



COMMONWEALTH *of* LEARNING



Open and Distance Learning Quality Assurance in Commonwealth Universities

A report and recommendations for QA and accreditation agencies and higher education institutions

Colin Latchem

Open and Distance Learning Quality Assurance in Commonwealth Universities

Colin Latchem



COMMONWEALTH *of* LEARNING

The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) is an intergovernmental organisation created by Commonwealth Heads of Government to promote the development and sharing of open learning and distance education knowledge, resources and technologies.



Commonwealth of Learning, 2016

© 2016 by the Commonwealth of Learning. Open and Distance Learning Quality Assurance in Commonwealth Universities is made available under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International Licence: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0>.

For the avoidance of doubt, by applying this licence the Commonwealth of Learning does not waive any privileges or immunities from claims that they may be entitled to assert, nor does the Commonwealth of Learning submit itself to the jurisdiction, courts, legal processes or laws of any jurisdiction.

Open and Distance Learning Quality Assurance in Commonwealth Universities

by Colin Latchem

Open learning consultant, researcher and writer.

ISBN 978-1-894975-79-7

Published by:

COMMONWEALTH OF LEARNING

4710 Kingsway, Suite 2500
Burnaby, British Columbia
Canada V5H 4M2

Telephone: +1 604 775 8200

Fax: +1 604 775 8210

Web: www.col.org

E-mail: info@col.org

Acknowledgements

The author acknowledges the valued support and advice of Dr. Sanjaya Mishra, Education Specialist, eLearning, Dr. Godson Gatsha, Education Specialist, Higher Education, and Ms. Leticia Pamela Garcia, intern at the Commonwealth of Learning. The author is also grateful to Ms. Charisse Cruz, who provided support in conducting the survey, and to all of those in the various universities who took the time and trouble to respond to the questionnaire.

The contributions of the editor, Dr. Dania Sheldon, and the designer, Ms. Ania Grygorczuk, are also appreciated.

The Commonwealth of Learning is grateful to Dr. Ebba Ossiannilsson and Dr. Stamenka Uvalić-Trumbić for serving as critical readers of the draft of this publication and providing valuable comments.





Contents

Foreword	2
PART 1: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS	
Background to the Study	3
Summary of the Findings	3
Recommendations.....	4
PART 2: INTRODUCTION	
Aims of the Study.....	5
Methodology	6
ODL in the Universities of the Commonwealth.....	7
QA and ODL	8
PART 3: FINDINGS	
National QA and Accreditation Agencies and Frameworks	11
QA Policies, Agencies and Frameworks.....	11
QA of ODL and Face-to-face Provision	15
Cross-border Provision.....	17
ISO Certification.....	18
Institutional QA Policies and Practices.....	20
QA and Strategic Planning	21
Centralised and Decentralised QA Systems	21
Recognition and Reward	23
The Quality Cycle	24
Quality Culture.....	25
eLearning	25
Inputs- and Outcomes-based QA	26
External and Internal Auditing.....	28
Student Participation in QA.....	29
Cross-border Accreditation and Certification	30
Perceived Benefits, Outcomes, Constraints and Challenges in QA.....	32
Use of COL and Other Sources in QA.....	34
PART 4: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	
Summary of the Findings	36
Discussion.....	38
Recommendations.....	39
References	40
APPENDIX I: ODL Key Terms and Definitions	44
APPENDIX II: QA Key Terms and Definitions	46
APPENDIX III: The Survey Instrument	48
APPENDIX IV: International, National and Regional QA, Accreditation and Certification Organisations in the Commonwealth Countries	53
International Organisations	53
Regional Organisations.....	53
National Organisations.....	55
APPENDIX V: QA Standards and Guidelines for Open, Distance and Online Learning.....	60



Continuous improvement in higher education institutions is critical for the provision of quality education through ODL in all its various forms.

FOREWORD

The issue of quality in open and distance learning (ODL) remains a major concern. Inadequate quality assurance (QA) measures, policies and systems render the credibility of ODL provision questionable. The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) is at the forefront of promoting quality ODL and over the years has developed several toolkits, guidelines and monographs, as well as a micro-site of web links on QA, to help Commonwealth countries benefit from credible and qualitatively comparable ODL models. COL's Review and Improvement Model (COL RIM) has assisted at least 13 institutions with integrating QA into their systems and processes. As quality is a matter of continuous relevance, COL commissioned a study to investigate the state of QA in open higher education institutions in the Commonwealth.

This report offers some key insights and findings on how QA is currently being practiced in open universities in the Commonwealth, from the perspectives of policy makers, leaders and practitioners in open and distance education institutions. The lessons show that whilst the importance of QA is accepted as a strategic value by all, the standards of practice, criteria and measures differ considerably. There is also a growing concern over QA in new forms of teaching and learning, including eLearning, open educational resources and massive open online courses.

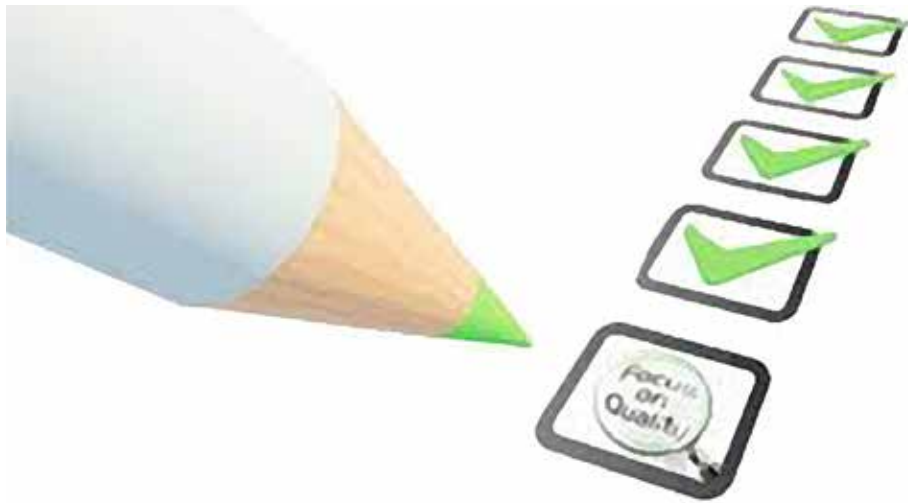
Continuous improvement in higher education institutions is critical for the provision of quality education through ODL in all its various forms, including eLearning, online learning and blended flexible learning. When practitioners generate, innovate, adopt, adapt, repurpose and use systems, learning resources and technologies, it is equally important to support the provision of quality education through the ODL mode. Embracing continuous improvement entails having robust institutional QA policies, implementation strategies, and consistent monitoring, evaluation and reporting. It therefore calls for ongoing planning and implementation to achieve better results and the desired outcomes. Success is realised when higher education leaders, policy makers and practitioners walk the talk by embracing quality issues as part of their strategic direction in their annual plans and daily practices at all levels within their institutions.

We are grateful to Colin Latchem, a senior ODL professional with significant experience and expertise in quality matters, for preparing this report. He has identified two sets of recommendations: (i) for governments and national QA agencies and (ii) for higher education institutions offering ODL courses and programmes.

I am sure that the report will be discussed and debated by the stakeholders in their respective contexts, and that the recommendations in this report will be considered starting points for reaffirming QA in ODL provisions.

Professor Asha Kanwar

President and CEO of the Commonwealth of Learning



The importance of quality assurance in open and distance learning is widely understood; however, there are countries and institutions where progress has been slower than might be expected and where policy makers, managers and practitioners are still in need of advice and support.

PART I

Executive Summary and Recommendations

Background to the Study

This study was commissioned by the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) to gain an up-to-date overview of the different policies, systems and practices in quality assurance (QA)¹ in open and distance learning (ODL)² in national QA and accreditation agencies and universities in the Commonwealth and, in light of the findings, make recommendations on QA standards and procedures for policy makers and senior decision makers responsible for ODL at the national and institutional levels.

Summary of the Findings

The findings indicated that the general concepts of QA and recognition of the importance of QA in ODL are understood at both national and institutional level in most Commonwealth countries. However, there are countries and institutions where progress has been slower than might have

¹ For definitions of key terms used in relation to QA, see Appendix II.

² For definitions of key terms used in relation to ODL, see Appendix I.

been expected and where policy makers, managers and practitioners are still in need of advice and support. In some cases, there may be compliance with QA processes but complacency over standards. There are also signs that QA is not keeping up with the times in regard to newer forms of ODL, such as eLearning.

Recommendations

Governments and national QA and accreditation agencies should:

1. Ensure that their QA and accreditation systems contain distinct standards, measures or performance indicators for assuring quality in and accrediting ODL courses and programmes in all higher education institutions within their national jurisdictions, whether public or private.
2. Ensure that national QA frameworks contain distinct standards, measures or performance indicators for assuring quality in and accrediting the ODL courses and programmes of overseas providers.
3. Allow for a degree of institutional autonomy by co-developing QA frameworks for ODL with the higher education community. These frameworks should set out the requirements that all providers are expected to meet and upon which they can draw to develop internal QA systems for their programmes and awards, according to their particular goals and circumstances; these systems can then be audited for their effectiveness.
4. Judge the quality of ODL and eLearning by the same generic measures as are used for conventional teaching and learning but augment these with criteria and measures appropriate to the various modes and methods of delivery.
5. Ensure that the QA and accreditation systems take due account of all of the newer forms of eLearning, including the use of OER, MOOCs, and systems for providing open informal and non-formal education and access to pathways to formal study.
6. Judge quality in ODL provision on the basis of access, equity and diversity, as well as the traditional measures for teaching, learning and research.
7. Assess quality in ODL provision by measuring not only the inputs but also the outputs, outcomes and impact.
8. Encourage and support student representation in all aspects of developing and applying QA.
9. Provide competitive funding and other incentives to encourage high-performing and innovative applications of ODL and QA in institutions and programmes.

Higher education institutions should:

1. Establish, maintain and update rigorous QA frameworks and benchmarking systems to assure quality in all forms of ODL and ensure accountability to their students and other stakeholders, as well as continuous improvement in all of their operations.
2. Establish QA centres or senior managers responsible for QA and benchmarking activities, in accord with Recommendations 2–9 above.



For COL to continue to promote good practice and strengthen the credibility of ODL as a means of delivery, it needs up-to-date data on how it can best encourage and support national and institutional QA policy making and practice in ODL.

PART II

Introduction

Aims of the Study

The Commonwealth of Learning (COL) is an intergovernmental organisation created by the Commonwealth Heads of Government (CHOG) to encourage the development and sharing of open and distance learning (ODL) knowledge, resources and technologies.³

COL is the world's only intergovernmental organisation solely concerned with the promotion and development of ODL to improve access to quality education and training in all sectors.

In regard to higher education, COL has been working with Commonwealth governments and institutions to develop national and institutional ODL policies, improve the quality of ODL systems and enhance staff capacity to develop and deliver quality programmes.

³ For definitions of key terms used in relation to ODL, see Appendix I.

For COL to continue to promote good practice and strengthen the credibility of ODL as a means of delivery, it needs up-to-date data on how it can best encourage and support national and institutional QA policy making and practice in ODL.

COL therefore commissioned this study to:

- gauge the extent, nature and status of quality assurance (QA) systems and practices⁴ in ODL in universities in the Commonwealth countries;
- document different systems and approaches to QA in ODL at the national and institutional levels;
- examine the parity of ODL with conventional higher education in terms of QA, recognition and accreditation;
- identify best practices and lessons learnt; and
- make recommendations for policy makers and senior decision makers to improve the quality and status of ODL.

The study was designed to investigate:

- national QA and accreditation frameworks;
- the management and administration of institutional QA systems;
- inputs- and outcomes-based QA;
- auditing;
- the accreditation and certification of institutions, programmes and courses;
- the accreditation and certification of cross-border provision;
 - cross-border provision;
 - the use of external guidelines; and
 - benefits, outcomes, constraints and challenges in applying QA.

A 30-item questionnaire was sent to vice-chancellors, deputy vice-chancellors, directors of quality centres and others deemed well placed to comment on the state of QA in 100 ODL institutions.

Methodology

A 30-item questionnaire was developed (see Appendix III), deriving from the literature of QA in higher education. Following review and amendments by experts in the field, the questionnaire, together with a letter from the President and CEO of COL, Professor Asha Kanwar, was sent to vice-chancellors, deputy vice-chancellors, directors of distance education, directors of quality centres and others deemed well placed to comment on the state of QA in 100 ODL institutions in developed and developing Commonwealth countries.

To strengthen its links with the various Commonwealth Member States, COL operates a network of COL Focal Points nominated by ministers of education to be the primary contacts in the various countries. All of these Focal Points were also requested to forward the survey instrument to institutions in their countries and invite them to provide data for this study.

The study was conducted between 8 April and 31 July 2015. Thematic analysis was employed to identify, examine and record patterns or themes within the data. The report was structured

⁴ For definitions of key terms used in relation to QA, see Appendix II.

around these patterns or themes to provide an overview of developments in QA in ODL and reveal what more could be done to encourage and support national and institutional policies and systems in assuring quality in ODL.

ODL in the Universities of the Commonwealth

Maslen (2012) reports that the number of students enrolled in higher education around the globe is forecast to more than double by 2025, to 262 million, and the number of students seeking to study abroad could rise to eight million — nearly three times more than today. Almost all of this growth will be in the developing world, and a very large percentage of these students will be enrolled in the universities of the Commonwealth.

Recognising the need to increase enrolments, developed and developing countries alike have embarked on the “massification” of higher education. The term massification has traditionally been applied to making luxury products available to the mass market. In the context of higher education, it describes the practice of making education that was formerly available only to those with the requisite entry scores, sufficient funds for study and convenient access to campuses available to the less privileged, including remote, rural and poor urban communities, girls, women and minority groups. This is increasingly accomplished by adopting some form of ODL to improve access and equity and achieve more cost-effective provision.

Recognising the need to increase enrolments, developed and developing countries alike have embarked on the “massification” of higher education.

Some countries have responded to this challenge by establishing open universities, institutions which waive or exercise flexibility in formal entry requirements. Examples include The Open University (UK), Athabasca University (Canada), Indira Gandhi National Open University (India) and the Open University of Sri Lanka. Aiming for similar goals, Australia has taken a different approach, establishing a unique system called Open Universities Australia. This is a private company owned by seven of the country’s leading public universities that enables students without the traditional academic requirements to study online, follow learning pathways and, should they so wish, go on to study with and graduate from the leading Australian university of their choice with exactly the same qualifications as an on-campus student. All of the undergraduate and post-graduate qualifications available through OUA are Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) qualifications.

The Commonwealth can also claim to have some of the world’s largest universities by enrolment. These so-called “mega-universities” include Indira Gandhi National Open University — the world’s largest university, with over four million students — Allama Iqbal Open University (Pakistan), with an average annual enrolment of more than 1.2 million, and Africa’s leading ODL institution, the University of South Africa, with an annual enrolment of over a third of a million.

The Commonwealth also has two major regional universities: the University of the South Pacific, which has its main campus in Fiji and serves 12 Pacific Island nations, and the University of the West Indies, with its main campus in Barbados, which serves the higher education needs of the English-speaking countries and territories of the Caribbean.

In developing and developed countries alike, there has also been an enormous growth in dual-mode provision — that is to say, offering the courses leading to the same degrees both off and on campus. There was a time when ODL and conventional higher education institutions could be seen as at the extremes of a continuum, the former characterised by the use of mediated delivery and largely independent learning and the latter by face-to-face and teacher-supported study. A mix of technological, socio-economic and educational factors has now led to the convergence of these two delivery modes and the clientele of these two kinds of institutions. A wide range of public and private institutions now deliver their programmes flexibly through a mix of print, audio, video, online and computer-based provision and face-to-face tuition. Both distance and

Mobile learning has taken ODL a step further by allowing students to learn virtually anywhere a mobile signal is available.

campus-based learners now have expectations of flexibility, increased learner-centredness, the ability to learn at times, paces and places of their own choosing, self-tailored learning, greater choice in course offerings, peer, collaborative and interactive learning, and a higher degree of standardisation in the quality and range of the course content and courseware. Mobile learning has taken ODL a step further by allowing students to learn virtually anywhere a mobile signal is available.

Institutions adopting these new educational paradigms set out their values in strategic plans and mandatory mission and vision statements, citing the need for excellence (surpassing normal standards), access, equity, social justice, internationalism, efficiency and affordability. Whatever the ideals or political and commercial imperatives, all of these universities need to establish administrative and procedural activities to ensure that they fulfil all of the national, societal and institutional requirements and goals by ensuring quality in their governance, policy making, planning, products, processes and services.

