurisdictions in which they operate, while acknowledging that receiving jurisdictions might have additional expectations in line with the receiving country/jurisdictions's priorities and regulatory systems.
		3.2	**Context & Culture:** The EQAP standards take into consideration local contexts and culture.	3.2.1	The EQAP considers the nuances of the operational context of the receiving tertiary education provisions under scrutiny. The EQAP's approaches to reviews should be sensitive to cultural and contextual differences.
4	Recognition	4.1	**Recognition of outcomes:** The EQAP ensures the outcomes of its reviews are recognized in the context they operate in and internationally.	4.1.1	The EQAP liaises appropriately with governments and local QA bodies within the contexts in which it operates. This cooperation is oriented to improve mutual understanding, to ensure a clear and comprehensive account of the regulatory framework and to share good practices in the promotion of international and local QA culture.
				4.1.2	The EQAP seeks to form relationships with other QA providers and significant stakeholders for the purposes of furthering mutual understanding and recognition.
				4.1.3	Students and other stakeholders receive clear and complete information about standards, the results of external reviews, awards delivered, and their recognition prospects.
				4.1.4	The EQAP undergoes periodic external reviews against standards specific to cross-border QA providers and in-line with its mission and strategy.

Module 2.2: Quality assurance of cross-border education

This module applies to external quality assurance providers that conduct quality assurance of cross-border education (nationally or across 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 reviews of cross-border education. The role and extent of contribution of the EQAP to international QA culture promotion within its remits and/or across the international borders are clearly articulated in a mandate given to them by their government, higher education sector, or other authoritative third party.
				1.1.2	The EQAP makes clear to CBE providers and the public the status of its quality assurance activity. The rights and obligations of the EQAP and cross-border tertiary education providers and their quality assurance are clearly established and well known by the parties. This circumstance is provided through a clearly defined and publicly available CBE assessment methodology from the EQAP which makes clear and unequivocal the obligations of the tertiary education units to meet the requirements of their domestic quality systems, as well as those of the country in which they are operating.
				1.1.3	The EQAP adheres to laws and regulations within the jurisdictions in which it operates 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 of the jurisdiction in which the reviewed provider is based. The purpose is to both to 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	1.2.1	The EQAP operates in line with the internationally recognized principles for cross-border education and its quality assurance and demonstrates clear evidence of effectiveness and continuous

			consideration relevant international soft regulations.		enhancement within the given context (e.g., UNESCO/OECD and any applicable local guidelines in both sending and receiving countries).
2	Policies and procedures	2.1	**Relevance of policies and procedures:** The EQAP has clearly specified policies and procedures relevant for the CBE provisions.	2.1.1	The EQAP has clear policies relating to its quality assurance of cross-border provision, whether in-bound, out-bound, or both, while appreciating the diverse profiles of the providers.
				2.1.2	The EQAP has clear procedures for conducting a review of CBE providers, including appeals and complaints. The EQAP should consider whether its procedures remain appropriately consistent across diverse contexts and if necessary specific adaptations should be in place to fit the context of the local legal framework, and its education system's traditions and structure.
		2.2.	**Expertise:** 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. In particular, its pool of reviewers 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 reviews of CBE providers.
				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 an education provider operates and is therefore accurate and fair. Thus, the EQAP should clarify any language requirements relevant to conducting the review of a CBE provision. This could, for example, include measures for securing translations of documents and meetings, and bilingual reviewers and thus has implications for the composition of the teams of expert and procedure coordinators assigned by the EQAP.
3	Relevance of EQAP	3.1	**Equivalent provisions:** The EQAP standards promote equivalent	3.1.1	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.

