

Course **Materials**

Quality Assurance in Higher Education in Africa

Enhancing the Quality of Higher Education



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About This Quality Assurance Module

How this course is structured

The course overview

The course overview gives you a general introduction to the course. Information contained in the course overview will help you determine:

- whether the course is suitable for you
- what you will already need to know
- what you can expect from the course
- how much time you will need to invest to complete the course

The overview also provides guidance on:

- study skills
- where to get help
- course assignments and assessments
- activity icons
- units

We strongly recommend that you read the overview *carefully* before starting your studies.

The course content

The course is broken down into units. Each unit comprises:

- an introduction to the unit content
- unit objectives
- unit outcomes
- core content of the unit with a variety of learning activities
- a unit summary
- unit assignment

Resources

For those interested in learning more on this subject, we provide you with a list of additional resources at the end of each unit. These consist of books, articles and websites.

Course Expectation and Evaluation Surveys

Before beginning your study of the Quality Assurance in Higher Education in Africa course, we would appreciate it if you could take a few minutes to complete the Course Expectations Survey, to let us know about the expectations you have of the course.

After completing this module, we would appreciate it if you would give us some feedback in the Course Evaluation Survey to help us identify areas that require improvement for future versions of this course. Your constructive feedback will help us increase the quality of our OER courses in the future.

Course overview

Welcome to this module on Quality Assurance in Higher Education in Africa. This module is a response to the need to improve the quality of higher education in Africa. It gives insights on the common challenges higher education is facing in the region, the concept of quality as applied to higher education, and approaches that should be used to enhance the quality of such education. It is hoped that this module will be an essential resource in the capacity building of staff in higher education on quality assurance matters.

Quality assurance in higher education in Africa

This module is intended for people who work in their various capacities in higher education in Africa. Essentially, the module targets: people working in quality assurance units in universities; faculty working in academic departments responsible for ensuring the quality of students' educational experience; and staff in national quality assurance agencies with the mandate to monitor the quality of higher education provision at a national level.

As an evolving field, quality assurance is also an area that should attract a lot of research interest to develop sound theory that guides practice. This module intends to bring to the fore some of the theoretical aspects that need strengthening, particularly within Africa.

Module objectives

The aims of this module are to:

- familiarise you with trends in higher education in Africa and help you understand their impact on quality
- acquaint you with the key terminology in quality assurance
- help you appreciate the importance of maintaining a quality higher education system in your country to achieve sustainable livelihoods
- expose you to contextually relevant and cost-effective quality assurance approaches that can be implemented in a developing country context

Course outcomes



Outcomes

Upon completion of this module on quality assurance in higher education in Africa, you will be able to:

- explain trends that impact directly on quality in higher education in Africa generally and in your institution in particular
- identify factors that have a negative impact on the quality of delivery in your institution
- conduct internal quality reviews as a way of enhancing the quality of provision in your institution/country
- develop improvement plans based on self-review processes
- explain how cross-border provision of higher education quality can be assured in your country

Time frame



You are expected to spend six weeks, with ten notional learning hours of study per week, to complete this module, together with the assignments. Since this is a self-study course, it is anticipated that you will plan your study time appropriately, in light of your other commitments. To facilitate continuity in your study, you are encouraged to devote an average of two hours of study every day. This is only on average; depending on your work commitments, you may not get time for the course on some days and then spend more hours on days when it is convenient for you to do so. If at all possible, strive to avoid having several days away from the course, as such long periods of inactivity will make continuity in your learning more difficult.

Study skills



As an adult learner, your approach to learning will be different from that of your school days, not least because you will most likely be fitting your study activities around other professional or domestic responsibilities. How you plan your study to meet the expected completion targets and timelines is entirely up to you.

Essentially, you will be taking control of your learning methods and environment, including time management, goal setting, and stress management. Perhaps you will need to reacquaint with skills such as

essay writing, reading for understanding, handling assignments, and using the Web as a learning resource.

Your most significant considerations will be *time* and *space* — i.e., the time you dedicate to your learning and the environment in which you engage in that learning. We strongly encourage you to develop a timetable and to collaborate with other learners as you go through the course, using social media and discussion forums where appropriate.