QA and ODL

For all the evidence of improvements — in access and equity, more enriched and cost-effective delivery through applications of information and communication technologies (ICTs) and more pedagogically sound and learner-centred methods in ODL — governments, funding agencies and the general public can still voice concerns regarding the quality of these newer forms of off-campus and on-campus provision. Sadly, there can also be unsubstantiated grandstanding and rhetoric in some of the claims made for ODL.

Critics of ODL are only too ready to seize upon the lower or absence of entry standards, the limited support for isolated learners, the costs and effort involved in creating and maintaining the technological infrastructure and developing the courseware, and the sometimes higher non-completion and failure rates. In some jurisdictions, ODL is perceived as “last-choice education.” Sometimes these viewpoints may be a hangover from the days of “correspondence education,” with its slow and poor-quality feedback and limited support for learners. In other cases, the rise of private online providers more interested in profit than academic quality has helped give ODL a bad name. At the time of writing, criticisms of the quality of the learning experiences and outcomes and poor job prospects for graduates of the University of Phoenix has left the USA’s largest for-profit provider struggling with a decline in enrolments, from 460,000 students five years ago to 213,000 today, and a drop of over 50 per cent in revenue (Gillespie, 2015). Having once regarded online and international students as “cash cows,” the for-profit education

providers have failed to overcome criticisms of their quality and have become a sore spot in the debate about the value of alternative forms of higher education.

Some critics claim that ICT-based teaching and learning at a distance is impersonal and can never be as effective as the face-to-face and experiential learning that on-campus study affords. Others argue that “less is more” and that the *comprehensivisation* of higher education and “cram-them-in” massification of the sector is downgrading the value of degrees in the eyes of the public and employers. There are also concerns about the costs and accountability of higher education in general. Whether for political or economic reasons, many governments are reducing their levels of funding support for public higher education whilst at the same time increasing their demands for regulatory compliance. Governments and other stakeholders around the globe are demanding more evidence of student participation, completion and attainment rates, the quality of the learning environments and assessment procedures, the sector’s contributions to socio-economic development, and the quality of governance and stakeholder responsiveness in these areas.

Governments and other stakeholders around the globe are demanding more evidence of student participation, completion and attainment rates, the quality of the learning environments and assessment procedures, the sector’s contributions to socio-economic development, and the quality of governance and stakeholder responsiveness in these areas.

“Internationalism” has become a mantra in higher education, and universities across the world are being encouraged to reap the benefits of global and technological interconnectedness. “Rankings” have become the new currency of quality. Stella and Gnanam (2004) have observed that the rise of cross-border ODL prompts further concerns in governments and QA agencies across the globe regarding the safeguarding of quality, integrity and sustainability in their national systems, and the protection of students from worthless courses offered by dubious online providers.

Accreditation and certification are forms of QA that guarantee a basic level of quality in the education provided by institutions and ensure that degrees will be recognised for the true achievements they are.

Accreditation and certification are forms of QA that guarantee a basic level of quality in the education provided by institutions and ensure that degrees will be recognised for the true achievements they are. But not all countries have yet established accreditation agencies to review their institutions of higher education and certify their quality. In most countries (the USA being one notable exception), accreditation for higher education is conducted by government organisations. The drive for competitiveness is also leading some universities to seek certification from the International Standards Organisation (ISO).

Brennan (1998) has summarised the reasons for QA and accreditation in higher education:

- To ensure accountability for public funds
- To improve the quality of higher education provision
- To inform funding decisions
- To inform students and employers
- To stimulate competitiveness within and between organisations

- To undertake a quality check on new (and sometimes private) institutions
- To assign institutional status
- To support the transfer of authority between the state and institutions
- To assist students' mobility
- To make international comparisons

Today, as James et al. (2011) have observed, ODL is subject to laws, policies, rules, regulations and practices imposed by government legislators, national and international QA and accreditation agencies, and professional and academic associations. Taxpayers, employers and student bodies

It is also recognised as important that QA not become too costly, bureaucratic and burdensome upon the universities.

also expect their concerns about educational standards to be addressed. At the same time, it is generally accepted that university and academic autonomy must be maintained and that higher education institutions should be allowed to plan for, maintain and evaluate their own academic standards in accord with their diverse missions. In the UK, the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) works closely with the higher education sector to develop, maintain and update the Quality Code; higher education providers use this code to help them set and maintain the academic standards of their programmes and awards and assure and enhance the quality of the learning opportunities they provide. It is also recognised as important that QA not become too costly, bureaucratic and burdensome upon the

universities. However, when it comes to ODL in higher education, there is clearly a need to ensure that extensive and rigorous QA systems are in operation, both internally and externally, if practitioners are to prove conclusively that their policies and practices are successful, beneficial and deployed consistently around the world.



The establishment, ownership, legal basis, governance, funding, degree of rigour and level of independence of QA agencies, as well as the scope and characteristics of their QA frameworks, vary from country to country.

PART III

Findings

National QA and Accreditation Agencies and Frameworks

QA Policies, Agencies and Frameworks

Question 2. Is there a national QA and accreditation framework for higher education in your country?

Question 3. Are all higher education providers in your country required to meet these QA standards regardless of whether they are open, distance, conventional, public, private or overseas institutions?

Question 4. Does the national QA framework, if any, specifically refer to ODL?

As shown in Appendix IV, the majority of Commonwealth countries have established QA agencies and frameworks.

75%
established QA

Seventy-five per cent of the respondents to this survey reported that their countries had established national QA and accreditation frameworks for their higher education systems. Eleven per cent indicated that such frameworks were in the course of development.

11%
in progress

The University of Belize reported that the country had embarked on a process of consultation with stakeholders to develop a National Quality Assurance Framework and National Quality Assurance System based on the European Qualifications Framework (EQF).⁵ The EQF facilitates communication and comparison between qualifications systems in Europe. Its eight common European reference levels are described in terms of learning outcomes: knowledge, skills and competencies. Learners, graduates, providers and employers can use these levels to understand and compare qualifications awarded in the different countries and by different education and training systems.

To date, in the Republic of Cyprus, an EU state, the Council of Educational Evaluation–Accreditation has only evaluated and accredited private universities, leaving public universities responsible for their own QA systems. But because QA is a key issue for the Bologna Process and the EU modernisation agenda for higher education, the Cypriot government is currently passing laws for the creation of a new Cyprus Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Education to evaluate, accredit and recognise public and private universities in accord with the European Standards and Guidelines.

Regional and national QA and accreditation frameworks are designed to assure conformity and the highest possible standards in provision and in transparency and accountability regarding public expenditure. Whilst the ideals of a liberal arts education still hold — embodying the Aristotelian view that study for its own sake can lead down glorious paths for individuals — politics, economics and the need to safeguard the interests of learners has led to the view of quality as “fitness for purpose,” the fulfilment of stated specifications and outcomes. So the QA and accreditation agendas are now being driven by such imperatives as the need for reforming education, assuring value for money, serving the national interests and ensuring standards in the face of massification, increased student diversity, the internationalisation of higher education and the rise of private for-profit providers.

The establishment, ownership, legal basis, governance, funding, degree of rigour and level of independence of QA agencies, as well as the scope and characteristics of their QA frameworks, vary from country to country. In some countries, for example in the Asia Pacific, governments hold responsibility for QA in the universities. But in many cases — such as the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education in the UK, the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency in Australia and the University Grants Commission in India — the monitoring and advising on standards and quality in higher education are entrusted to statutory organisations and independent bodies operating at the national level.

Canada is an exception. Rather than having a single national regulatory body to oversee higher education, the system involves provincial legislation and membership in the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada; consequently, ODL providers wishing to extend their reach beyond a single province are confronted with a complicated patchwork of licensing requirements and accreditation standards (Parker, 2012). There are also some private for-profit organisations that operate legally in Canada without ministerial sanction.

⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/search/site?f%5B0%5D=im_field_entity_type%3A97

Many national agencies also have responsibility for accrediting universities and private higher education providers. Some QA and accreditation systems concern institutions, whilst others concern programmes. Some are mandatory and others voluntary. For example, in Trinidad and Tobago, all post-secondary and tertiary institutions operating in the country, whether local or transnational/foreign, must be registered with the Accreditation Council of Trinidad and Tobago, but accreditation is voluntary. However, since registration only provides assurance that an institution meets minimum standards, it is in the best interests of the institutions in the country to seek institutional accreditation.

Some national agencies publicly disclose QA audit outcomes and require post-QA/accreditation follow-up. Others only disclose whether or not institutions or programmes have been accredited. Some QA systems are more concerned with matters of control and management than with self-improvement. Others apply lighter external control where institutions are able to demonstrate that they have clear and effective internal QA processes in place. However, certain elements are common to all of these systems: QA frameworks which enable institutions to look at their strengths and weaknesses and continuously improve their quality of service; self-assessment according to a set of criteria and indicators of quality; validation by external teams; and some form of registration or recognition allowing institutions to operate as universities and/or offer programmes that are valid for certain periods of time. What all of these agencies also do is accord with national and even global priorities, such as social and economic development, international competitiveness, social justice, equity, gender, inclusiveness, diversity and so on.

An example of a national body responsible for QA in higher education providing a framework that is designed to assure accountability in the institutions and conformity with regulatory and continuous improvement is Uganda's Quality Assurance Framework for Universities, and the Licensing Process for Higher Education Institutions published by the National Council of Higher Education (NCHE, 2014). This framework uses the definition of QA as "fitness for purpose." It details the requirements and achievements of institutions to be measured for the purposes of institutional and individual programme accreditation and external and internal audits. It stresses that the responsibility for assuring such quality lies with each individual institution in partnership with the NCHE. The framework covers:

- accreditation;
- statutory requirements;
- institutional governance
 - * vision
 - * mission
 - * strategic plan;
- the functioning of the university organs
 - * the university council
 - * the senate
 - * the administration
 - * the staff union
 - * the student union;

- overall institutional autonomy;
- admissions
 - * merit-based admission that does not discriminate between applicants on the basis of ethnicity, race, gender or creed
 - * minimum entry requirements;
- the quality of academic staff
 - * qualifications
 - * rules and regulations for hiring, promoting and firing staff
 - * staff development
 - * students' assessment of academic staff;

Some smaller and developing nations may lack the capacity to establish national QA systems on their own or may be unable to identify a sufficient number of well-qualified and widely experienced reviewers for the purpose of external evaluation. Here, collaboration in QA across regions provides the answer.

- standards for courses and programmes of study;
- examination regulations and awards standardisation;
- educational facilities;
- research and publication;
- the quality of outputs;
- institutional financial management;
- the university and the community;
- collaboration with professional bodies; and
- any other items worthy of attention.

On the issue of cross-border providers, the NCHE states that any foreign institution wishing to operate in Uganda shall be subjected to the Act and not be allowed to offer education inferior to what they offer in their country of origin.

Some smaller and developing nations may lack the capacity to establish national QA systems on their own or may be unable to identify a sufficient number of well-qualified and widely experienced reviewers for the purpose of external evaluation. Here, collaboration in QA across regions provides the answer, as in the case of the University of the South Pacific (USP) and the University of the West Indies (UWI), two institutions which not only have to cope with the challenge of distance but are jointly owned by the governments of their member countries (Chandra, Thurab-Nkhosi, & Marshall, 2012). USP is a self-accrediting institution with the power to design and award its own degrees, but it is also audited by the Academic Quality Agency for New Zealand Universities. UWI operates its own Quality Circle through the UWI Quality Assurance Unit to evidence, for the benefit of all of the university's stakeholders, the quality of its academic, administrative and service in terms of "fitness for purpose," but its programmes are also accredited by international organisations (UWI, 2014).

In Africa, the African Quality Assurance Network has been established to support members of the African Association of Universities in creating or evaluating internal QA systems, and to share good practices amongst existing and emerging national regulatory agencies in Africa by developing guidelines for good practice in quality assurance (CHE & AfriQAN, 2012).

76%
ODL subject to same standards

22%
ODL specifically mentioned in QA frameworks

QA of ODL and Face-to-face Provision

Question 9. Are the standards, measures and performance indicators in the national QA framework the same for judging quality in face-to-face teaching and learning and ODL?

It is commonly accepted that QA is needed to ensure that ODL governance structures, processes, courses, programmes, learner support and degrees meet the highest possible academic and professional standards. However, views differ on whether the standards and measures should be general and applied to all forms of higher education provision, regardless of delivery mode, or whether it should be recognised that ODL is typically characterised by different philosophies and principles and involves different organisational, pedagogical and methodological approaches. For example, it is commonly incumbent upon ODL providers to increase access and equity, overcome discrimination and provide entry for the traditionally disadvantaged. As a result, their intakes are typically much larger and more diverse than those of the traditional, “more elitist” on-campus institutions. Providing the necessary face-to-face and online support and technology and ensuring interactivity, commitment and understanding in these learners is much more problematic than in classroom-based teaching and learning. Yet despite all these factors, and often the obligation to operate with more limited resources, it is still expected that ODL providers will achieve optimal outcomes.

For these reasons, writers such as Kirkpatrick (2005) and Shale and Gomes (1998) posit that different approaches to QA are needed for ODL. The view that the new types of providers and new forms and methods of teaching and learning present new challenges to accreditation standards, policies and procedures is upheld by the U.S. Council for Higher Education and Accreditation (CHEA, 2002). CHEA suggests that accrediting organisations not only should ensure that the standards of distance, online and blended courses are commensurate with those of conventional courses, but should subject the unique features of ODL to particular scrutiny. By contrast, David Woodhouse, the former President of the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education, is of the view that the criteria for judging inputs and processes and their correlation with quality outcomes are similar in both face-to-face and ODL programmes; he does, though, acknowledge that because teachers, students and resources are dispersed or online, it may be necessary to ask different questions and employ different enquiry methods when assessing their quality (Woodhouse, 2006).

Sixty-seven per cent of the respondents to this survey stated that their national QA agencies applied the same sets of standards and measures regardless of mode, and only 22 per cent reported that ODL per se was specifically mentioned in their national QA frameworks. Thus, for example, the authorities responsible for QA in higher education in Malaysia, Singapore and Sri Lanka consider ODL to be an integral part of higher educational provision and believe that such dimensions as accuracy, relevance, currency and pedagogical effectiveness in learning design should apply in all contexts, whether face-to-face, at a distance or online.

Sixty-seven per cent of the respondents to this survey stated that their national QA agencies applied the same sets of standards and measures regardless of mode, and only 22 per cent reported that ODL per se was specifically mentioned in their national QA frameworks.

Some countries do specifically address ODL issues within the context of their overall QA systems. The Malaysian Qualifications Agency has developed guidelines, procedural criteria and standards to assist institutions, faculties and individual faculty members in the development, accreditation and auditing of ODL courses and programmes (Malaysian Qualifications Agency, 2013). These guidelines concern: vision and mission statements; educational goals and outcomes; curriculum design and delivery; assessment of students; student selection and support services; academic staff; educational resources; programme monitoring and review; leadership, governance and administration; and continual quality improvement.

Mauritius has a national QA framework for post-secondary educational institutions that are required to register and seek accreditation with the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC). In 2011, the TEC established a Distance Education and Open Learning Division to advise on QA matters relating to ODL, and an evidence-based distance education policy now supplements the TEC regulatory framework for public and private providers.⁶

India regards the assessment of quality in ODL as a quite separate issue. The erstwhile regulator of distance education programmes, the Distance Education Council of Indira Gandhi National Open University, has now been dissolved, and all of the regulatory functions in regard to higher education ODL have been vested in the Distance Education Bureau of the University Grants Commission. At the time of writing, the Distance Education Bureau was framing new regulations for granting permission to state, central, “deemed” or “deemed-to-be” universities acknowledged by the Ministry of Higher Education to offer distance education programmes, and the Government of India is moving to establish a separate Distance Education Council with powers extending to the whole of India. In Mozambique, the regulatory body is the National Institute of Distance Education (Instituto Nacional de Educação à Distância), which is responsible for all ODL policies, QA and accreditation in the national education system, rather than the National Council of Higher Education Quality Assessment.

Practices also vary at the institutional level. Botho University, in Botswana, utilises the same QA framework for ODL and face-to-face provision but pays particular attention in its ODL programmes to issues of support and interactivity between the institution and the learners and the quality of materials development. The Academic Program Review of Canada’s Thompson Rivers University assesses all programmes’ quality, improvement, sustainability and accountability through evidence-based inquiry and analyses, regardless of mode, but it measures different elements in the context of delivery. And whilst the University of British Columbia holds ODL and campus courses to the same standards, it has developed special QA checklists regarding the design, content and accessibility of its distance education programmes, allows questions to be customised at the department level to gauge students’ perspectives on the quality of online courses, and is currently developing a model for assessing departmental applications for the funding of online courses.