Standards	level in the quality of CBE provisions.	3.1.2	The EQAP standards consider all quality aspects related to cross-border education provision, such as distance or online provisions or tertiary short-learning programs as relevant to the context in which they operate.
		3.1.3	The EQAP makes clear that the CBE provider is responsible for ensuring the equivalent quality of the education offered across all the sites in which it is offering provisions, that the CBE provider takes into consideration the regulatory frameworks of the home/host jurisdictions, and that it 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 that 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 the recruitment stage, including international and domestic recognition prospects of the resulting qualifications.
		3.2.2	The EQAP standards address students' learning experience and ensure it is comparable to that of the home country in terms of exposure to faculty qualifications, body of knowledge, resources for learning, achievement of intended learning outcomes and application of knowledge and internships. These 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 in similar programs on the home campus.
	3.3 **Context & Culture:** The EQAP	3.3.1	The EQAP takes into consideration the operational context and cultural nuances of the tertiary education provisions under scrutiny. The EQAP

			standards take into consideration the local context and culture.		approaches to reviews 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 local socio-economic context 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 In which they operate and internationally.	4.1.1	The EQAP liaises appropriately with 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 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.
				4.1.3	The EQAP seeks to form relationships with other external quality assurance providers in advancing the cause of cross-border education provision and its recognition, for example through the mutual recognition of external review decisions.
				4.1.4	Students and other stakeholders receive clear and complete information about the standards and results of external reviews, awards delivered, and their recognition prospects.
				4.1.5	The EQAP undergoes cyclical external reviews against standards specific for the quality assurance of cross-border education and in line with its mission and strategies.

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 solid evidence of independence, effectiveness, relevance and trustworthiness in their 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 elements 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' capacity 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 the 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	**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 successful learner experience.	3.6.1	The EQAP standards cover the resources necessary to deliver the short learning program including: 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.

				3.6.3	The standards ensure that 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 the professionalization of its staff and external reviewers as per its specific profile.

Module 4: Quality assurance of online and blended modalities of distance education

This module applies to distance education that is online or blended. Other forms of distance education are addressed within the baseline standards.

	Standard				Guidelines	
1	Mandate of the EQAP	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 (online/blended) 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 all relevant staff to evaluate quality of education in online/blended modality and determine whether students are achieving the stated learning objectives in the online/blended education courses/programs.
				1.2.2	The EQAP uses external evaluators with appropriate training and experience to conduct external reviews of online/blended education provisions.
2	Policies and procedures of the EQAP	2.1	**Relevance:** The EQAP provides clear definitions for distance education and how TEPs may apply for approval.	2.1.1	The EQAP policies include a definition of distance education n general and explain how online/blended education courses/programs are distinguished from on-campus courses/programs.
				2.1.2	Based on its definition of distance education, the EQAP has clear and published policies for how TEPs may apply for approval for online/blended education courses/programs. The policies and protocols ensure TEPs affirm that online/blended 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 online/blended 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 is required for initial notification and/or authorization for a TEP's provision of online/blended education and any subsequent schedule for authorization, if required, of online/blended education provision.

				2.2.2	The EQAP has clear and published policies about removal of such authorization.
3	**Relevance of EQAP Standards for review of TEPs**	3.1	**Equivalency:** The EQAP has standards to ensure TEPs can and do provide equivalent learning experiences for distance education students.	3.1.1	The EQAP has standards and/or practices to ensure TEPs have identified how online/blended 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 online/blended 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 online/blended education.
				3.1.4	The EQAP has standards and/or practices to ensure that 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 online/blended education courses/programs to prospective and current students.
				3.1.5	The EQAP has standards and/or practices to ensure that TEP's are appropriately preparing and supporting faculty for online/blended education and are periodically evaluating faculty effectiveness in 1) providing instruction; 2) engaging students; and 3) assessing student progress in online/blended education courses/programs.
				3.1.6	The EQAP has standards and/or practices to ensure that TEPs are appropriately preparing and supporting students for online/blended education

			3.1.7	The EQAP has standards and/or practices to ensure that TEPs can demonstrate equivalency in learning resources and outcomes between on-campus and online/blended education students.
			3.1.8	The EQAP has standards and/or practices to ensure that online/blended education provided by the TEP is overseen by an individual qualified to supervise and monitor education quality in an online/blended education course or program.
			3.1.9	The EQAP has standards and/or practices to ensure that TEP's have adequate policies and practices for academic integrity, verification of student identity, and data security and privacy of their online/blended e 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 that 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 online/blended education courses/programs.
			3.2.2	The EQAP has standards and/or practices that require TEPs to periodically report on course/program outcomes for online/blended education programs and the equivalency of these outcomes to courses/programs offered on-campus.