As adults, you might already be familiar with independent study and have the necessary skills. However, if you need guidance on independent study skills, we suggest you refer to some or all of the excellent resources in the links below, and that you do this *before* commencing your self-study activities. If you are used to independent study and feel you do not need such guidance, you can skip this section.

- <http://www.how-to-study.com/>
 - a. The “How to Study” website is dedicated to study-skills resources. You will find links to study preparation (a list of nine essential qualities for a good study place), taking notes, strategies for reading textbooks, using reference sources, and test anxiety.
- https://www.ucc.vt.edu/academic_support/study_skills_information.html
 - b. This is the study skills website of Virginia Tech’s Cook Counseling Center. You will find links to a study skills checklist as well as pages on time skills strategies (including a “Where does time go?” link), basic concentration techniques, control of the study environment, note taking, how to read essays for analysis, and memory skills.
- <http://www.howtostudy.org/resources.php>
 - c. This is another “how to study” website with useful links to pages on time management, efficient reading, getting the most out of doing (“hands-on” learning), memory building, tips for staying motivated, developing a learning plan, and skills for questioning, listening and observing.

The above links are our suggestions to start you on your way. At the time of writing, these web links were active. If you want to look for more, go to www.google.com and search for “self-study basics,” “self-study tips,” “self-study skills” or similar phrases.

Assignments



Assignments

To facilitate effective learning, you will be encouraged to reflect on the key quality assurance concepts and processes that are covered in the module. Each unit will therefore have reflection exercises, tasks and at least one assignment that you should complete and upload on Moodle for marking by the module facilitator. The main purpose for the tasks and assignments is to help you gauge how well you master the salient aspects of the module. Accordingly, the facilitator will provide you with rich feedback on each of the assignments. If you successfully complete 75 percent of the tasks and assignments, COL will provide you with a course certificate.
























All information and guidelines pertaining to the assignments will be provided in each of the assignments.

Getting around this module

Margin icons

While working through this module, you will notice the frequent use of margin icons. These icons serve to “signpost” a particular piece of text, a new task or a change in activity; they have been included to help you to find your way around this module.

A complete icon set is shown below. We suggest that you familiarise yourself with the icons and their meaning before starting your study. You are, however, free to make constant reference to the icons as you get along with the course.

				
Activity	Assessment	Assignment	Case study	Objectives
				
Discussion	Group activity	Help	Note it!	Basic competence
				
Outcomes	Reading	Reflection	Study skills	Answers to assessments
				
Summary	Terminology	Time	Tip	
				
Computer-based learning	Audio	Video	Feedback	

Unit 1

Trends in higher education in Africa

Introduction

In order to understand the quality challenges that are faced in higher education in Africa, you need to have a good understanding of the higher education context in the region, particularly with respect to expansion and transformation trends. Whilst expansion in higher education is a global phenomenon, this trend is not only more acute in Africa; it is also accompanied by declining public subvention, giving rise to numerous challenges in universities. The ultimate consequences of these challenges include the declining quality of provision in most African universities. If you work in a university, you may want to think of how declining public funding has affected your institution over the past five years.

In addition to phenomenal growth in enrolments, higher education has undergone significant changes over the past decade. These changes have mainly been a result of the advent of educational technology, changes in the needs of the job market, and shifts in the profiles of students who now have access to university education.

In this unit and the next in this module, think of the ways in which the trends and associated challenges that are discussed impact on the quality of higher education in your country in particular and on the continent generally. In essence, this unit brings to the fore key trends that define the context within which higher education is provided in Africa as well as the implications of such trends for the quality of the education provided.



Unit Outcomes

Upon completion of this unit, you will be able to:

- explain key developments that have happened in higher education in Africa and infer some of the challenges that have arisen from such developments
- discuss some of the implications of these challenges for the quality of higher education in Africa

1.1 Demand and supply of higher education in Africa

The literature shows that although there has been exponential growth of higher education in Africa over the past 40 years, Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) still experiences the lowest tertiary gross enrolment ratios (GER) globally. For example, according to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, the average GER in SSA stood at 9.00% by 2017, compared to an average of 11.96% for landlocked developing countries, 24.92% for South and West Asia, and 50.64 % for Latin America and the Caribbean.¹

In many African countries, demand for higher education has increased because of increased participation rates at the schooling level. This has mainly been a result of efforts governments made in a bid to meet the United Nations Millennium Development Goals, which promoted universal primary education. Whilst this was a positive development, especially in terms of enhancing literacy levels, there was a lack of concomitant expansion of higher education, which resulted in an increasing mismatch between supply and demand in higher education. In some countries in the region, less than ten percent of students who apply for university entry are enrolled, while the rest remain out of school and out of employment. This situation is worsened by a lack of adequate alternative pathways to post-secondary education and training.