⁶ http://tec.intnet.mu/qa_distance_education

Cross-border Provision

Question 11. Are there distinct standards, measures and performance indicators in the national QA framework for assuring quality in and accrediting the ODL courses and programmes of overseas providers?

28%

distinct standards
for overseas
providers

Only 28 per cent of the respondents indicated that their national QA frameworks contained distinct standards, measures or performance indicators for assuring quality in, and accrediting, the ODL courses or programmes of overseas providers. This apparent lack of national capacity for QA and accreditation of cross-border ODL could result in students falling victim to misleading guidance and information, disreputable providers and qualifications that are not comparable to what institutions in their home countries offer. As one of the respondents in this study observed, “The absence of an accreditation body [in our country] results in the undermining of quality education by spurious providers.”

Since the 1980s, there has been considerable growth in cross-border higher education, not only in terms of the physical mobility of students and academic staff, but in the form of ODL provided by public and private institutions. As Vincent-Lancrin and Pfothenauer (2012) have observed, cross-border higher education can improve the knowledge, skills and outlooks of students, enhance the quality of higher education systems, enable innovation and capacity development, and assist with the human, social, economic and cultural development of the receiving countries. However, as the CHEA International Quality Group (2015) observed, increased student mobility, expanded faculty exchanges and research collaboration, more cross-border partnerships amongst institutions and the growing reliance on online or Web-based education have created a sense of urgency for countries and universities to develop a shared understanding of educational quality.

Cross-border ODL has tended to operate on a North–South basis, with public universities in countries such as Australia and the UK enrolling students online or operating franchises and accrediting overseas providers, and U.S. public and private providers marketing their wares, most recently in the form of massive open online courses (MOOCs). But now cross-border provision is also operating on a South–South basis. Ten years ago, Daniel, Kanwar and Uvalić-Trumbić (2005) reported that the University of South Africa was set on becoming a major provider across Africa. Today, Unisa serves more than 400,000 students from 130 countries, in Africa and globally, making it one of the world’s mega-universities. At the time of Daniel, Kanwar and Uvalić-Trumbić’s comments, India’s Indira Gandhi National Open University was serving the niche markets of the Indian diaspora in the Middle East. Today, it has a presence in 35 countries and partnership arrangements with 62 educational institutes. Malaysia’s ODL providers are also delivering programmes into such countries as Bangladesh, China, Indonesia and Sri Lanka.

Daniel, Kanwar and Uvalić-Trumbić also observed that governments needed to turn their attention to creating QA and accreditation frameworks for some potentially very large cross-border providers. Szabo and Tück (2014) noted that in the European context, higher education

This apparent lack of national capacity for QA and accreditation of cross-border ODL could result in students falling victim to misleading guidance and information, disreputable providers and qualifications that are not comparable to what institutions in their home countries offer.

institutions are keen to take advantage of the opportunities of a cross-border external review but national frameworks are lagging behind, and the number of countries that allow their higher education institutions to work with suitable QA agencies from abroad is small, even though cross-border reviews are a reality in almost all European Higher Education Area countries. International evaluations or accreditations in these countries often happen in addition and parallel to the national, mandatory external QA, rather than being recognised as part of it. This leads to an unproductive duplication of efforts and does not contribute to promoting a genuine regional or international dimension to QA.

ISO Certification

Question 23. Does your institution use any other form(s) of certification/accreditation, such as ISO 9001, for assuring quality in its ODL provision?

Three of the institutions responding to this survey stated that they had been granted ISO 9001/1 certification for their ODL systems, and one reported that ISO certification was in progress.

The ISO⁷ is an international, independent, non-governmental, standard-setting body composed of representatives from the standards organisations of the 163 member countries. ISO facilitates world trade by providing common standards between nations and has established nearly 20,000 standards, covering everything from manufactured products and technology to food safety and healthcare. By so doing, it ensures that products and services are safe, reliable and of good quality and helps minimise errors and waste. By enabling products from different markets to be directly compared, these standards help companies to enter new markets and develop global trade on a fair basis.

Higher educational institutions are increasingly recognising the technological, economic and societal benefits of international standards, and ISO is undertaking a number of actions to reach out to the sector.

The ISO standard is not specific to higher education, but it comprises a set of generic requirements for a quality management system, independent of the nature of the organisation's activities, size and status. Sections deal with: general requirements; management responsibility; resource management; product realisation; and measurement, analysis and improvement. Whilst these standards are mainly used in industry, where they are better known than the quality standards specific to particular countries or groups of countries, universities may also use them to induce greater confidence in the effectiveness of their management, processes and products.

Higher educational institutions are increasingly recognising the technological, economic and societal benefits of international standards, and ISO is undertaking a number of actions to reach out to the sector. It has a repository of resources and teaching materials that describe how standardisation can be integrated into education, offers awards to promote education institutions leading the way in standardisation, co-organises World Standards Cooperation academic days and promotes co-operation between standards bodies and education institutions in developing countries. Institutions seeking ISO 9001/1 certification receive guidance through a handbook designed for educational organisations. Three Commonwealth ODL institutions that have taken this route are the University of Southern

⁷ <http://www.iso.org/iso/home.html>

Queensland, in Australia (USQ), the Open University of Malaysia (OUM) and Botho University, in Botswana.

USQ took this step as a means of differentiating itself from the competition emerging in the global distance education market and because it saw ISO certification as a prerequisite to any partnerships it might enter into with other institutions or sectors. It gained ISO 9001 quality certification for its: organisational and project management; systems administration; courseware design and development; distance learning evaluation; examinations preparation and production; telecommunications and IT support and maintenance; and student support systems (Taylor & Swannell, 2001).

OUM has received MS ISO 9001:2008 certification for its Registry, Sanusi Digital Library, Centre for Instructional Design and Technology and Centre for Student Management (Ibrahim, Abas, & Ali, 2008).

In 2013, Botho University — Botswana’s largest private tertiary educational provider — in recognition of its quality management system received ISO 9001:2008 certification from the Botswana Bureau of Standards.

The Open University (OU) of Mauritius, established in 2012, reports that it is currently being ISO 9001:2008 certified. The university’s staff have been trained in conducting audits by the party auditor and the Mauritius Standards Bureau, together with local and foreign auditors. Audits for ISO certification have been conducted twice since April 2014. The OU also complies with the quality requirements of the UK QAA, which in 2014 was invited by the Mauritian government to conduct an audit of tertiary education institutions in that country.

The Botswana College of Distance and Open Learning (BOCODOL) had earlier received ISO 9001:2008 certification, but at the time of writing, this certification was in abeyance as the institution was in the process of transforming into an open university in 2016; this means that it will be offering online post-graduate programmes as well as serving its traditional market — those at school equivalency level unable to enter conventional tertiary institutions because of a shortage of places or for other reasons.

Ossiannilsson, Williams, Camilleri and Brown (2015) have recently argued that the ISO 9000/1 standards can also be very helpful in providing scaffolding for the creation of internal QA systems. BOCODOL reports that it still uses the ISO 9001-2008 standard in conducting its annual internal audits. OUM says that it has its own QA system, which is based on ISO 9001-2008 and operates in accord with four sets of documents: a quality manual, a service operation manual, procedures, and guidelines for the documentation and management of internal audit procedures.

The International Council for Distance Education sees considerable advantages in engaging with ISO to incorporate the general principles of conducting QA in online and other modes of delivery in the upcoming ISO 21001 standard on Quality Management Systems for Educational Organisations, not least because this would become the de facto reference point for ODL QA practices around the globe (Ossiannilsson et al., 2015).

Institutional QA Policies and Practices

Question 5. Is your institution's QA framework or system for ODL based on this national framework?

Question 6. Is your institution permitted to set its own quality codes and policies for maintaining standards in the ODL awards and programmes?

Question 8. If there is an institutional QA framework, does this specifically refer to ODL?

50%

QA based on national frameworks

39%

QA frameworks refer to ODL

Fifty per cent of the respondents declared that their institutional QA frameworks were based on the national QA frameworks, and 14 per cent said that they were partially based on these. Eighty-three per cent of the institutions said they were permitted to set their own policies on the standards of their ODL awards and programmes. However, only 39 per cent said that their national or institutional QA frameworks specifically referred to ODL, and half reported that they used the same standards, measures and performance indicators for face-to-face teaching and learning and ODL.

Autonomy and self-regulation have been the traditional modus operandi for centuries in most higher education systems across the globe.

However, the sector is now experiencing a significantly increasing level of control over its governance, financial management, programme development and assessment and evaluation methods.

Autonomy and self-regulation have been the traditional modus operandi for centuries in most higher education systems across the globe. However, the sector is now experiencing a significantly increasing level of control over its governance, financial management, programme development and assessment and evaluation methods. This can give rise to a clash of cultures and the imposition of inappropriate management systems in the belief that there can be a "one-size-fits-all" model of QA.

A compromise approach is shown in the UK, where The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) is trialling a new Quality Code,⁸ which was introduced in 2012–2013 and co-developed with the higher education community. This sets out the expectations that all UK higher education providers are required to meet and gives the universities a shared framework and starting point for developing their respective policies for maintaining academic standards and for setting, describing and assuring the academic standards of their awards and programmes. The QAA produces a range of guidance materials to help university providers ensure that students receive a high-quality learning experience. These publications are also useful for those coming from overseas to study in the UK. When it comes to external audits, the reviewers then use these general expectations as the main reference points for their institutional reviews.

In Australia, the Tertiary Education Quality Standards Agency (TEQSA) has recently developed a more streamlined Higher Education Standards Framework⁹ (which is due to be implemented in 2017). This has a greater focus on protecting students. According to the final draft, protection of the quality of the educational experience of students is of prime importance amongst the objects of the TEQSA, and the new standards will enable and support prospective and enrolled students to make informed choices through the provision of comprehensive, timely, accurate and publicly available information about a higher education provider's offerings and operations.

⁸ <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code>

⁹ <http://docs.education.gov.au/node/37863>

Stella (2012) made the important point that not all of the existing standards used by QA agencies are of a high quality. He observed that some are expressed at extremely high levels of generality, some do not provide specific tools to take action, some are too broad and ambitious to help practitioners convince the governments, some do not adequately empower the policy makers to implement good practice in the sector and some might lead to “trade language” creeping into academic discussions.

QA and Strategic Planning

Question 7. Is your institution’s QA framework linked to an institutional strategic plan?

Teay (2009) argued that strategic planning is inseparable from QA because strategic planning and QA cannot work in a vacuum of information and there needs to be a triangulation of planning–information–quality. Strategic plans define the inputs and activities and the desired outputs, outcomes and impact. QA monitors and assesses the progress in achieving these and helps to ensure that the providers’ vision, mission, goals and planning systems are integral to the organisational structure, staff roles and operations, whilst allowing for the particular circumstances and functional modalities of the various departments and units within the institution.

Eighty-one per cent of the responding universities reported that their QA frameworks were linked to their institutional strategic plans, whilst a number of respondents reported that they were in the process of aligning their strategic plans and QA procedures or saw a need for this to occur. However, when asked whether these QA frameworks specifically referred to ODL, only 39 per cent of the respondents said “yes.” Fifty-three per cent indicated that their institutional QA frameworks used the same standards, measures and performance indicators for judging the quality of face-to-face teaching and learning and ODL.

Eighty-one per cent of the responding universities reported that their QA frameworks were linked to their institutional strategic plans, whilst a number of respondents reported that they were in the process of aligning their strategic plans and QA procedures or saw a need for this to occur.

Centralised and Decentralised QA Systems

Question 12. Is there a dedicated QA centre / QA office/ senior manager responsible for QA in your institution?

Question 13. Has your institution developed a QA policy manual?

Over 72 per cent of the responding institutions reported that they are operating centralised QA systems — that is to say, they have made some centre or senior manager responsible for ensuring that the institutions’ policies, procedures, products, services and outcomes meet certain defined quality requirements.

72%
centralised QA systems

A centralised institutional QA system is generally recognised as signifying that the primary responsibility for QA lies within the institution rather than with an external body. In such an arrangement, a QA centre or senior manager is responsible for establishing the QA policies and procedures for QA in an entire institution, albeit in consultation with the internal and external

stakeholders. From time to time, this centre or senior manager audits the institution's academic and administrative policies, procedures, products and services to ensure their compliance with internal and external policies, standards and performance indicators — and, where applicable, professional or industrial requirements and international standards.

Centralising QA concentrates the expertise in QA and may be associated with resource allocation and/or reward systems to encourage best practices.

Centralising QA concentrates the expertise in QA and may be associated with resource allocation and/or reward systems to encourage best practices. Two universities operating according to this model are the Open University of Malaysia and Botswana College of Distance and Open Learning. The main governing body for QA at OUM is the Quality, Research and Innovation Council (QRIC). The Institute of Quality, Research and Innovation (IQRI) is the secretariat and main executor of all directives issued by the council. The QRIC is chaired by the president/vice-chancellor, and the director of IQRI is secretary to the council. The functions of the IQRI are to assure QA, conduct training and awareness programmes, encourage and support the continuous improvement of core processes, manage mission-critical and institutional research in flexible learning and establish an innovative culture amongst staff. In the case of BOCODOL, the Department of Research and QA has a manager and a QA specialist who are tasked with the development, implementation and monitoring of the QA activities in the institution and its regional learning centres. In Sri Lanka, it is a requirement of the Ministry of Higher Education that all universities and higher education institutions establish internal QA units.

Some institutions adopt a more decentralised model for QA, in which the policies are made and decisions and actions are taken at both senior and lower levels. Here the centre's role is that of facilitator rather than controller, encouraging and supporting the engagement of managers and staff in QA procedures. This approach shows respect for the autonomy of the various units and helps to maintain links between the institutional strategic plan, policies, governance and procedures and those of the various schools, departments, disciplines, fields of study and programmes. The University of British Columbia (UBC) provides an example of this approach. The QA policies and procedures are governed by the UBC Senate, and there are distributed groups in the faculties (such as curriculum committees) who work to put forward new programmes and review existing programmes. There are also service groups on campus that administer the Student Evaluation of Teaching and collect student performance data in support of the QA processes.

Two of the institutional QA centres responding to the survey also serve as national or regional centres for QA. In Pakistan, where assuring quality is perceived as a major problem, the Quality Assurance Agency of the Higher Education Commission (HEC) has recommended the establishment of Quality Enhancement Cells (QECs) in all universities and institutes of higher education in order to systematically improve quality in higher education. In response to this requirement, the Virtual University of Pakistan (VUP), which has been applying quality assurance and enhancement to its procedures since its inception in 2002, has established a Directorate of Quality Enhancement,¹⁰ whose functions are twofold. Within the VUP, its functions are in accordance with the requirements of the HEC (managing internal programme evaluation, self-assessment procedures, workshops and training sessions, developing a quality enhancement culture, etc.). Its functions external to the university include standardising QA toolkits

¹⁰ <http://qec.vu.edu.pk/Default.aspx>

and operating procedures, promoting public confidence in the quality of higher education, strengthening public–private partnerships to ensure quality resources and infrastructure, identifying national/international institutions/agencies with whom to collaborate in improving the quality of higher education and enhancing professional skills.

The University of South Africa has established a Quality Assurance and Promotion Directorate to enable the university to fulfil its QA obligations vis-à-vis the external QA agencies in South Africa: the Higher Education Quality Committee of the Council for Higher Education and the South African Qualifications Authority. The directorate helps prepare the university for the regular institutional quality audits conducted by the Higher Education Quality Committee and oversees the internal programme evaluations for all the academic programmes in the university in order to obtain programme accreditation. It also collaborates with similar departments in other institutions in the region, nationally and internationally, exchanging information on internal QA matters and sharing the knowledge and experience of international experts visiting South Africa.

Surprisingly, only 36 per cent of the institutions reported that they had developed QA manuals, whilst 36 per cent said that such documentation was in the course of development. In other words, half of those institutions claiming to be operating centralised QA systems were seemingly operating without a detailed written document containing (i) the required performance standards for all of the systems and procedures, (ii) performance indicators for the inputs, outputs and outcomes and (iii) specifics of the resources, competencies and actions necessary for the realisation of QA and continuous improvement. Developed collaboratively by the departments and members of staff, such manuals are critically important to attaining and verifying quality intended outcomes and developing a common understanding amongst internal and external stakeholders regarding the universities' expectations, standards, procedures and measures in their QA systems.