Section 3: Quality Enhancement Continuum

Section 3 enables the continued relevance of periodic external reviews of EQAPs by outlining the *Guiding Principles* for each new cycle of reviews as per the EQAP's objectives. The *Guiding Principles* aim to incentivize the EQAPs for continuous and more superior performance and impact at a system level with each cycle of external reviews.

- **Quality enhancement focus: Efficiency**
  - *Guiding Principle:* The core Guiding Principles for 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 (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.
      - To ensure quality and efficiency in operations the EQAP should be able to demonstrate the capacity of its own internal quality assurance system, which is designed to meet required quality and efficiency expectations as measured from functional, financial, operational and systemic perspectives.

- **Quality enhancement focus: Relevance**
  - *Guiding Principle:* The EQAPs should be able to demonstrate their capacity for *Relevance, Quality, Enhancement, and Trust- oriented* performance.
    - *Definition of Relevance:*
      - 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 markets, and various international soft regulations. Thus, the EQAPs/systems that can demonstrate the relevance of their performance, 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.
      - To ensure *relevance, quality, enhancement and trust oriented* operations, the EQAP should be able to demonstrate the capacity of its own internal quality assurance system, which is designed to meet the required expectations measured from functional, financial, operational and systemic perspectives.

- **Quality Enhancement Focus: Transformation**
  - *Guiding Principle:* The transformative capacity of an EQAP on the TE system is the proof of a superior level of performance and the external review is guided by such a core principle across the relevant ISGs (baseline as mandatory and selective modules as per the EQAP's profile) as *organizational and systemic transformation, relevance, quality,* and *recognition of qualifications.*
    - *Definition of Transformation:* Transformation involves a 'qualitative change' from one state to another (Harvey & Green, Defining Quality, 1993). It entails changes within the EQAP so that it is better equipped to transform a TE system under its purview resulting in transformative learning, research, and services to society (Harvey &

Knight, 1996). It is measured by the capacity of an EQAP to alter the culture of the institution by changing select underlying assumptions and institutional behavior, processes, outcomes and outputs.

- The EQAPs at this level of maturity should be able to substantiate proactive engagement in activities that ensure system-wide transformation leading to relevance of tertiary education provisions, enhanced trust and accountability, thus setting the required premises for smooth recognition of TE outcomes, including qualifications awarded.
- The EQAP should be able to demonstrate a robust internal QA built on a strong data management system empowered by most recent analytical techniques. It should be able to also demonstrate its international standing, visibility, and capacity to contribute to QA body of knowledge through its active engagement, contribution and leadership in the QA arena.

The INQAAHE Quality enhancement continuum can be applied both internally (by the EQAP for self-evaluation purposes) and externally (by external evaluators). Assessment against the enhancement continuum foci is designed to be a cumulative and summative output with the aim of benefitting an EQAP with relevant recommendations for continuous enhancement.

The assessment against the quality enhancement guidelines has a summative nature and is carried out as a culmination of the EQAP's assessment once all the evidence has been reviewed and evaluated. The final output takes the form of a set of summative recommendations and commendations for the EQAP's guidance on enhancement.

The EQAP's Quality Enhancement Continuum: Rubrics per Focus

The following framework is designed to guide the EQAPs in evaluating the focus of quality enhancement according to an EQAPs mission. Each focus builds on and adds to the previous one, thus triggering transformative behavior for those EQAP's that in their mission seek an increase in the relevance and transformation of the tertiary education system level and society at large.