The role of private providers

Over the years, it has become evident that public universities alone cannot meet the demand for quality higher education. Hence, the role of private providers has significantly increased globally, with the quality of educational offerings varying quite significantly from context to context and from provider to provider. In the developed world, where private provision of higher education has taken place for some time, GERs have been substantially pushed up. Thus, horizontal diversification is one strategic way of raising participation rates in higher education. In Teichler's view, horizontal diversification refers to diversity in the types of study programmes, educational concepts, and specializations available (Teichler, 2015).² This diversification is often enhanced by having a variety of institutions that offer different specialisations in higher education, and increasing the role of private providers. Thus, diversification, differentiation and privatisation are strategies that can enhance access to higher education, provided appropriate policies are in place. You may want to reflect on these three terms in relation to higher education provision in your country.

¹ UNESCO Institute for Statistics. (2019). Education: Gross enrolment ratio by level of education [Table illustrating GER by country]. UIS Database. Retrieved from <http://data.uis.unesco.org/index.aspx?queryid=142>.

² Teichler, U. (2015). Diversity and diversification of higher education: Trends, challenges and policies. *Voprosy Obrazovaniya / Educational Studies*, 1, 14-38. doi:10.17323/1814-9545-2015-1-14-38.



Reflection activity 1.1.1: Discussion forum

- a. What is the tertiary GER in your country?
- b. Which factors constrain participation rates at the tertiary level in your country?
- c. What are the implications of low participation rates for the national economy?

You may check for statistics with the relevant ministry in your country or on the UNESCO Institute for Statistics website. Post your responses in the discussion forum for others to compare with those of their own countries.



Learning activity 1.1.2: Journal post

Read Resource 1, which is an extract from Trow (1973).³ This summarizes the common problems always associated with growth in education.

Questions

1. Which of the problems mentioned in the extract is most pressing in universities in your country?
2. Suggest how the problem can be alleviated.

Commentary

Note that there is no one answer that is correct for the two questions above; much depends on the context.

1.2 Exponential increases in enrolments in public universities

Most governments strive to achieve the highest possible participation rates (GERs) in higher education for their countries. Whilst there are perceived public versus private benefits of higher education, it still remains a fact that exponential expansion at this sophisticated level of education has its own challenges. As Trow (1973, p. i) rightly argues:

³ Trow, M. (1973). Problems in the transition from elite to mass higher education. Paper prepared for a conference on mass higher education held by the OECD in Paris, June 1973. Available at <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED091983>.

Growth poses a variety of problems for the education systems that experience it and for the societies that support them. These problems arise in every part of higher education — in its finance, in its government and administration; in its recruitment and selection of students; in its curriculum and forms of instruction; in its recruitment, training, and socialization of staff — growth has its impact on every form of activity and manifestation of higher education.

In order to gain better understanding of some of the challenges of growth in higher education, refer to some of the readings in the reference list at the end of this unit.



Learning activity 1.2: Discussion forum

Post your response to the tasks below, including your reaction to posts by your peers, in the discussion forum for this activity.

- a. Briefly explain how any two of the problems mentioned in the quotation from Trow apply to your local universities.
- b. Read about challenges posted by any two of your peers on the course. Which ones are similar and which ones are unique to your local institution?

Commentary

From the two readings above, you probably noticed that growth poses the challenge of matching available resources to increasing numbers of students, whether it is at the national or the institutional level. Often, this is a result of inadequate planning being made before more students come on board. Ideally, institutions should have a carefully determined enrolment plan with carefully worked out enrolment projections that take into account the rate at which resources can be increased.