36%
have QA manual

36%
QA manual in progress

Recognition and Reward

Question 21. Are there any internal or external grants, funds or reward systems to encourage and support QA in ODL? If yes, please name in the comment box.

Only 25 per cent of the respondents reported that their institutions provided any internal or external grants, funds for special projects or other forms of recognition and reward to encourage QA in ODL.

In the corporate world, it is well recognised that to get the best out of people, it is important to reward them for their efforts and accomplishments. Good leaders make their employees feel important by creating working environments in which there are incentives for hard work and success. When it comes to QA in higher education, ensuring staff ownership of the concepts and practices throughout entire institutions is clearly important. Shah, Wilson and Nair (2010) suggested that one of the key ingredients in ensuring an ongoing institution-wide commitment to quality is recognising and rewarding group or individual performance. Koning (1993) stressed the importance of recognising and rewarding staff in ways that are in line with what institutions are trying to achieve and making sure that everyone is

One of the key ingredients in ensuring an ongoing institution-wide commitment to quality is recognising and rewarding group or individual performance.

recognised for exceptional work. The promise of reward motivates by sparking hope. Poorly administered, however, rewards can demotivate and cause frustration and resentment in the rest of the workforce.

Most, if not all, Australian universities have instituted teaching and development grant schemes and annual “excellence in teaching” awards to encourage and support individual or group initiatives that enhance or institute new and better approaches in teaching and learning. One of the corresponding universities in this study, the University of British Columbia, has introduced a Teaching and Learning Enhancement Fund to encourage innovation. Successful projects, particularly those involving online or blended delivery, are selected on the basis of the quality of the plans for their development, implementation and evaluation strategies and their potential impact.

Such incentives are particularly important in university systems where academics receive grants, tenure and promotion on the basis of their research, and successful researchers can buy themselves out of teaching. Staff who excel in the complex and demanding tasks in ODL, developing curriculum and courseware and supporting off-campus learners, rarely get special time release or any other form of institutional recognition for their efforts in addressing real, significant problems and advancing theory and practice. Many institutions even fail to provide them with the induction and ongoing professional training necessary for ensuring quality in their work. As Aitkin (2013) observed, such behaviours have the effect of displacing and downgrading the core purpose of the university, which is to transmit what is known to the next generation and find out more about how to do this ever more successfully. Reward and recognition can be planned (e.g., providing grants, special awards or support for conference attendance or study tours) or spontaneous (e.g., passing on positive feedback from students and other stakeholders and publicly recognising individuals and groups who are performing well, on public occasions, in university publications or through the media).

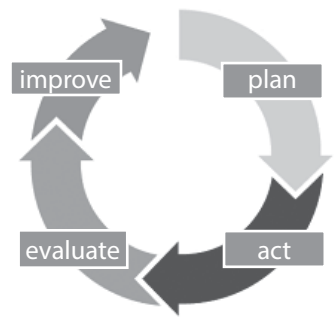
Other than granting recognition to, or approving, institutions or courses, none of the responses to this study made mention of any national rewards or recognition for institutions’ successful external or internal audits or innovations in provision. However, it is known that some governments link QA to performance funding, tying institutional funding to performance outcomes such as student retention levels, attainment of certain credits and graduation numbers. If such funding is channelled into supporting innovative projects, providing more training for staff, enrolling more disadvantaged and at-risk students and internally tracking academic standards, this approach can be helpful; but again, managing the “three other Rs” — recognition, reward and resentment — can be a delicate task because such allocations may favour the longer-established, better-resourced institutions and so be divisive.

The Quality Cycle

Question 25. Is the institutional QA system for ODL conceived of as a cyclical process aiming for continuous improvement?

Eighty-one per cent of the responding institutions reported that they conceived of their ODL QA systems as cyclical processes aiming for continuous improvement.

The adoption of the quality cycle (plan-act-evaluate-improve) within institutions' strategic planning and QA frameworks identifies weaknesses and points of difference between the expected and actual processes and outcomes as early as possible in the development process and thus prevents defects from becoming too serious or expensive to rectify. Once a defect is identified, the correction, whether it be technological, pedagogical or organisational, undergoes its own QA cycle, starting as soon as it is identified and ending when it is proven to have been resolved.



Quality Culture

Question 26. Is the institutional QA system for ODL designed to foster and promote a quality culture?

Eighty-one per cent of the respondents characterised their institutional QA systems for ODL as designed to foster a quality culture. This is very important because the philosophy and practice of the quality cycle and its integration with universities' strategic planning play a key role in promoting staff members' awareness of and commitment to the core values and practices of their institutions, and their engagement in the evidence-based decision making and continuous improvement that will collectively contribute to the success of all operations. In such settings, QA is not seen as an externally imposed requirement or a chore but a frame of mind and something which is second nature to all managers and staff.

eLearning

Question 14. Does your national or institutional QA framework have distinct standards, measures and performance indicators for eLearning?

28%
specific standards
for eLearning

Only 28 per cent of the respondents reported that their national or institutional frameworks featured specific standards, measures and performance indicators for eLearning. This resonates with the finding of the International Council for Open and Distance Education (ICDE) that eLearning quality assessment is not a regular or integral feature in many national quality reviews. The ICDE recommends that measures for judging the quality of eLearning should be mainstreamed into QA, but rather than trying to develop different criteria for all of the possible applications of eLearning in ODL, a generic QA system should be developed; this should comprise a common set of criteria that are applicable to all forms of online and open learning, augmented with modules for each mode of learning that feature criteria specific to that mode (Ossiannilsson et al., 2015).

Only 28 per cent of the respondents reported that their national or institutional frameworks featured specific standards, measures and performance indicators for eLearning.

ICTs are an integral part of ODL, being applied to providing career and study guidance, enrolment processes, teaching and learning, and assessment and certification. The range of technologies used in ODL is ever-growing, ranging from the Internet, computers, tablets and mobile devices to virtual and augmented reality and 3D printing. The pedagogical applications of these ICTs may differ significantly from the traditional modes of teaching and learning. Ehlers (2012) maintained that when knowledge and understanding are actually being created online by students, and they are using e-portfolios to assemble their ideas and reflect upon their own

learning capacities and strategies, these represent such fundamental changes in the nature of teaching and learning that different questions need to be asked, different objects and processes need to be evaluated, and different quality criteria need to be applied. Nichols (2002) argued that in QA it is now necessary to assess the quality of the presentation, assessment, communication and management tools of learning management systems (LMSs), information repositories (the sites containing electronic documents such as course outlines, handouts and PowerPoint slides), one-way online communications systems (e.g., posting notices to students using email or webpages), two-way online communications (e.g., students communicating and sharing files with

teachers, tutors and one another individually or in groups through social media), and online tests, assignments and assessments. Uvalić-Trumbić and Daniel (2014) have seen the need to assess the potential of what they call “post-traditional higher education,” with its various dimensions of openness, and the creation, adoption, adaptation and analytics of OER and MOOCs.

To identify its goals in eLearning and its progress towards these, the University of the Southern Caribbean reported that it has based its QA framework on interrelated building blocks in the Sloan-C (now renamed the Online Learning Consortium)¹¹ Five Pillars of Quality Online Education. These are: learning effectiveness, student satisfaction, faculty satisfaction, cost-effectiveness and access (Lorenzo & Moore, 2002).

Bates (2010) was surprised by how often it is suggested that there are no quality standards for eLearning. As shown in Appendix V of this report, there are in fact some very useful systems and tools for judging quality in online and blended learning, which could be drawn upon to develop some overarching frameworks, as suggested by Ossiannilsson et al. (2015).

Inputs- and Outcomes-based QA

Question 15. Does your national or institutional QA framework judge quality in ODL in terms of inputs?

Question 16. Does your national or institutional QA framework judge quality in ODL in terms of outputs / outcomes / impacts?

Asked whether their national or institutional QA frameworks judged quality in ODL in terms of inputs or outputs, outcomes and impacts, 58 per cent of the respondents judged the frameworks to be inputs-based and 67 per cent outputs-based, indicating a mixture of both means. One university reporting that its QA framework includes outcomes-based measures was the Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL). Its QA framework contains such criteria as progression of learning, graduation rates, staff and student research and tracer studies of OUSL graduates, the last being managed by the OUSL Centre for Educational Technology and Media (CETMe).

Traditionally, national and institutional QA systems have focused on judging the quality of the inputs. Here the measures concern such matters as management, staffing, resourcing, curriculum, courses and courseware, teaching and learning, student and staff support, assessment, evaluation and internal QA systems, technology infrastructure, and other legal and regulatory requirements. The assumption in this approach to QA is that the higher the standard of the inputs, the higher the quality of the outputs. However, this does not necessarily follow.

¹¹ <http://onlinelearningconsortium.org>



Nowadays, there is increasing focus on outcomes-based QA. Here the aim is to ensure the products, processes and services satisfy, and even exceed, the expectations of all of the stakeholders. So in the ODL context, QA needs to focus on how standards of achievement are established and how rigorous these standards are, how student achievement is assessed and therefore certified, and how well students actually perform against the required standards. The use of such learning outcomes is reflected in the European Quality Assurance Standards and Guidelines (ESG), which, like the Bologna reforms in general, reflect a shift towards student and stakeholder interests and away from the input or supply perspective that previously dominated QA in higher education (Adamson et al., 2010).

Given the need to justify the new methods and uses of technology, raise the status of ODL and compete for funding from public, private and student sources, more encouragement and support are needed to ensure greater use of the outcomes-based approach to QA. There is a considerable degree of rhetoric in the literature of ODL, and many of the claims still need to be justified. There are also many questions still to be answered. For example, what forms and degrees of openness in terms of time of study, entry for non-traditional students, etc., and what degrees of flexibility in terms of pace and place work best? How scalable are some of the new methods being used? How student-centred or individualised are the learning experiences, and how much more learner-centred and individualised do they need to be? In what ways are the uses of technology and new methods of ODL more effective than conventional higher education? To what degree are these new approaches transforming higher education? In what ways are they opening up new learning pathways and to what effect? To what extent are they revealing new business models or attracting new clients, advocates and champions? In what ways can they be shown to be more efficient or cost-effective? How well are the qualifications being received by employers? In what ways do ODL methods change governance systems? And so on.

Given the need to justify the new methods and uses of technology, raise the status of ODL and compete for funding from public, private and student sources, more encouragement and support are needed to ensure greater use of the outcomes-based approach to QA.

Such questions can really only be asked and answered by those who are pioneering the various forms of ODL, since they are without precedent. So, there is great need for more research, evaluation and collection of macro-level data on access, equity, ODL systems and institutions, cross-border provision and cross-cultural issues, to help like-minded institutions advance the cause of ODL and prove their worth.

Much of the work of the Commonwealth ODL universities, particularly in the developing countries, is concerned with achieving greater access and equity and improving socio-economic circumstances and welfare in communities. It is therefore reasonable to expect that these institutions will be able to demonstrate tangible results in these regards to governments, international aid agencies, public and private donors and the local communities themselves. However, when it comes to entry and acceptance, many ODL students are mature in age, have followed different pathways to university study, have diverse educational needs and are generally less well prepared for their studies than those entering conventional universities. In many cases, they will also be more numerous. Consequently, many of the inputs are different from those in conventional higher education. But the ODL providers will still be judged by the quality of the outputs and outcomes. Hence, value-added measures are needed to allow fairer comparisons between conventional and ODL institutions, with their different student intakes.

These need to apply to the *immediate* outputs (the learners' retention, progression and satisfaction levels, graduation and employment rates, etc.), the *medium-term* outcomes (improvements in the status of the institutions, programmes and graduates, increased enrolments, improved funding, etc.) and the *longer-term* impacts (the influence of the institutions and their methods on other providers, evidence of social and economic benefits attributable to the institutions, creation of new educational paradigms and systems, etc.). Such outcomes- or results-based monitoring and evaluation can be powerful tools to help policy makers and providers track progress, demonstrate the true value of the institutions and ensure high status for ODL (Kusek & Rist, 2004).

External and Internal Auditing

Question 17. Is the university's ODL provision subject to internal audits to assess conformance with internal and/or external standards? If so, explain in the comment who does the internal audits and how often.

Question 18. Is the university's provision in ODL subject to external audits to assess conformance with external standards? If yes, explain in the comment who does the external audits and how often.

Question 19. Do the external audits involve visits to your institution by external audit personnel?

With governments calling for improved management practices and quality standards in operations and better use of resources, higher education institutions are increasingly being subject to quality audits and conformance with requirements, frameworks and standards determined by national or other external agencies.

Traditionally, the university world has operated on the basis of self-regulation, enjoying a high degree of autonomy and largely depending upon internal QA. Internal QA may be far more valuable to institutions than external QA. Internal QA consists of ongoing monitoring and periodic self-checks that over time reveal conformance or non-conformance with internal and external standards. It prevents complacency and generates fresh or different ideas. And if it is regularly conducted within a planning cycle and linked to an institutional strategic plan, then external assessment can be less frequent and lighter in touch. Reichert (2008) observed that for internal QA to be truly effective, there must be a strong commitment, belief in its benefits, a willingness to expose weaknesses and improve performance, and the leadership, resources and capacity to support change and improvement.

However, with governments calling for improved management practices and quality standards in operations and better use of resources, higher education institutions are increasingly being subject to quality audits and conformance with requirements, frameworks and standards determined by national or other external agencies. Such external QA is periodic and conducted by independent experts in the field on behalf of national or other authorities; it is also often concerned with assessing the effectiveness of the universities' internal QA processes, thus acknowledging the need for autonomy and responsibility for QA within the institutions themselves.

Some countries employ standardised national performance indicators against which to audit institutions. Others use performance indicators based upon the universities' own missions and goals that have been developed and are measured at the institutional level. Prior to the external

auditors' visits, institutions are required to prepare performance portfolios, conduct self-reviews and address any areas calling for improvement. The auditors then verify the claims made for, and consistency and due diligence shown in, the quality of the policies, procedures, products and services by interviewing managers and staff, students and alumni.

67%

ODL externally audited

Not all QA agencies make audits compulsory for all higher education institutions in their countries. Sixty-seven per cent of the responding institutions reported that their ODL provision was externally audited. The frequency of the external audits ranged from every one to two years to every five to seven years.

One of the responding universities, OUSL, experienced a number of external reviews over the years. Not only has it been reviewed by the QAA Council of the Sri Lankan University Grants Commission, but it was audited in line with the QA framework of the Asian Development Bank-funded Distance Education Modernisation Project (DEMP)¹² and assessed by a team of COL RIM evaluators.

Judging the quality of ODL development and delivery may require different methods from on-campus audits. Online inspections may be a better, less location-dependent and cheaper means of assessing the quality of courses and courseware and obtaining off-campus students' views on the technologies and methods used than on-site visits.

Student Participation in QA

Question 20. Are the students involved in the QA audits (e.g., providing feedback on their perceptions of quality in ODL and satisfaction levels)?

Sixty-seven per cent of the responding institutions reported that their students were involved in their QA audits, providing feedback on their satisfaction with programmes of study, tutors and administrative support. Some indicated that in light of the student feedback, they were able to implement corrective actions on an annual or even a semester basis. A few institutions said that they conducted tracer studies on a regular basis. None reported student representatives participating in internal or external evaluation teams.

67%

students involved in QA audits

The increased focus on learning outcomes, as in the European Quality Assurance Standards and Guidelines (ESG), is leading to students having greater participation, not only by completing surveys but by being consulted on standards, procedures and guidelines (as was the European Students' Union in the case of the development of the ESG) and serving as members of external review teams (Adamson et al., 2010). As Jung (2012) observed, the QA criteria developed for ODL tend to reflect the perspectives and interests of governments, funding bodies, external assessors and academics. These may not coincide with the distance and online learners' views on what constitutes quality in ODL and may fail to take cognisance of the students' actual needs. As Jung additionally noted, there can also be gender and cultural differences in learners' perceptions of quality in ODL. These are important matters for consideration, especially in ODL, where so much emphasis is placed on the co-construction of knowledge, understanding and relationships by the teachers and learners.

¹² <http://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/evaluation-document/36186/files/pvr-277.pdf>

In many cases, there is socio-cultural incongruence between the low socio-economic status and backgrounds of the learners and the high socio-economic institutions in which they study.

Whilst some might question whether students have the critical ability to participate in QA, given that many are disinclined to engage in online discussions and seem reluctant to express personal viewpoints, Rolfe (2015) has stressed the importance of teachers gaining a thorough understanding of the views of the students, whether they be on campus or at a distance. In many cases, there is socio-cultural incongruence between the low socio-economic status and backgrounds of the learners and the high socio-economic institutions in which they study. The providers may know little about the off-campus learners they teach: their motivations for study, their knowledge, skills and digital literacies, and whether they judge quality in the courses in terms of currency and authenticity of content, relevance to their lives and aspirations, or convenience and ease of use.