Quality Enhancement Focus	Efficiency	Relevance	Transformation
Functional *Sources of evidence: Strategic planning monitoring; Reviews undertaken considering feedback about the burden required for the procedures; Stakeholder mechanisms of participation, stakeholder opinion. Meta-assessments of review procedures include: system impact, Communication Plan, Publications (Codes of Good Practice, White Papers…) Seminars, Conferences.*	The EQAP demonstrates a strong capacity to achieve its goals with minimal resource usage, makes sure the objectives are achieved economically by the utilization ratio of the resources used for its own organizational purposes and for the TEIs under its purview. The procedures used complement, or supplement each other, and prevent any burden on the TEIs. TE values are defined clearly and considered in the actions taken.	The procedures, standards and activities carried out by the EQAP are relevant to the TE system within which it operates and equip the TEIs, and overall, the system, with the necessary capacity to yield relevant outcomes. The EQAPs priorities and policies are set jointly with such key stakeholders as governments, professional associations, TE institutions, students, labour markets, and various international soft regulations. TE values are enacted and contribute to relevance of EQAP functions.	The EQAP has a proven capacity to alter the culture of TE institutions and system by changing select underlying assumptions and institutional behavior, processes, and products; its influence is deep and pervasive, affecting the whole institution and the system at large; it is intentional; and occurs over time and results in continuous and sustainable enhancement of TE. TE values are enacted and have a transformative impact on EQAP performance.

Operational *Sources of evidence: IQAS. Milestones of EQAP and TE system performance.*	The EQAP has a robust internal QA system and the results of internal reviews feed into decision making regarding enhancement of the operations and organization in general. There is clear evidence of a systemic approach to internal QA, ensuring enhanced efficiency and quality in operations. TE values are defined clearly and considered in the actions taken. Operational efficiency is evidenced through clear performance indicators (e.g., cost-benefit analysis, return on investment).	The EQAP demonstrates proactive engagement in activities that ensure system-wide impact, enhancement, relevance, trust, and accountability, thus setting the required premises of smooth recognition of TE outcomes, including qualifications awarded. The EQAPs processes and activities benefit from active engagement of key stakeholders in a systemic manner and are evidenced through a tangible, proactive and meaningful engagement with key stakeholders. There is first hand exposure to diverse and relevant expertise coming globally. The processes for such an engagement are firmly established and demonstrate a history of enhanced relevance to the socio-economic needs throughout time. The EQAP's activities are in line with systemic policy directives and yield relevant policy solutions. Quality assurance is an integral part of the system and a key tool of reference for decision-making by diverse authorities. TE values are enacted across all the activities, procedures and standards and contribute to relevance of TE provisions.	There is a high degree of integration of the EQAP's tools and technologies, which enhance organisational performance and enable transformations at both organizational and systemic levels. The EQAP has a long standing history of a robust internal QA built on a strong data management system empowered by most recent analytical techniques. There is strong evidence of continuous improvement and enhancement of IQA leading to transformations both at organizational and system levels. TE values are enacted and have a transformative impact on EQAP performance.
Financial *Sources of evidence: Sources and volume of funding. The cost of "quality assurance" in the context of the spending budget of the system in which it operates. Capacity of analytical funding analysis. Profile of staff, collaborators, decision bodies involved, (national\international profile). Distribution of costs by activity.*	**The EQAP demonstrates enough capacity for financial** efficiency supported by respective evidence (e.g. efficient financial management, control over budget). TE values are defined clearly and considered in the relevant activities related to financial management, thus ensuring financially sustainable performance. The EQAP, due to efficiency in its performance, manages to secure adequate resources to efficiently run the organization and its activities.	The EQAP demonstrates enough financial capacity for addressing systemic issues, thus enhancing the relevance of its processes, resources, standards and activities through respective evidence (e.g., cost/benefit analysis of an accreditation approach, and/or return on investment). Pertinent TE values (e.g. transparency, integrity) are enacted in the financial management and contribute to relevance. Available resources ensure the necessary capacity and expertise to respond to the needs of TEIs and the system at large.	The EQAP demonstrates enough financial capacity for promoting transformations of a TE system in the country, including student learning and research performance through respective evidence (e.g. diversified funding) Relevant TE values (e.g. transparency, integrity) are enacted and have a transformative impact on EQAP performance and the TE system at large. The EQAP demonstrates a history of and potentials for its resources to have a transformative impact on the system.