At the national level, you will have noticed that one of the major challenges in most African countries is that other forms of tertiary education and training are not sufficiently developed to absorb significant numbers of learners that come out of the schooling system. This problem is worsened by the relative unattractiveness of these alternative institutions that offer an alternative pathway to tertiary education. As a result, all learners from the schooling system are channelled towards university education.

1.3 Increasing distance education

Increasingly, many countries and universities are rolling out distance education as a way of increasing access in cost-effective ways. Distance education refers to a mode of delivering education and training beyond the conventional face-to-face setting. It involves a mixture of delivery strategies whereby structured learning takes place away from campus and away from the lecturer. In this mode of

delivery, print, audio, or other teaching and learning technologies can be used. In distance education, the learner is in control of the learning process. Thus, an essential aspect of this mode of delivery is design for independent and flexible learning to take place for students who are not physically on campus. The Southern Africa Development Community (2004) reaffirms that distance education, otherwise known as open and distance learning (ODL), is the key to improving access to education and reducing inequalities in the provision of education.⁴

ODL institutions in Africa are becoming more popular with students not only because of the flexibility of learning offered, but also because of the lower fees they charge. Studying by distance also does not require that students spend resources on rented accommodation, something that is becoming prohibitively costly in most conventional universities and their environs. Thus, higher education in the region is characterised by:

- transformation of conventional universities into dual-mode institutions
- rolling out of eLearning programmes
- large numbers of students enrolled in ODL programmes

The number of open universities in Africa is sharply increasing. Examples include the long-standing University of South Africa, the Open University of Tanzania, the Zimbabwe Open University, Botswana Open University, Zambia Open University, the National Open University of Nigeria, and the Open University of Sudan. Most of these open universities are by far the biggest single universities in their respective jurisdictions in terms of enrolment. In the spirit of openness and to widen access, these universities differ from conventional face-to-face institutions in that they have more relaxed entry requirements. They also support more flexible forms of learning in terms of where, when and how people can study. They accommodate any student, irrespective of age.

In addition to these open universities, almost all conventional universities in the region have established centres/colleges of ODL that offer distance education programmes.

Think about the number of universities in your country that offer distance education. They probably enrol quite a significant percentage of all higher education students in your country, and this trend is likely to continue.

As highlighted at the beginning of this course, this module is not on higher education generally. Rather, it is concerned with the quality of

⁴ Murangi, H. (2017). *Managing the transition from conventional to open schooling: A case study of Namibia* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. University of Pretoria, South Africa.

higher education provision in Africa. The foregoing section simply helps you appreciate key dynamics that have profound implications for the quality of higher education in the region. Given that increasing numbers of students now go through distance education, it is important to ensure that such offerings are of high quality. The importance of investing in appropriate and effective quality assurance approaches that have the potential to enhance the quality of distance education provisioning can therefore not be overemphasised.



Learning activity 1.3: Discussion forum

1. Describe how distance education is quality assured in your university or country.
2. What challenges arise in enhancing the quality of such education?
3. Give your opinion on the quality of distance education offered in your country. Provide reasons for your opinion.
4. Read case studies 4 and 5 in Resource 3 (pages 53–57),⁵ then give your own account of how distance education is generally quality assured in Africa.

Commentary

You will notice from the case studies that developing and working with carefully defined quality criteria helps in guiding practitioners on aspects that need particular attention when rolling out distance education. This applies not only to distance education but to any mode of provision. Quality criteria provide improvement guidelines at the departmental, institutional and national levels.

You will also have noticed from the case studies that distance education curricula need to be customised to particular contexts in Africa. Unless this is done, the curricula remain irrelevant and may not meet the needs of students and the local market.

1.4 The disruptive nature of educational technologies

The advent of new information and communication technologies has profoundly changed the way education is deployed and how learning takes place. Bates (2015)⁶ identifies various ways in which technology is used to deploy higher education: online learning,

⁵ ADEA. (2002). *Open and distance learning in Sub-Saharan Africa: A literature survey on policy and practice*. Report prepared for ADEA. Paris: ADEA. Available at http://www.adeanet.org/clearinghouse/sites/default/files/docs/dol_02_op_enlrn_en.pdf.