Some may also cast doubts upon the value and accuracy of students' self-assessments of their ODL experiences, so it is important to correlate these findings with the short-, medium- and long-term educational outcomes.

Cross-border Accreditation and Certification

Question 22. Are any of your institution's ODL courses/programmes accredited in other countries?

Thirteen of the respondents stated that their institutions' ODL courses or programmes were accredited in other countries.

The study revealed a variety of cases of cross-border ODL provision and accreditation. The University of the West Indies School of Business and Applied Studies (trading as ROYTEC) is a private company whose campus is in Port of Spain and external operations are managed by the UWI at St. Augustine. It offers bachelor programmes in primary teacher education and business administration and a Master of Education in a blended learning mode, in partnership with the University of New Brunswick, in Canada, which is accredited by the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission. The approval for these programmes was granted by the Accreditation Council of Trinidad and Tobago.

The University of British Columbia is offering an innovative online, coursework-only Master of Education in Adult Learning and Global Change in collaboration with partner universities in South Africa (University of the Western Cape), Sweden (Linköping University) and Australia (Australian Catholic University), and this course is accredited in multiple countries.

All the programmes of study at the Open University of Cyprus (OUC) are accredited in Greece by the National Academic Recognition Information Centre (NARIC),¹³ an organisation supervised by the Hellenic Ministry of Education. NARIC is responsible for the recognition of university or technological degrees that are awarded by foreign higher education institutions, the provision of information about educational systems and the accreditation of institutions in Greece and abroad. However, as a public university, OUC's programmes are also recognised within the EU, and efforts are now being made to ensure the accreditation of its ODL programmes in other countries, especially in the Middle East.

¹³ <http://www.doatap.gr/gr>

Open University Malaysia has expanded its online and blended learning delivery to the Middle East, Europe, Asia and Africa and currently has accreditation in 12 countries.

Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) is another university that is extending its outreach far beyond the borders of the country. IGNOU is currently offering academic programmes in 35 countries across the globe through 62 partner institutions, including in the United Arab Emirates (Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah and Ras Al Khaimah), Qatar, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Oman, Mauritius, Singapore, Papua New Guinea, Seychelles, Ethiopia, Kenya, Ivory Coast, Nepal, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Mongolia and Kyrgyzstan.

Different accreditation systems apply in the case of the two regional universities — the UWI, serving 17 Caribbean nations, and the University of the South Pacific (USP), which is owned by the governments of 12 South Pacific countries. In the case of UWI, its three campuses and the UWI Open Campus¹⁴ are accredited by the national accreditation agencies of Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados and Jamaica. By contrast, USP, which has major campuses in Fiji, Samoa and Vanuatu, and 12 smaller regional campuses, and about half of whose 20,000 students choose to study through ODL, is a self-accrediting institution with the power to design and award its own degrees (Chandra, Thurab-Nkhosi, & Marshall, 2012).

As Parker (2012) explained, in Canada, with its ten provinces and three territories, degree-granting authority within one province does not necessarily permit operations in another province. In the USA, there are a number of accrediting organisations that are recognised by the Department of Education as “reliable authorities” but no national QA or accreditation agency. Consequently, negotiating cross-border ODL between Canada and the USA can be a complicated and time-consuming process. At the time of writing, Thompson Rivers University, in Kamloops, British Columbia, was seeking to enrol U.S. distance students. To do this, it required institutional accreditation with the Washington-based Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU), one of the six regional organisations recognised by the U.S. Department of Education and Council for Higher Education Accreditation. Thompson Rivers University had “Applicant status” with the NWCCU and had recently completed a detailed self-evaluation demonstrating how its policies, procedures and practices related to the five standards prescribed by the NWCCU. It was planning to submit its final self-evaluation report in winter 2015/2016 and host an on-site peer evaluation in spring 2016.

The growth in cross-border higher education over the last two decades is due partly to the increased mobility of students, academic staff and institutions and partly to the adoption of ODL methods and technologies. Whilst cross-border ODL offers new educational and developmental opportunities for students, institutions and entire societies, the use of these new modes also raises concerns about quality, reliability, recognition and safeguarding against low-quality services.

The *Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-border Higher Education* (UNESCO & OECD, 2005) have been designed to propose tools and a synthesis of best practices that can assist governments, higher education institutions/providers (including academic staff and student bodies), quality

Whilst cross-border ODL offers new educational and developmental opportunities for students, institutions and entire societies, the use of these new modes also raises concerns about quality, reliability, recognition and safeguarding against low-quality services.

¹⁴ <http://www.open.uwi.edu>

assurance and accreditation bodies, academic recognition bodies and professional bodies in member states assess the quality and relevance of higher education provided across borders, and protect students and other stakeholders in higher education from low-quality higher education provision. Whilst these are only guidelines and not binding, their endorsement by these two major international organisations, representing more than 190 countries, gives them significant force.

It may not always be easy for countries, especially developing countries, to muster the human and financial resources to develop such tools and protocols on their own. This is why UNESCO Bangkok and the Asia-Pacific Quality Network (UNESCO & APQN, 2006) have developed a toolkit on regulating the quality of cross-border education, to support the implementation of the UNESCO–OECD guidelines and act as a guide for the Asia-Pacific countries. This toolkit has separate sections on regulatory frameworks for receiver and provider countries.

COL has developed a Transnational Qualifications Framework (TQF) for use by the 32 countries of the Commonwealth¹⁵ who are collaborating in the Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC).¹⁶ VUSSC is not a tertiary institution. It is a network of small countries committed to the collaborative development of free content resources for use in post-secondary, skills-related courses in areas such as tourism, entrepreneurship, disaster management, life skills, use of ICTs, and small fisheries management. The materials produced by VUSSC are non-proprietary and readily adaptable for use in specific country contexts. VUSSC is also a forum for institutions to build capacity and expertise in eLearning. The TQF, whose creation was recommended by the education ministers of the countries involved in the VUSSC initiative and involved the various national QA agencies, is a freely available resource designed to support the classification of VUSSC qualifications and facilitate credit transfer and common accreditation mechanisms between the participating countries. In 2015, the TQF Management Committee completed the review of VUSSC, approved the registration of six of its programmes and released an updated TQF.¹⁷

Perceived Benefits, Outcomes, Constraints and Challenges in QA

Question 27. What are seen to be the main benefits, outcomes and impact of your QA system for ODL?

Question 28. What are seen to be the main constraints and challenges in your QA system for ODL?

Reichert (2008) argued that quality evaluations at the institutional level can be an excellent means of sharpening strategic reflection and that they bring benefits to universities, faculties, departments, schools and programmes. Mills and Fage (1999) observed that QA can have benefits for institutional management — for example, by helping senior personnel to encourage change, development and healthy competition between departments and institutions. But there can also be negative aspects. For example, QA can be extremely time-consuming and contentious and involve huge amounts of paperwork.

¹⁵ Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Belize, Botswana, Brunei Darussalam, Cyprus, Dominica, Fiji, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Kiribati, Lesotho, Maldives, Malta, Mauritius, Namibia, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Solomon Islands, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Swaziland, The Bahamas, The Gambia, Tonga, Trinidad and Tobago, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.

¹⁶ <http://www.vussc.info>

¹⁷ <http://oasis.col.org/handle/11599/501>

To obtain the respondents' views on these matters, the final two questions in the survey were open-ended. One question solicited views on the benefits and outcomes of QA, the other on the constraints and challenges in QA. The respondents were generous in expressing their views.

Many of the answers to Question 27, "What are seen to be the main benefits, outcomes and impact of your institutional QA system for ODL?" referred to the students, with comments such as that QA "benefits the learners," "improves . . . processes to meet diverse students' needs," "produces satisfied graduates" and "[enables] the smooth transfer of credits for students from one institution to another."

Other respondents expressed the view that the use of QA helped to raise the status of ODL, offering such comments as "[it] narrows the difference between conventional teaching, learning and ODL," it provides "social recognition for distance education students within the community" and "it is only through quality that we will be able to have a competitive advantage."

Others observed that QA is "benefitting the curriculum," "improving the delivery system," "legitimatising ODL in academic minds," "helping to ensure a strong alignment between on-campus and ODL provision," "using stakeholder feedback, triangulation and review of standards to keep abreast with the changing modes of delivery," "enabling people to stay up to date with developments in their fields" and "conforming to international quality standards."

Other beneficial outcomes from QA were described as "promoting a quality culture," "auditing and validation which is more transparent and impacts on self-improvement" and "optimum utilisation of public funds for education."

However, the larger number of responses was to Question 28, "What are seen to be the main constraints and challenges in your QA system for ODL?" These suggested that the achievement of quality is constrained not only by insufficient resources and staffing but, in some cases, by lack of clarity and direction in national and institutional policies, and the problem of changing the attitudes of staff — which is essential for achieving a quality culture.

Major problems highlighted were coping with "the large number of students who due to various constraints are not able to study in a conventional system of education," "orienting students from conventional to ODL mode" and "providing learning support to a distributed student population."

Another major issue is, as one respondent put it, "getting people to recognise that good ODL is not cheap." Many respondents voiced their concerns about "lack of funding, resources, time and buy-in," "lack of availability of human resources with capacity in QA and ODL" and "lack of continuous training for instruction and learner support."

Concerns were also expressed over the lack of incentives for "changing the mindset of staff" and "entrenching a culture of quality." One respondent wrote, "Innovation is acknowledged, but not given due recognition," whilst another observed, "With the new eLearning policy, there are issues related to remuneration and class sizes for quality recognition and delivery. There needs to be a university policy for encouraging lecturers to go online which is also considered for promotion."

The achievement of quality is constrained not only by insufficient resources and staffing but, in some cases, by lack of clarity and direction in national and institutional policies, and the problem of changing the attitudes of staff — which is essential for achieving a quality culture.

Other responses, such as “the QA system is focused on conventional teaching and learning” and “there is a need to develop a strong and working QA for ODL programmes,” indicate that there is still need for support at the national and institutional levels, where QA and ODL have yet to receive due recognition. There were a number of comments along the lines of “the government must do the control, visiting the institutions in order to help them and benefit the institutions, the courses and the students,” “our model of delivery is unique and therefore traditional measures do not necessarily apply” and “ODL is still a new phenomenon and still under development even by the national frameworks.”

There was also some dissatisfaction with the institutions’ lack of support for QA, with references to the absence of appropriate policy/frameworks and inadequate knowledge and goodwill in the institutional leaders. One response read, “[QA] needs personnel trained to monitor and evaluate the eLearn[ing] standards from the administrative and faculty levels, support from the highest levels of the institution’s governance and administration, greater funding and buy-in from larger numbers of faculty.” Another commented:

[The university] has not developed a lot of online programmes, so it can be a challenge to ensure that online courses are strategically considered in relation to new programmes. While we can leverage existing QA processes such as Senate approval/review processes, there is a lot of diversity in the groups who develop ODL materials/programmes. Without an institution-level articulation of a QA framework for ODL, it is difficult to define a standard that all groups must meet.

Yet another observed:

With the experience of COL RIM [the university QA committee] has set out goals and action plans under the different themes and is implementing these action plans, aiming at continuous improvement in all operational activities. However, the implementation of such activities has faced many difficulties due to staff shortages, and financial resources in some areas.

Use of COL and Other Sources in QA

Question 24. Has your institution used any external guidelines for developing the QA system for ODL (e.g., the Commonwealth of Learning Review and Improvement Model [COL RIM] or the ICDE Quality Assurance Toolkit)?

Ever since its establishment, COL has been concerned with helping to formulate QA policies at the national and institutional levels in regard to ODL. In particular, it has sought to encourage a quality culture in institutions whereby there is common ownership of the internal quality systems, continuous capacity building in QA and accountability to stakeholders.

Amongst the many initiatives undertaken by COL has been the development of the Review and Improvement Model (COL RIM).¹⁸ Clarke-Okah and Gatsha (2014) and Plimmer, Clarke-Okah, Donovan and Russell (2012) describe how this simple “do-it-yourself,” five-step process provides a credible, self-administered, cost-effective approach for institutions needing to assess their practices as a first step towards external accreditation or as an ongoing process of self-improvement. COL RIM can be employed by any institution, using its own staff rather than

¹⁸ http://oasis.col.org/bitstream/handle/11599/602/COL-RIM_Handbook_2014.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

involving a panel of external experts. The COL RIM handbook was revised in 2014, and COL provides assistance to any ODL providers embarking on this process.

Another free online tool developed by COL to support capacity building in QA in ODL is the COL–UNESCO Quality Assurance Toolkit (Clarke-Okah & Coomaraswamy, 2009).¹⁹ This toolkit was originally developed by the Sri Lankan Distance Education Modernisation Project (DEMP) in collaboration with COL, with a wide range of inputs from OUSL, other partner institutions of DEMP and international consultants drawn from Australia, Canada, Hong Kong, India and South Africa. The performance indicators were initially developed for use in Sri Lanka but were subsequently amended to enable the toolkit to be used internationally. All Sri Lankan universities engaging in ODL are required to use this QA toolkit. It lists the ten “key areas” or “criteria” which reflect the salient features of a distance higher education system and the six “key areas” or “criteria” which identify the essential elements in offering distance higher education programmes. It also includes case studies of successful QA practice.

COL has also long maintained a Quality Assurance Micro-site,²⁰ a convenient access point for a range of useful resources concerning QA in ODL for institutions, researchers and governments seeking to establish benchmarks for quality provision or otherwise interested in devising effective systems for the review and evaluation of ODL.

In view of all these efforts by COL to provide support for QA in ODL, it was encouraging to find that 53 per cent of the responding institutions reported that in developing their QA systems, they had referred to COL RIM, the Quality Assurance Toolkit and the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA), which was established by COL; CEMCA’s mission is to assist governments and institutions in the Asian region to expand the scale, efficiency and quality of learning by using multiple media in ODL. Other respondents acknowledged support in QA through the International Council for Distance Education (ICDE), which is supported by the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, has consultative partner status with UNESCO and is an affiliate member of the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organisation.

Other guides and codes of practice which can inform and assist institutions in planning and operating QA systems for ODL include: ACODE (2014); Barefoot et al. (2011); INQAAHE (2007); Jung and Latchem (2012); Koul and Kanwar (2006); and Uvalić-Trumbić and Daniel (2014).

Fifty-three per cent of the responding institutions reported that in developing their QA systems, they had referred to COL’s Review and Improvement Model, the Quality Assurance Toolkit and the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia.

¹⁹ http://oasis.col.org/bitstream/handle/11599/105/pub_HE_QA_Toolkit_web.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

²⁰ <https://www.col.org/programmes/higher-education/quality-assurance-higher-education>

PART IV

Conclusions and Recommendations

Summary of the Findings

Whilst the majority of Commonwealth countries have national QA and accreditation agencies and/or frameworks in place, there remain countries where such systems are as yet in development or are simply interim measures. This suggests that some governments and agencies still need encouragement and support. And universities need considerable notice when new standards frameworks are being introduced, so these findings indicate that some institutions in some countries are unlikely to be conforming to national QA and accreditation systems and/or registration/re-registration requirements for some years.

67%

all higher education institutions conform to national QA standards

Sixty-seven per cent of the respondents indicated that all of the higher education institutions in their countries, regardless of whether these were open, distance, conventional, public, private or overseas providers, had to conform to the national QA standards. Three of the responding institutions had ISO certification, and one was in the course of applying for this.

53%

the same QA standards, measures and performance indicators apply

Fifty-three per cent of the respondents reported that the same QA standards, measures and performance indicators applied in the national QA frameworks, regardless of mode of delivery. Only 22 per cent of the respondents indicated that their national QA frameworks referred specifically to ODL.

28%

national QA agencies had established standards, measures or performance indicators for ensuring quality in and accrediting overseas ODL courses

Cross-border distance and online higher education is growing, and it is clearly important to ensure quality in course provision and qualifications. However, only 28 per cent of the respondents reported that their national QA agencies had established standards, measures or performance indicators for ensuring quality in and accrediting the ODL courses or programmes of public or private overseas providers.

Fifty per cent of the respondents reported that their institutional QA frameworks were based on the national QA frameworks, and 14 per cent said that they were partially based on these. Eighty-one per cent confirmed that their institutional QA frameworks were linked to their strategic plans.