Systemic

Sources of evidence: Mandate\procedures linked to socio-economy needs of the system. Meta-assessment, research, publications, knowledge generation. Regional\National\International institutional outreach.

The EQAP has a promising capacity for a positive impact on the efficiency of the tertiary education system and invests significantly in promoting efficiency and quality of the TE providers under its purview.

Its functions are efficiently aligned with, complement, and supplement other TE QA provisions in the system.

The procedures and standards used are fit for purpose, meet the needs of the TE system and promote the country's socio-economic needs.

TE values are defined clearly and considered effected actions, ensuring efficiency in TEI and systemic performance.

Thematic/system-wide and other systemic analysis done by the EQAP demonstrate its impact on efficiency of the system.

The EQAP's standards promote strategic priorities of the jurisdiction within which it operates and are designed to meet the needs of the system. The standards promote sustainable enhancement and relevance of the TE provisions to socio-economic needs.

TE values are enacted and contribute to relevance.

The results of the EQAP's activities feed into systemic meta-assessments and contribute to national strategic projections.

Through thematic reviews, the EQAP demonstrates tangible evidence of continuous involvement with the community in order to steer TE towards societal needs.

The EQAP demonstrates its international standing, visibility, and capacity to contribute to a QA body of knowledge through its active engagement, contribution and leadership in the QA arena.

TE values are enacted and have a transformative impact on the TE system performance.

Through thematic reviews, the EQAP demonstrates tangible evidence of systemic transformations resulting from their activities, including but not limited to enhanced student performance, improved employability of graduates, research and other KPIs (as defined by the country) contributing to the socio-economic needs of the country.

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 country borders/jurisdictions 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 encompassing crossing country/jurisdiction borders and does not cover cases wherein students cross borders to obtain a tertiary education qualification. In some countries, CBTE is referred to as transnational education (TNE) and embraces a circumstance in which students leave the borders of their home country to pursue their education in a different country. For the purposes of this document, CBTE does not refer to student mobility.
Cross-border Quality Assurance	Quality assurance services are those offered by EQAPs beyond the country borders/jurisdictions in which the EQAP is legally incorporated.
Distance Education	Distance education (DE) is 'education imparted at a distance through the use of information/communication technology: radio, TV, the telephone, correspondence, e-mail, videoconferencing, audio-conferencing, CD-ROMs, or online' (UNESCO Thesaurus. n.d.). Put more simply, distance education/learning is a category of education/learning where students are at a physical distance from instructor. For the purposes of the ISGs: - **Distance education/learning** includes all types of learning where the learner and the instructor are apart. Types of distance education other than online and blended education should be addressed using the Baseline Standards. - **Online and blended education** is a type of distance education and refers to digital education, which are also types of distance education and are delivered via internet, in an online modality to support interaction between the students and the instructor synchronously or asynchronously. Different types of technology may be used for online/blended instruction, including the internet, satellite or wireless communication, and audio and video conferencing. This type of education learning is covered under selective *Module 4 on Quality assurance of distance education (online and blended).*
Flexible Learning Pathways	These consist of entry 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.
Quality enhancement continuum: efficiency, relevance, and transformation	The quality enhancement continuum aims to focus evaluation, to accord with EQAPs mission, the status of a QA body in terms of its performance creating capacity for system-wide enhancement, impact and ultimately, driving transformations. Efficiency, relevance and transformation depend on such factors as the extent of organizational optimization, self-optimization, and continuous improvement and enhancement, and the 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, and a culture of trust and accountability. The development stage of an internal QA system of the organization, its extent of effectiveness and efficiency to measure, manage, conduct quality checks and enhance all key processes and outputs and the culture of external reviews to which it subjects itself are key to defining the maturity level of an institution. Last, but not least, the quality enhancement continuum is judged based on the extent to which such 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 (QA) 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 the quality of provisions and promote a 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 the 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 that 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 the overall enterprise which it embodies. 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 the 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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