⁶ Bates, A. W. (2015). *Teaching in a digital age: Guidelines for designing teaching and learning*. Vancouver, Canada: Tony Bates Associates Ltd. Available at <https://www.tonybates.ca/teaching-in-a-digital-age/>.

blended learning, flipped learning, hybrid learning, flexible learning, and ODL. He notes that although these terminologies are used interchangeably, there are significant differences in their meanings. He further observes that these forms of education, once considered somewhat esoteric and out of the mainstream of conventional education, are increasingly taking on greater significance and in some cases becoming mainstream. In fact, many university students now prefer to learn through technology, as it facilitates flexible learning. It enhances collaborative interactions and engagement with peers in the same institution and across institutions. Students also find it easy to look for information on their own. Through technology-enabled learning, coupled with guidance from the course facilitator, independent learning can be promoted as more preferable than the transmission method where students sit and listen to a professor for hours.

Use of educational technology in teaching and learning

Literature abounds on the affordances of educational technology in teaching and learning. Educational technologies have great potential to enhance the quality of learning if they are used innovatively enough. It is, however, important to realise that it is not the technology that should be given priority, but rather the attendant pedagogical approaches. Technology is brought in as an enabler in the learning process, to support a particular pedagogical approach. The single most important factor in technology-supported learning is learning design. Unless academics are skilled in designing learning, the benefits of using technology in teaching and learning might never be fully realised.

As you will appreciate, there is a wide continuum of the infinite ways in which technology can be used in teaching and learning in higher education. Many factors influence what and how educational technology is used, particularly in Africa, where institutions face a myriad of challenges regarding the use of technology generally. We will discuss some of these challenges later in this module.

Increasingly, there is a shift in higher education from the conventional education delivery mode to blended, off-campus learning. Figure 1 illustrates the whole range of possibilities that now exist in terms of teaching and learning in higher education. The grid below contains two important axes to consider when interpreting mode of delivery: spatial distance from campus (whether learning takes place on campus or remotely) and the extent to which learning takes place online.

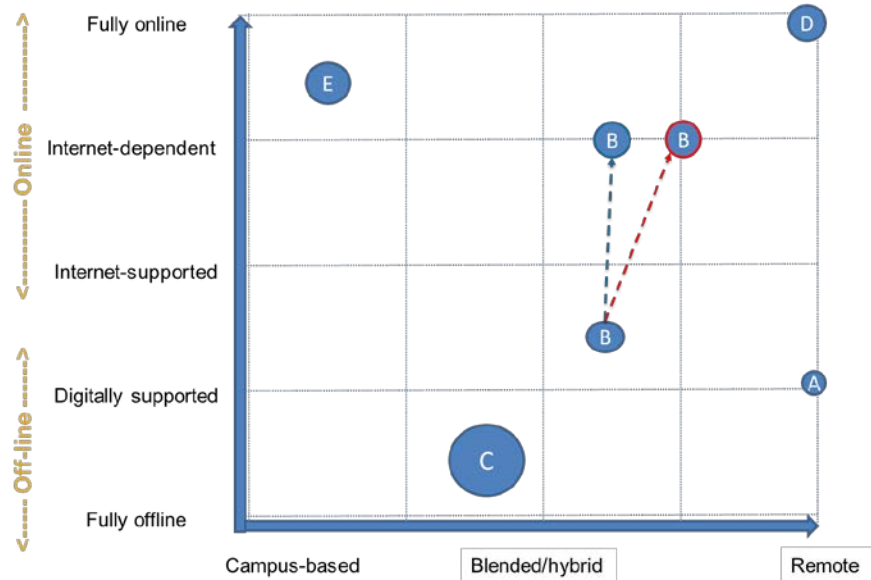


Figure 1. Use of technology in teaching and learning. Source: CHE (2014).⁷

Important to note on the grid is that technology can be used in different ways to support learning, whether it is on-campus or off-campus learning. A programme in an institution may gradually shift from being a digitally supported blended programme to being a remote programme that is Internet dependent. As the grid shows, countless delivery modes can be used. In an institution, it is important to locate where a particular programme sits on the grid, and then determine key quality aspects to be addressed.