22%

national QA frameworks refer specifically to ODL

81%

institutional QA frameworks linked to strategic plans

Eighty-three per cent of the institutions indicated that they were permitted to set their own policies in regard to the standards of their ODL awards and programmes. However, only 39 per cent of the institutions said that their national or institutional QA frameworks specifically referred to ODL, and half of the institutions reported that they used the same standards, measures and performance indicators for face-to-face teaching and learning and ODL.

Only 28 per cent of the respondents stated that their national or institutional frameworks featured specific standards, measures and performance indicators for eLearning.

28%

national or institutional frameworks featured specific standards, measures and performance indicators for eLearning

Thirteen of the universities reported that their ODL courses and programmes were accredited in other countries.

Seventy-two per cent of the universities reported that they had established QA centres or appointed QA officers with overall responsible for QA. Thirty-six per cent of these institutions stated that they had developed QA guidance manuals, and 36 per cent reported that they were in the process of developing these.

Fifty-eight per cent of the respondents stated that their national and institutional QA frameworks judged quality in terms of inputs, whilst 67 per cent said that they focused on outcomes.

Seventy-four per cent of the respondents reported that their institutions' ODL provision was internally audited to assess conformance with internal and/or external standards.

Sixty-seven per cent said that their ODL provision was subject to external review, which in 61 per cent of the cases involved visits to their institutions by external auditors.

Sixty-seven per cent indicated that the students were involved in the QA audits, insofar as they were invited to provide feedback on their courses, perceptions of the quality of ODL provision and satisfaction levels.

Eighty-one per cent of the respondents described the QA system in their institution as a cyclical process, and 81 per cent said that the process was designed to foster and promote a quality culture.

Only 25 per cent of the respondents reported that there were any internal or external grants, funds for special projects or other forms of recognition and reward to encourage QA in ODL.

Fifty-two per cent of the institutions had referred to external guidelines in developing their QA systems for ODL, including COL RIM and the COL QA Toolkit.

A number of those surveyed accepted that QA benefits students as well as administrative, teaching and learning systems, ensures stakeholder satisfaction, increases the status of and demand for ODL, helps to gain competitive advantage, legitimises ODL in the minds of academics and assures optimal utilisation of public funds for education.

However, many of the respondents expressed concerns about matters that were preventing the achievement of quality in ODL provision. These included a lack of time release, limited funding, staff shortages, limited numbers of staff well-versed in ODL and QA, a lack of professional development and the absence of reward and recognition systems. These challenges were probably predictable, as higher education is under considerable pressure around the globe and many of the responses were from institutions in low- or middle-income countries.

There were also observations which raise questions about the quality of the QA itself. There were some criticisms regarding a lack of national policy, frameworks and directions for implementing QA, a lack of assistance from external review agencies and a lack of funding to address the shortcomings identified in institutional and subject reviews. Other respondents

72%
established QA centres or appointed QA officers

67%
students were involved in QA audits

25%
internal or external grants, funds for special projects or other forms of recognition and reward to encourage QA in ODL

52%
referred to external guidelines in developing QA systems for ODL

referred to the need for clearer QA frameworks at the institutional level and more support from senior managers in order to gain commitment to a quality culture in larger numbers of faculty.

Discussion

The findings from this survey indicate that the general concepts, conventional practices and recognition of the importance of QA in ODL and the strategic value of QA at both national and institutional levels are broadly accepted. However, they also show that there are countries and institutions where progress has been slower than might have been expected, plus there are still major differences in the extent, nature and rigour of QA in ODL and debate over the criteria and measures to be applied to the various forms of ODL.

In some cases, there may be compliance with QA but complacency over standards. There are also indications that QA is not keeping up with the need to ensure quality in the newer forms of eLearning and in the creation, adoption, adaptation and analytics of OER and MOOCs.

Another dimension to QA which is not mentioned in the literature is the nature and quality of the informal and non-formal study opportunities and open learning pathways offered by the providers of MOOCs, and through such systems as the Open University's OpenLearn and FutureLearn, and Open Universities Australia's Open2Study, which offer free online learning opportunities that may include articulation agreements for formal study.

Australia's La Trobe University has recently developed a new "QED ranking" (from the Latin *quod erat demonstrandum*, "which had to be proven") that takes in measures of equity and diversity to give what it believes is a truer measure of how well rounded an institution is. Long and Harvey (2015) argued that the traditional measures of quality in higher education are very narrow and that the interaction between quality, equity and diversity in a period of growth and widening access is pivotal in any assessment of the relevance of university education. For equity, they use the participation rates of students from regional, indigenous or poor backgrounds and those with a disability; for teaching and learning, student retention and success; and for diversity, the indicators concern the proportion of international students, those from non-English speaking backgrounds, gender balance amongst students and the proportion of female senior academics. The traditional impact metrics still apply for research, and this could include the scholarship of learning and teaching.

If ODL providers can evidence quality in these four domains, and if, as Long and Harvey (2015) have suggested, the metrics are kept simple and transparent, it should be possible for providers to prove that the standards achieved in applying the new methods and technologies in ODL are comparable or even superior to those of the conventional higher education institutions. The competition for funds and status in higher education currently skews assessment, recognition and reward systems towards research rather than teaching and learning and the all-important social dimensions of university provision. To counter this and assure that provision meets the needs of the 21st century, ODL providers could thus become leaders in demonstrating how universities should be assessed in terms of how well they are serving their societies' diverse needs and expectations.

These findings suggest that there is still considerable need for support, guidance and regional and international co-operation in ensuring and demonstrating the quality and standards of

the various forms of ODL institutions and their delivery systems. Diversity in the structure and organisation of these institutions within the different cultural settings and jurisdictions, and different degrees of preparedness for QA and ODL, will warrant different approaches to encouraging and improving systems and procedures.

QA in ODL requires far more than lip service and assumptions that everything will go as expected. To honour the trust that students place in ODL systems and the value of their qualifications, to assure governments, funding agencies and other stakeholders that ODL is deserving of resources and support, and to ensure that ODL institutions remain competitive, everyone involved in ODL needs to ensure that it performs as well as possible through thorough, extensive and continuous monitoring. QA is time-consuming and demanding, but ultimately, it brings many benefits to institutions, faculties, departments, staff and students, and it enhances the adoption and reputation of ODL.

There is still considerable need for support, guidance and regional and international co-operation in ensuring and demonstrating the quality and standards of the various forms of ODL institutions and their delivery systems.

Recommendations

Governments and national QA and accreditation agencies should:

1. Ensure that their QA and accreditation systems contain distinct standards, measures or performance indicators for assuring quality in and accrediting the ODL courses and programmes in all higher education institutions within their national jurisdictions, whether public or private.
2. Ensure that national QA frameworks contain distinct standards, measures or performance indicators for assuring quality in and accrediting the ODL courses and programmes of overseas providers.
3. Allow for a degree of institutional autonomy by co-developing QA frameworks for ODL with the higher education community. These frameworks should set out the requirements that all providers are expected to meet and upon which they can draw to develop internal QA systems for their programmes and awards, according to their particular goals and circumstances; these systems can then be audited for their effectiveness.
4. Judge the quality of ODL and eLearning by the same generic measures as are used for conventional teaching and learning but augment these with criteria and measures appropriate to the various modes and methods of delivery.
5. Ensure that the QA and accreditation systems take due account of all of the newer forms of eLearning, including the use of OER, MOOCs, and systems for providing open informal and non-formal education and access to pathways to formal study.
6. Judge quality in ODL provision on the basis of access, equity and diversity, as well as the traditional measures for teaching, learning and research.
7. Assess quality in ODL provision by measuring not only the inputs but also the outputs, outcomes and impact.
8. Encourage and support student representation in all aspects of developing and applying QA.
9. Provide competitive funding and other incentives to encourage high-performing and innovative applications of ODL and QA in institutions and programmes.

Higher education institutions should:

1. Establish, maintain and update rigorous QA frameworks and benchmarking systems to assure quality in all forms of ODL and ensure accountability to their students and other stakeholders, as well as continuous improvement in all of their operations.
2. Establish QA centres or senior managers responsible for QA and benchmarking activities, in accord with Recommendations 2–9 above.

References

- ACODE. (2014). *Benchmarks for technology enhanced learning*. Canberra, Australia: Author. Retrieved from http://www.acode.edu.au/pluginfile.php/579/mod_resource/content/3/TEL_Benchmarks.pdf
- Adamson, L., Becerro, M., Cullen, P., González-Vega, L., Sobrino, J. J., & Ryan, N. (2010). *Quality assurance and learning outcomes*. ENQA Workshop report 17. Helsinki, Finland: European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education. Retrieved from <http://www.enqa.eu/indirme/papers-and-reports/workshop-and-seminar/WSR%2017%20-%20Final.pdf>
- Aitken, D. (2013, April 17). Teaching versus research: The great dilemma for universities [Blog post]. Retrieved from <http://donaitkin.com/teaching-versus-research-the-great-dilemma-for-universities/>
- Barefoot, H., Gamble, M., O'Hare, D., Kuit, J., Mellar, H., Newland, B., Papaefthimiou, M., Oliver, M., & Webb, E. (2011). *A toolkit for harnessing quality assurance processes for technology enhanced learning*. QA-QE Special Interest Group. Retrieved from http://qaqe-sig.net/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/Toolkit_version_2011_9_3.pdf
- Bates, T. (2010, August 15). E-learning quality assurance standards, organizations and research [Blog post]. Retrieved from <http://www.tonybates.ca/2010/08/15/e-learning-quality-assurance-standards-organizations-and-research/#sthash.PhW3DzXW.dpuf>
- Brennan, J. L. (1998). *Quality assurance in higher education: A legislative review and needs analysis of developments in Central and Eastern Europe*. London, UK: European Training Foundation/Quality Support Centre.
- Chandra, R., Thurab-Nkhosi, D., & Marshall, S. (2012). Quality assurance in regional dual-mode universities. In I. Jung & C. Latchem (Eds.), *Quality assurance and accreditation in distance education and e-learning: Models, policies and research* (pp. 136–150). London, UK: Routledge.
- CHE & AfriQAN. (2012). *AfriQAN-INQAAHE workshop on good practices in quality assurance*. Nairobi, Kenya: Commission for Higher Education (CHE), African Quality Assurance Network (AfriQAN), & Association of African Universities.
- CHEA. (2002). *Accreditation and assuring quality in distance education*. Washington, DC: Council for Higher Education Accreditation. Retrieved from http://www.chea.org/pdf/mono_1_accred_distance_02.pdf
- CHEA International Quality Group. (2015). *International quality principles*. Washington, DC: Council for Higher Education Accreditation. Retrieved from http://www.icde.org/filestore/News/2015_January-June/QualityPrinciples-April2015.pdf
- Clarke-Okah, W., & Coomaraswamy, U. (2009). *Quality assurance toolkit for distance higher education institutions and programmes*. Vancouver, Canada: Commonwealth of Learning & UNESCO.
- Clarke-Okah, W., & Gatsha, G. (Eds.). (2014). *Handbook for the Commonwealth of Learning review and improvement model (COL RIM)*. Vancouver, Canada: Commonwealth of Learning. Retrieved from <http://oasis.col.org/handle/11599/602>
- Daniel, J., Kanwar, A., & Uvalić-Trumbić, S. (2005). *Who's afraid of cross-border higher education? A developing world perspective*. Paper presented at the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) Annual Conference, Wellington, New Zealand.

- Ehlers, U-D. (2012). Quality assurance policies and guidelines in European distance and e-learning. In I. Jung & C. Latchem (Eds.), *Quality assurance and accreditation in distance education and e-learning: Models, policies and research* (pp. 79–90). London, UK: Routledge.
- Gillespie, P. (2015, March 25). University of Phoenix has lost half its students. *CNN Money*. Retrieved from <http://money.cnn.com/2015/03/25/investing/university-of-phoenix-apollo-earnings-tank/>
- Ibrahim, F., Abas, Z. W., & Ali, R. (2008, November). *Quality management initiatives in an open and distance learning university*. Paper presented at the 8th Annual SEAAIR Conference, Surabaya, Indonesia.
- INQAAHE (2007). *Guidelines of good practice (GGP)*. Barcelona, Spain: Author. Retrieved from [http://www.inqaah.org/admin/files/assets/subsites/1/documenten/1231430767_inqaah---guidelines-of-good-practice\[1\].pdf](http://www.inqaah.org/admin/files/assets/subsites/1/documenten/1231430767_inqaah---guidelines-of-good-practice[1].pdf)
- James, R., Tynan, B., Marshall, S., Webster, L., Suddaby, G., & Lewis, R. (2011, December). *Regulatory frameworks for distance education: A pilot study in the Southwest Pacific/South East Asia Region. Final report*. Oslo, Norway: International Council for Distance Education. Retrieved from http://www.icde.org/filestore/Regulatory_Framework/RegulatoryFrameworksforDEfinalreport2.pdf
- Jung, I. (2012, April). Asian learners' perception of quality in distance education and gender differences. *International Review of Research into Open and Distributed Learning*, 13(2). Retrieved from <http://www.irrodl.org/index.php/irrodl/article/view/1159/2128>
- Jung, I., & Latchem, C. (Eds.). (2012). *Quality assurance and accreditation in distance education and e-learning*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Kirkpatrick, D. (2005). *Accreditation and assuring quality in open and distance learning*. Vancouver, Canada: Commonwealth of Learning. Retrieved from http://oldwebsite.col.org/SiteCollectionDocuments/KS2005_QA.pdf
- Koning, J. W., Jr. (1993). Three other r's: Recognition, reward and resentment. *Research Technology Management*, 36(4), 19.
- Koul, B., & Kanwar, A. (Eds.). (2006). *Perspectives on distance education: Towards a culture of quality*. Vancouver, Canada: Commonwealth of Learning. Retrieved from http://oldwebsite.col.org/PublicationDocuments/pub_PS-QA_web.pdf
- Kusek, J. Z., & Rist, R.C. (2004). *Ten steps to a results-based monitoring and evaluation system: A handbook for development practitioners*. Washington, DC: The World Bank. Retrieved from <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/14926/296720PAPER0100steps.pdf?sequence=1>
- Long, J., & Harvey, A. (2015, July 15). Equity and diversity should figure in any rankings system. *The Australian: Higher Education*, p. 33. Retrieved from <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/higher-education/opinion/equity-and-diversity-should-figure-in-any-rankings-system/story-e6frgcko-1227441819779?sv=1608afb635d65988122d9e82d980d3ac>
- Lorenzo, G., & Moore, J. (2002). *The Sloan Consortium report to the nation: Five pillars of quality online education*. Retrieved from <http://www.edtechpolicy.org/ArchivedWebsites/Articles/FivePillarsOnlineEducation.pdf>
- Malaysian Qualifications Agency. (2013). *Code of practice for open and distance learning*. Petaling Jaya, Malaysia: Author.
- Maslen, G. (2012, February 19). Worldwide student numbers forecast to double by 2025. *University World News*, 209. Retrieved <http://www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=2012021610573999>
- Mills, R., & Fage, J. (1999, March). *Quality assurance: Internally embedded or externally controlled?* Paper presented at the First Pan-Commonwealth Forum, Bandar Seri Begawan. Retrieved from <http://oldwebsite.col.org/forum/PCFpapers/PostWork/mills.pdf>
- NCHE. (2014). *Quality assurance framework for universities and the licensing process for higher education institutions*. Kyambogo, Uganda: Author. Retrieved from <http://www.unche.or.ug/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Quality-Assurance-Framework-for-Universities.pdf>

- Nichols, M. (2002, December). *Development of a quality assurance system for elearning projects*. Paper presented at ASCILITE2002, UNITEC, Auckland, New Zealand. Retrieved from <http://www.ascilite.org/conferences/auckland02/proceedings/papers/004.pdf>
- Ossiannilsson, E., Williams, K., Camilleri, A. F., & Brown, M. (2015). *Quality models in online and open education around the globe: State of the art and recommendations*. Oslo, Norway: International Council for Open and Distance Education. Retrieved from http://icde.org/admin/filestore/News/2015_January-June/ICDEQualitymodels.pdf
- Parker, N. (2012). Quality assurance and accreditation in the United States and Canada. In I. Jung & C. Latchem, (Eds.), *Quality assurance and accreditation in distance education and e-learning: Models, policies and research* (pp. 58–68). London, UK: Routledge.
- Plimmer, G., Clarke-Okah, W., Donovan, C., & Russell, W. (2012). Lowering the cost and increasing the effectiveness of quality assurance: COL RIM. In I. Jung and C. Latchem, (Eds.), *Quality assurance and accreditation in distance education and e-learning: Models, policies and research* (pp. 162–171). New York, NY: Routledge.
- QAA. (2013, March). *Self-evaluation report of the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education: External review for confirmation of full membership of ENSA*. Gloucester, UK: Author. Retrieved from <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/ENQA-13.pdf>
- Reichert, S. (2008). Looking back — looking forward: Quality assurance and the Bologna process. In A. Beso, L. Bollaert, B. Curvale, H. T. Jensen, L. Harvey, E. Helle, B. Maguire, A. Mikkola, & A. Surssock (Eds.), *Implementing and using quality assurance: Strategy and practice. A selection of papers from the 2nd European Quality Assurance Forum* (pp. 5–10). Brussels, Belgium: The European University Association.
- Rolfe, V. (2015, January). Students as evaluators of open educational resources. *OpenEducationEuropa*, 40. Retrieved from <http://www.openeducationeuropa.eu/en/download/file/fid/37915>
- Shah, M., Wilson, M., & Nair, C. S. (2010, November). *The Australian Higher Education Quality Assurance Framework: Its success, deficiencies and way forward*. Paper presented to the Australasian Institutional Research Forum: Has Institutional Research Come of Age in Australasia? Geelong, Australia. Retrieved from <http://www.aair.org.au/app/webroot/media/pdf/AAIR%20Fora/Forum%202010/HEQualityFrameworkMahsoodShah.pdf>
- Shale, D., & Gomes, J. (1998). Performance indicators and university distance education providers. *Journal of Distance Education*, 13(1), 1–20.
- Stella, A. (2012). *International guidelines: Similarities and criticisms* [PowerPoint slides]. Retrieved from <http://documents.mx/documents/1-international-guidelines-similarities-and-criticisms-dr-antony-stella-audit-director-australian-universities-quality-agency-apqn-board-member.html>
- Stella, A., & Gnanam, A. (2004). Quality assurance in distance education: The challenges to be addressed. *Higher Education*, 47, 143–160. Retrieved from www.qou.edu/arabic/researchProgram/distanceLearning/qualityAssurance.pdf
- Szabo, M., & Tück, C. (2014). *Recognising International Quality Assurance Activity in the European Higher Education Area (RIQAA): Final project report*. Brussels, Belgium: European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education. Retrieved from https://www.eqar.eu/fileadmin/documents/eqar/riqaa/WP5_RIQAA_Report_final.pdf
- Taylor, J. C., & Swannell, P. (2001). USQ: An e-university for an e-world. *The International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning*, 2(1). Retrieved from <http://www.irrodl.org/index.php/irrodl/article/view/28/370>
- Teay, S. (2009, July). *Actioning strategic planning*. Paper presented at the International Conference on Strategic Planning and Quality Assurance in the Muslim World, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Retrieved from http://www.academia.edu/1544096/Action_Strategic_Planning
- UNESCO & APQN. (2006). *UNESCO-APQN Toolkit: Regulating the quality of cross-border education*. Bangkok, Thailand: UNESCO Bangkok. Retrieved from <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001464/146428e.pdf>

- UNESCO & OECD (2005). *Guidelines for quality provision in cross-border higher education*. Retrieved from <http://www.oecd.org/edu/skills-beyond-school/35779480.pdf>
- Uvalić-Trumbić, S., & Daniel, J. (2014). *A guide to quality in post-traditional online higher education*. Dallas, Texas: Academic Partnerships. Retrieved from http://www.icde.org/filestore/News/2014_March-April/Guide2.pdf
- UWI. (2014, May). *The UWI Quality Circle: Some key elements of the UWI Quality Management System*. Volume 16. Retrieved from http://www.open.uwi.edu/sites/default/files/The_Quality_Circle_Vol16_May_2014.pdf
- Vincent-Lancrin, S., & Pfotenhauer, S. (2012). *Guidelines for quality provision in cross-border higher education: Where do we stand?* Paris, France: OECD. Retrieved from <http://www.oecd.org/edu/research/49956210.pdf>
- Woodhouse, D. (2006, May). *The quality of transnational education: A provider view*. Paper presented at the INQAAHE Workshop, The Hague, Netherlands. Retrieved from http://www.inqaahe.org/admin/files/assets/subsites/1/documenten/1259589098_quality-assurance-of-transnational-education-a-providers-view.pdf

APPENDIX I

ODL Key Terms and Definitions

Asynchronous learning: Learning online at different times and/or places using online learning platforms, discussion forums, email and other suitable methods.

Blended learning: Teaching and learning that use a mix of face-to-face and digital-based delivery. Examples include flipped classroom, online interaction followed by face-to-face teaching, and online learning supplemented by face-to-face practical sessions.

Distance education: A mode of teaching and learning characterised, for the most part, by the separation of teachers and learners in time and/or place; it includes using technology for learning delivery, with the possibility of face-to-face teacher–learner and learner–learner interactions.

eLearning: The use of the Internet, local area networks or any digital devices (computers, personal digital assistants, tablets, smartphones, etc.) for teaching and learning, delivering or accessing content, and interactive learning.

Flexible learning: Forms of provision which, like blended learning, provide more choices for learners in the “when, where and how” of their learning. These include online learning, workplace-based learning, part-time learning, distance learning, and face-to-face teaching and learning, with options to fast-track or defer courses.

Flipped classroom: A form of blended learning wherein learners read or watch online lecture materials at home before participating and interacting in a classroom environment.

Information and communication technologies (ICTs): The range of technologies and tools used to create, collate and communicate information and knowledge and facilitate two-way communication.

Learning management systems (LMSs) (also known as course management systems or virtual learning environments): Web-based software systems that enable teachers to manage courses and deliver lessons online, and that help in the administration, tracking and reporting of learning processes.

Learning technologies: The range of ICTs used for teaching, learning and assessment, and as tools for drill and practice, tutorials, information retrieval systems, simulations, communications, etc.

Massive open online courses (MOOCs): Online courses made available without charge to very large numbers of people. “Open” in this context largely refers to open registration, not necessarily to courses available under an open licence.

Mobile learning (mLearning): The provision of education and training using mobile devices such as personal digital assistants, tablets, smartphones and mobile phones, enabling learners to study anywhere, anytime.

Online learning: Learning via some form of digital network which enables the learner to have increased access to and interaction with content, teachers and other learners.

Open and distance learning (ODL): A system of teaching and learning characterised by the separation of teacher and learner in time and/or place, which uses multiple media for the delivery of instruction and involves two-way communication, occasional face-to-face meetings for tutorials and learner–learner interaction.

Open educational resources (OERs): Teaching, learning and research materials in any medium, digital or otherwise, that reside in the public domain or have been released under an open licence that permits no-cost access, use, adaptation and redistribution by others with no or limited restrictions. The open licensing is built within the existing framework of intellectual property rights as defined by relevant international conventions and respects the authorship of the work.

Open learning: Policies and practices of openness in entry requirements (with minimal or no restriction on qualifications), choice of courses, place of study and time, etc. An educational philosophy that can be applied in both distance and face-to-face institutions.

Open university: A type of distance teaching institution that offers different degrees of openness and flexibility in terms of courses, entry requirements, learning media and approaches, time and place of study, etc.

Synchronous learning: Learning in which learners interact with teachers and/or learners online at the same time but at different locations.

Virtual education: Largely web-based on- or off-campus learning which involves multimedia and a high level of online interactivity and interaction between teachers and learners, both synchronously and asynchronously.

Virtual universities: Higher education institutions or networks of higher education institutions responsible for the design, development and provision of online and flexible courses and programmes. As with distance and open universities, their goal is to provide access to those in society who are unable to attend a physical campus.

APPENDIX II

QA Key Terms and Definitions

Accreditation: The act of granting credit or recognition to an educational institution that can evidence that it meets the appropriate standards of quality.

Audits: Systematic investigations of institutions, courses, programmes and other areas of operation to ensure consistent quality and to identify errors and opportunities for improvement.

Best practices: Policies, practices and procedures that have consistently shown results superior to those achieved with other means and that are used in benchmarking

Certification: The means of publicly attesting that a specified quality or standard has been achieved or exceeded in an institution, course or programme.

Educational effectiveness: The degree to which educational objectives are achieved and targeted problems are solved. In contrast to efficiency, effectiveness is determined without reference to costs/resources.

Educational efficiency: The degree to which the lowest amount of inputs is needed to create the greatest amount of outputs.

Evaluation: The collection of data to assure governments, QA agencies and other stakeholders of effectiveness/efficiency and to continuously review and enhance educational provision.

External review: Monitoring and periodic review of institutions; safeguarding national academic standards for higher education; and accrediting institutions and programmes by national QA/ accreditation agencies, peer review or visits by outside assessors.

Internal review: Academic self-regulation. Institutions, departments and course/programme teams take responsibility for ongoing or periodic QA, conformance with standards, risk and control assessment, and effective use of resources and methods.

Outcomes-based assessment: Judging and improving the quality and effectiveness of educational, administrative and support programmes and services by judging performance and consequences against pre-specified learning outcomes.

Outputs-based assessment: Judging and improving the quality and effectiveness of educational, administrative and support programmes and services by assessing, for example, the enrolment targets met, the number of degrees awarded, graduate employment rates, and the institution's contribution to the labour market.

Performance indicators (PIs) or key performance indicators (KPIs): A set of measures that institutions, their departments and programmes use to gauge or compare performance in terms of meeting their strategic and operational goals in their particular activities.

Qualifications frameworks: International or national policies for regulated qualifications in

tertiary education systems, which help with communication and comparison between qualifications systems and which enable learners, graduates, providers and employers to understand and compare qualifications awarded in different countries or sectors and by different education and training systems.

Quality assurance (QA): The maintenance of a desired level of quality in an institution, course, programme or service, by means of continuous monitoring and assessment at every stage of policy making, processes and practices.

Quality audits: The systematic examination of quality systems, conducted by internal and/or external quality auditors or audit teams.

Quality control: A system for verifying and maintaining a desired level of quality in an institution, course, programme or service by means of careful planning, use of appropriate resources, continuing inspection, and corrective action as required.

Quality culture: A set of group values and taken-for-granted practices that guide quality and improvement in everyday working practices, and the consequent outputs/outcomes in institutions, departments and courses/programmes.

Quality management: The means by which institutions, departments, courses, programmes and services ensure consistency in processes, outputs and outcomes by means of quality planning, quality control, quality assurance and quality improvement.

Stakeholders: Persons, groups and organisations that affect or are affected by organisations' objectives, policies, actions and performance. In educational contexts, these include students, staff, employers, communities and governments.

Student evaluation: Student appraisals of teaching and courses or modules, used as part of a higher education institution's QA procedures and to inform decisions on programme development and the overall process of monitoring the effectiveness of programmes.

APPENDIX III

The Survey Instrument

Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Open, Distance and Online Learning in the Commonwealth

Welcome to this Survey on “Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Open, Distance and Online Learning in Commonwealth Universities.”

The aims of this study are to review the current nature of, and provisions for, quality assurance (QA) and accreditation in open, distance and online learning in Commonwealth universities and to determine what further encouragement, support and collaboration might be needed from the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) in assuring standards and continuous improvement. The survey intends to capture inputs from senior members of the higher education community in the Commonwealth countries to share the state of affairs on quality assurance, accreditation and recognition in various forms of open and distance learning (ODL). We would be grateful for all the information and comments you can give us. Wherever possible, where it says “comments/references/links,” please add personal comments or references or links to online policy documents, reports, journal articles, conference papers, etc.

In the context of this study:

“ODL” refers to all forms of teaching and learning, including eLearning, mobile learning, massive open online courses (MOOCs) and open educational resources (OER), applied to increase access and equity and achieve flexible and blended provision.

“Inputs” refers to policies, management systems, student selection, staffing, curriculum/pedagogical/materials design, funding, teaching facilities, technology infrastructure, etc.

“Outputs/outcomes” refer to completion/graduation rates, stakeholders’ satisfaction, increased/more diversified enrolments, financial benefits to the institution/learners/community, etc.

“Impacts” refers to positive/negative, primary/secondary, direct/indirect, intended/unintended long-term effects of the open and distance education provision.

We appreciate your contribution to making this study a success.

Thank you.

Colin Latchem

On behalf of the Commonwealth of Learning

Questionnaire:

1. About the Institution

Your Name: _____

Your Position: _____

Organisation/Institution: _____

Address: _____

City/Town: _____

Country: _____

Your Email Address: _____

2. Is there a national QA and accreditation framework for higher education in your country?

Yes _____ No _____ In development _____

Comments/References/Links: _____

3. Are all higher education providers in your country required to meet these QA standards regardless of whether they are open, distance, conventional, public, private or overseas institutions?

Yes _____ No _____

Ambiguous _____

Comments/References/Links _____

4. Does the national QA framework, if any, specifically refer to ODL?

Yes _____ No _____

Comments/References/Links _____

5. Is your institution's QA framework or system for ODL based on this national framework?

Yes _____ No _____ Partially _____

Comments/References/Links _____

6. Is your institution permitted to set its own quality codes and policies for maintaining standards in the ODL awards and programmes?

Yes _____ No _____

Comments/References/Links _____

7. Is your institution's QA framework linked to an institutional strategic plan?

Yes _____ No _____

Comments/References/Links _____

8. If there is an institutional QA framework, does this specifically refer to ODL?

Yes _____ No _____

Comments/References/Links _____

9. Are the standards, measures and performance indicators in the national QA framework the same for judging quality in face-to-face teaching and learning and ODL?

Yes _____ No _____

Comments/References/Links _____

10. Are the standards, measures and performance indicators in the institutional QA framework the same for judging quality in face-to-face teaching and learning and ODL?

Yes _____ No _____

Comments/References/Links _____

11. Are there distinct standards, measures and performance indicators in the national QA framework for assuring quality in and accrediting the ODL courses and programmes of overseas providers?

Yes _____ No _____

Comments/References/Links _____

12. Is there a dedicated QA centre/QA office/senior manager responsible for QA in your institution?

Yes _____ No _____

Comments/References/Links _____

13. Has your institution developed a QA policy manual?

Yes _____ No _____ In development _____

Comments/References/Links _____

14. Does your national or institutional QA framework have distinct standards, measures and performance indicators for eLearning?

Yes _____ No _____

Comments/References/Links _____

15. Does your national or institutional QA framework judge quality in ODL in terms of inputs?

Yes _____ No _____

Comments/References/Links _____

16. Does your national or institutional QA framework judge quality in ODL in terms of outputs/ outcomes/impacts?

Yes _____ No _____

Comments/References/Links _____

17. Is the university's ODL provision subject to internal audits to assess conformance with internal and/or external standards? If so, explain in the comment who does the audit and how often.

Yes _____ No _____

Comments/References/Links _____

18. Is the university's provision in ODL subject to external audits to assess conformance with external standards? If yes, explain in the comment who does the external audit and how often.

Yes _____ No _____

Comments/References/Links _____

19. Do the external audits involve visits to your institution by external audit personnel?

Yes _____ No _____

Comments/References/Links _____

20. Are the students involved in the QA audits (e.g., providing feedback on their perceptions of quality in ODL and satisfaction levels)?

Yes _____ No _____

Other (please specify) _____

21. Are there any internal or external grants, funds or reward systems to encourage and support QA in ODL? If yes, please name these in the comment box.

Yes _____ No _____

Comments/References/Links _____

22. Are any of your institution's ODL courses/programmes accredited in other countries?

Yes _____ No _____

Comments/References/Links _____

23. Does your institution use any other form(s) of certification/accreditation, such as ISO 9001, for assuring quality in its ODL provision?

Yes _____ No _____ In development _____

24. Has your institution used any external guidelines for developing the QA system for ODL (e.g. the Commonwealth of Learning Review and Improvement Model [COL RIM] or the ICDE Quality Assurance Toolkit)?

Yes _____ No _____

Comments/References/Links _____

25. Is the institutional QA system for ODL conceived of as a cyclical process aiming for continuous improvement?

Yes _____ No _____

Comments/References/Links _____

26. Is the institutional QA system for ODL designed to foster and promote a quality culture?

Yes _____ No _____

Comments/References/Links _____

27. What are seen to be the main benefits, outcomes and impacts of your QA system for ODL?

28. What are seen to be the main constraints and challenges in your QA system for ODL?

29. Is there anything else you'd like to say about QA and ODL in your country or institution?

30. Are there any reports, journal articles, conference presentations, etc. about your institution's QA system that would be useful in this survey? (If so, please attach these when you return this questionnaire.)

Thank you for taking the time and trouble to complete this questionnaire.

You will receive a copy of the final report on its publication.

APPENDIX IV

International, National and Regional QA, Accreditation and Certification Organisations in the Commonwealth Countries

International Organisations

International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) (www.inqaah.org)

INQAAHE is a worldwide association of over 200 organisations active in the theory and practice of QA in higher education. The great majority of its members are QA agencies that operate in many different ways, although the network also welcomes (as associate members) other organisations that have an interest in QA in higher education.

International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO) (www.iso.org)

ISO is an independent, non-governmental membership organisation and the world's largest developer of voluntary international standards. ISO 9001 sets out the criteria for a quality management system. It can be used by any organisation, large or small, regardless of its field of activity. It is implemented by over one million companies and organisations in over 170 countries. This standard is based on a number of quality management principles, including a strong customer focus, the motivation and implication of top management, the process approach and continual improvement.

Regional Organisations

Region	Countries Served	
Africa		
African and Malagasy Council for Higher Education (Conseil Africain et Malgache pour l'Enseignement Supérieur) (CAMES)	Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Democratic Republic of Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea-Conakry, Ivory Coast, Madagascar, Mali, Niger, Rwanda, Senegal, Togo	www.lecomes.org
African Quality Assurance Network (AfriQAN)	Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Guinea Bissau, Kenya, Jordan, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Tanzania, Tunisia, Uganda, Zimbabwe	http://afriqan.aau.org

Association of African Universities (AAU)	Angola, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Libya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Africa, Sudan, Swaziland, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe	www.aau.org
Asia		
ASEAN University Network-Quality Assurance (AUN-QUA)	Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam	www.aunsec.org
Asia Pacific Quality Network (APQN)	Australia, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, China, Chinese Taipei, Fiji, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Iran, Japan, Kazakhstan, Korea, Laos, Macao, Malaysia, Maldives, Mongolia, Nepal, New Zealand, Pakistan, Philippines, Russia, Samoa, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Tonga, Vanuatu, Vietnam	www.apqn.org
Caribbean and the Americas		
Caribbean Accreditation Authority for Education in Medicine and Other Health Professions (CAAM-HP)	Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Guyana, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Grenada, St. Kitts and Nevis, Suriname	http://www.caam-hp.org/
Caribbean Area Network for Quality Assurance in Tertiary Education (CANQATE)	Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Montserrat, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago	www.canqate.org
Europe		
European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)	Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Holy See, Hungary, Ireland, Kosovo, Lithuania, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland, United Kingdom	www.enqa.eu

National Organisations

Africa	
Botswana	
Tertiary Education Council	www.tec.org.bw
Botswana Training Authority	www.bota.org.bw
Cameroon	
National Commission on Private Higher Education	(no website found)
Council of Higher Education and Scientific Research	(no website found)
Ghana	
National Accreditation Board	www.nab.gov.gh
Kenya	
Commission for University Education	www.cue.or.ke
Lesotho	
Council on Higher Education	www.che.ac.ls/home
Mauritius	
Tertiary Education Commission	www.tec.intnet.mu
Mauritius Qualifications Authority	www.mqa.mu
Mozambique	
National Commission for Accreditation and Evaluation of Higher Education	(no website found)
Namibia	
National Council for Higher Education	www.nche.org.na
Namibia Qualifications Authority	www.namqa.org
Nigeria	
National Universities Commission	www.nuc.edu.ng
Rwanda	
National Council for Higher Education	www.hec.gov.rw

Seychelles	
Seychelles Qualifications Authority	www.sqa.sc
South Africa	
Higher Education Quality Committee of the Council on Higher Education	www.che.ac.za
South African Institute for Distance Education	www.saide.org.za
South African Qualifications Authority	www.saqa.org.za
Tanzania	
The Tanzania Commission for Universities	ww.tcu.go.tz
Uganda	
National Council for Higher Education	www.unche.or.ug
Zambia	
Technical Education, Vocational and Entrepreneurship Training Authority	www.teveta.org.zm
Asia	
Bangladesh	
University Grants Commission of Bangladesh	www.ugc.gov.bd
Brunei Darussalam	
Brunei National Accreditation Council	www.moe.gov.bn/bdnac
India	
University Grants Commission	www.ugc.ac.in
National Assessment and Accreditation Council	www.naac.gov.in
Distance Education Bureau	www.ugc.ac.in/deb
Malaysia	
Malaysian Qualifications Framework	www.mqa.gov.my/mqr/english/ePengenalanMQF.cfm
Maldives	
Maldives Qualification Authority	www.mqa.gov.mv

Pakistan	
Quality Assurance Agency – Pakistan	www.nust.edu.pk/QA/Pages/default.aspx
Higher Education Commission – Pakistan	www.hec.gov.pk
Singapore	
Singapore Accreditation Council	www.sac-accreditation.gov.sg.sg
Singapore Quality Class for Private Education Organisations	www.sac-accreditation.gov.sg
Sri Lanka	
Quality Assurance and Accreditation Council	www.qaacouncil.lk
Caribbean and Americas	
Antigua and Barbuda	
National Accreditation Board	www.canqate.org/AboutUs/Partners/ABNAB.aspx
The Bahamas	
Tertiary Quality Assurance Division, The Bahamas Ministry of Education	www.bahamaseducation.com/Departments/Higher/tqa.html
Barbados	
Barbados Accreditation Council	https://bac/gov.bb/
Belize	
Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports – Tertiary and Post-Secondary Services	www.moe.gov.bz/index.php/education-services/tertiary-and-post-secondary-services-tps#deputy-director
Canada	
Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada	www.aucc.ca/canadian-universities/quality-assurance
Canadian Degree Qualifications Framework	http://cicic.ca/1286/Pan-Canadian-qualifications-frameworks/index.canada
Canadian Education and Training Accreditation Commission	http://nacc.ca/ccap/about-ccap/
Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials	www.cicic.ca/2/home.canada
The Council of Ministers of Education, Canada	www.cmec.ca/en

Dominica	
National Accreditation Board	http://nab.gov.dm
Grenada	
Grenada National Training Agency	http://grenadanta.gd
Grenada National Accreditation Board	www.moegrenada.org/#!/links/c20pg
Guyana	
National Accreditation Council	www.nac.gov.gy
Jamaica	
University Council of Jamaica	www.ucj.org.jm
National Council on Technical and Vocational Education and Training – National Qualifications Register	www.nqrjamaica.org/nationalregister/generalinfo/main.aspx
St. Kitts and Nevis	
St. Kitts and Nevis Accreditation Board	http://ab.gov.kn
St. Vincent and the Grenadines	
National Accreditation Board of St. Vincent and the Grenadines	www.education.gov.vc/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=180&Itemid=114
Trinidad and Tobago	
Accreditation Council of Trinidad and Tobago	www.actt.org.tt
The Ministry of Tertiary Education and Skills Training	www.stte.gov.tt
Europe	
Cyprus	
Council of Educational Evaluation Accreditation	www.highereducation.ac.cy/en/council-educational-evaluation-accreditation.html
Cyprus Council for the Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications	www.kysats.ac.cy/index.php/en/?page=home&action=&lang=en
Malta	
National Committee for Further and Higher Education	www.ncfhe.org.mt/content/home-quality-assurance/5963821/
Government Quality Assurance Department	https://education.gov.mt/en/education/quality-assurance/Pages/default.aspx

United Kingdom	
British Accreditation Council for Independent Further and Higher Education	www.the-bac.org
Open and Distance Learning Quality Council	http://odlqc.org.uk
Quality Assurance Agency	www.qaa.ac.uk/en
Pacific	
Australia	
Australian Qualifications Framework Advisory Board	www.aqf.edu.au
Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency	www.teqsa.gov.au
Fiji	
Fiji Higher Education Commission	www.fhec.gov.fj/policies/quality-assurance
New Zealand	
New Zealand Qualifications Authority	www.nzqa.govt.nz
New Zealand Universities Academic Audit Unit	www.aqa.ac.nz
Papua New Guinea	
National Training Council Secretariat	www.ntcwebsite5.com
Samoa	
Samoa Qualifications Authority	www.swa.gov.ws
Tonga	
Tonga National Qualifications Board	www.tnqab.to

APPENDIX V

QA Standards and Guidelines for Open, Distance and Online Learning

African Virtual University. (2014). *AVU Quality Assurance (QA) Framework for Open, Distance and eLearning Programmes*.

www.avu.org/images/Documents/QA_FRAMEWORK.pdf

The AVU QA Framework was approved by the Board of Directors and AVU General Assembly on 5 September 2014 in Nairobi, Kenya. It used the *Quality Assurance Toolkit for Distance Higher Institutions and Programmes* developed by the Commonwealth of Learning in 2009, cross-referenced with accrediting standards from the USA, UK and other countries. The framework focuses on: institutional policies and mission; programme design and development; course design and development; learning infrastructure and resources; learner support and progression; learner assessment and evaluation; and community capacity building, development and engagement. There are 92 criteria statements, accompanied by suggested performance indicators and evidence sources, with a proposed five-point score rating associated with each performance indicator.

Australasian Council of Open, Distance and eLearning (ACODE). (2014). *Benchmarks for Technology Enhanced Learning*.

www.acode.edu.au/pluginfile.php/579/mod_resource/content/3/TEL_Benchmarks.pdf

The ACODE benchmarks are designed to assist institutions in delivering a quality technology-enhanced learning experience for their students and staff (recognising that some institutions refer to their practice with terms such as eLearning, online or flexible learning, blended, etc.). There are eight benchmarks, each of which can be used as a standalone indicator or collectively to provide a whole institution perspective. However, these benchmarks are deemed more powerful when one or more institutions are willing to share with others their practices and journey in technology-enhanced learning, based on the outcomes of their own internal benchmarking activities.

California State University. *Rubric for Online Instruction*.

www.csuchico.edu/eoi/documents/rubric.pdf

This framework for developing online course design and delivery enables instructors to self-assess course(s) based on the university's expectations. It also provides a means of supporting and recognising faculty members' efforts in developing expertise in online instruction.

Campus Alberta Quality Council. (2011). *Additional Quality Assessment Standards for Programs Delivered in Blended, Distributed or Distance Modes*.

www.caqc.gov.ab.ca/media/1092/caqc_distance_program_standards.pdf

The Campus Alberta Quality Council is guided by the principle that whilst instructional methods may differ, expectations of high quality remain the same, regardless of mode. It argues that the key considerations in assuring the quality of any programme are that

it be learning-driven and informed by excellent research and scholarship, not only in the discipline(s) addressed but also in the teaching, learning and assessment. The standards apply to undergraduate and graduate programmes delivered in whole or in part in blended, distributed or distance modes. The council has developed these additional standards with reference to national and international norms and benchmarks for blended, distributed and distance learning, and it expects those proposing programmes to do the same.

Canadian Recommended E-learning Guidelines (CanREGs). (2002). Prepared by K. Barker, FuturEd, Vancouver, Canada: Canadian Association for Community Education.
www.futured.com/pdf/CanREGs%20Eng.pdf

These Canadian standards apply to any form of learning using computers and the Internet, whether single courses or entire programmes, designed for individuals or entire groups in classes, and offered for credit at an education institution and/or for general interest without credit.

CEMCA Quality Assurance of Multimedia Learning Materials (QAMLM). (2009).
http://cemca.org.in/ckfinder/userfiles/files/QAMLM%201_0.pdf

The Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA) developed these QA guidelines with the support of the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, and the Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, and in collaboration with practitioners, professionals, industries and institutions engaged in quality audits. The quality indicators were developed at round tables held in India and Malaysia, the draft version was widely disseminated both online and offline, field testing was carried out in both countries, and the revised guidelines were then published online.

EADTU. (2012). *Quality Assessment for E-Learning: A Benchmarking Approach. Second Edition*. Heerlen, Netherlands: European Association of Distance Teaching Universities
http://e-xcellencelabel.eadtu.eu/images/documents/Excellence_manual_full.pdf

This manual describes issues, criteria and performance indicators in regard to: strategic management; curriculum design; course design; course delivery; staff support; and student support. It is the main product of a suite of EU-funded projects undertaken under the auspices of EADTU: E-xcellence (2005–2006), E-xcellence plus (2008–2009) and E-xcellence Next (2011–2012). The overall aim of these projects was to develop a methodology and supporting resources for QA in higher education eLearning. They involved a core pool of experts from six European universities with a stake in eLearning developments, and an extended group drawn from a total of 50 institutions during the course of the projects.

JISC. (2009). *Effective Practice in a Digital Age*.
www.webarchive.org.uk/wayback/archive/20140615094835/http://www.jisc.ac.uk/media/documents/publications/effectivepracticedigitalage.pdf

This instrument is designed for those in further and higher education who aim to enhance the student learning experience through apt and imaginative uses of technology.

Khan, B. H. (2010). Web-based Training. In *Human Resources and Their Development. Volume II*. www.eolss.net/sample-chapters/c11/e1-10-04-03.pdf

This eLearning framework is a self-assessment instrument for institutions to organise their evaluation of eLearning readiness and opportunities for growth. The framework is composed of eight dimensions, each reviewed by practical checklists of 50–70 questions. The eight dimensions are pedagogical, technological, interface, evaluation, management, resource support, ethical and institutional.

Marshall, S. (2009). *E-Learning Maturity Model Version Two: New Zealand Tertiary Institution E-Learning Capability: Informing and Guiding E-Learning Architectural Change and Development. Project Report*. Wellington, NZ: New Zealand Ministry of Education. www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/e-Learning/58139

This is a research report commissioned by the New Zealand Ministry of Education and undertaken by Victoria University of Wellington and e-Learnz Inc., which was a follow-up to *Determination of New Zealand Tertiary Institution e-Learning Capability*. It took the ideas of process capability maturity and used these as a foundation for a form of benchmarking, to improve the quality of eLearning for the benefit of students, staff and institutions.

Middle States Commission on Higher Education. (2011). *The Interregional Guidelines for the Evaluation of Distance Education Programs (Online Learning)* www.msche.org/publications/Guidelines-for-the-Evaluation-of-Distance-Education-Programs.pdf

These guidelines were designed to assist institutions in planning distance education and to provide an assessment framework for institutions already involved in distance education. The guidelines are also intended for use by evaluation teams.

Open ECBCheck – Quality Improvement Scheme for E-Learning Programmes
www.gc21-eacademy.org/quality/quality-standards

Open ECBCheck enables organisations to measure how successful their eLearning programmes are and allows for continuous improvement through peer collaboration and bench-learning. Members of ECBCheck can benefit in a variety of ways from their membership. They have access to tools and guidelines for their own practice and can obtain a community-based label.

Open Education Network, UK. (2014). *Quality Assurance for OER: Current State of the Art and the TIPS Framework*. www.openeducationeuropa.eu/sk/article/Quality-Assurance-for-OER-%3A-Current-State-of-the-Art-and-the-TIPS-Framework

This tool uses 38 key validated QA criteria as guidelines for creating and improving OER. These are based on all 45 known related frameworks in the literature and several rounds of international workshops, questionnaires, surveys and referrals, and have been examined by more than 200 OER experts and teachers around the world. They concern the teaching aspects, information content aspects, presentation aspects, and system technical aspects — thus the acronym TIPS. These key criteria can be helpful to creators of OER or are easily

applied as a rubric for reusers to assess or improve existing OER. All the methods and data are in the free-of-cost open-access domain.

Quality Assurance Agency. (2015). *The Quality Code: A Brief Guide*
www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/quality-code-brief-guide.pdf

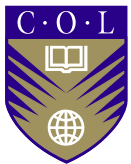
This explains the process of QA followed by QAA in the UK. Detailed information is available at www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code.

Swedish National Agency for Higher Education. (2008). *E-learning Quality: Aspects and Criteria for Evaluation of e-Learning in Higher Education*.
www.hsv.se/download/18.8f0e4c9119e2b4a60c800028057/0811R.pdf

This is part of an ongoing initiative to develop knowledge about what constitutes quality in eLearning, and how such quality may be assessed within the framework of a national QA system. The report presents a model for quality assessment of eLearning.

Tertiary Education Commission, AUT University and Massey University, New Zealand. (2014). *eLearning guidelines (eLg) Ako Aotearoa*.
www.elg.ac.nz/sites/elg/files/eLg%20-%20All%20perspectives%20guidelines.pdf

These guidelines have been developed to support the tertiary sector in its engagement with eLearning. They offer prompts for good practice for organisations and are intended for teachers, managers, organisational leaders and QA bodies. Relevant resources supporting each of the perspectives are included for further reading and research.



4710 Kingsway, Suite 2500
Burnaby, BC V5H 4M2
Canada

Tel: +1.604.775.8200
Fax: +1.604.775.8210
E-mail: info@col.org
Web: www.col.org

March 2016