Learning activity 1.4.1: Wiki collaborative editing post

As part of a small group, participate in a wiki. Study the grid in Figure 1, and take turns posting your responses to the following questions:

- Describe the learning activities that are possible at A, D and E.
- Draw a sketch of the grid above, and with an arrow, show the trend in delivery modes at your local universities.
- What are the challenges your institution is facing in moving programmes from being fully offline and campus based to fully online programmes offered remotely?

⁷ Council on Higher Education (CHE). (2014). *Distance higher education programmes in a digital era: Good practice guide*. Pretoria, South Africa: CHE. Available at https://www.saide.org.za/documents/CHE_-_Distance_Higher_Education.pdf

Challenges of using educational technology in African universities

Experience in working with African universities shows they face many challenges when it comes to using technology in teaching and learning. Factors include human capacity, infrastructure, student profiles and resource provision.

Learning management systems

As highlighted above, many universities in Africa are shifting from traditional forms of lecturing, instead encouraging students to access course content, including assignments and associated feedback, on learning management systems (LMSs). The LMSs used in African universities ranges from open-source varieties, such as MOODLE, Canvas and SAKAI, to proprietary types, such as Blackboard. Some institutions also develop their own customised LMSs using their internal technical expertise or outsourcing such resources. How choices are made regarding the type of LMS to invest in is quite a complex matter, as all of them have advantages and disadvantages.

Generally, LMSs fall into three broad categories: proprietary, open-source and cloud-based. The vendor of a proprietary LMS is generally accountable for the good functioning of the system, thereby relieving an institution from the responsibility of managing it and ensuring that it functions properly all the time so as to avoid disadvantaging students. The main disadvantage of a proprietary LMS is that an institution has to shoulder the costs for all-the-time service. It also does not give much room for customisation to suit the particular needs of an institution. Open-source LMSs are often free, which makes them quite attractive to institutions. The only time payment is required is when an institution decides to make additions to the already designed platform. “An open-source LMS is easy to use and also customizable. You can access the source code and personalize your learning portal, add features, and even fix bugs. That’s the beauty of a system built by a collaborative community” (Bran, 2018).⁸ The main disadvantage of an open-source LMS is that it comes with some hidden costs, such as hosting fees, back-ups, extra storage space and more technical support (Bran, 2018).

A cloud-based LMS has very low initial costs and is easily scalable. In his blog post, Bran underscores this advantage, which is usually very attractive to rapidly expanding universities: “it works the same if this year you use it for 200 students and 20 teachers and the next one you grow to 1000 students and 50 teachers” (Bran, 2017). There is,

⁸ Bran, L. (2017). What type of LMS is best for your school: proprietary, open source, or cloud-based? [Blog post]. Available at <http://blog.neolms.com/type-lms-best-school-proprietary-open-source-cloud-based/>.

however, apparently insufficient security for data associated with cloud-based LMSs.

Quality issues in using LMSs

There are key quality issues that have to be considered when using LMSs in higher education. Of course, these issues vary according to the type of LMS. There are, however, general aspects that should always be considered if learning gains are to be maximised. These factors include security of student information, scalability of the system to accommodate growing numbers of users, ease of navigation by students, adaptation of the system to changing needs, cost of ownership, general management of the LMS, and reporting capabilities.⁹ A good way of looking at quality aspects of an LMS is to classify them under purely technological aspects, user-related aspects and pedagogical aspects.

To help you understand how you can evaluate the quality of your LMS, read pages 11–16 of Resource 4 provided in this course: Zaharias and Pappas, “Quality Management of Learning Management Systems.”



Learning activity 1.4.2: Discussion forum

1. What are the common LMS types used by universities in your country?
2. In your experience, what are the key quality issues associated with an LMS?
3. Talk to staff and students who use the LMS in any university of your choice. In Table 1, list the positive and negative points they raise about the LMS. Upload your table to the Moodle forum for this activity.

Table 1. Staff and student opinions on the LMS they use

	Positive points	Negative points
Staff		
Students		

1.5 Brain drain

African universities are threatened by a decline in scholarship that is a direct result of the ageing professoriate. In many countries, experienced professors with a track record for research and international links either have retired or are close to retirement. This problem is worsened by the ever-increasing trend of brain drain of

⁹ Zaharias, P., & Pappas, C. (2016). Quality management of learning management systems: A user experience perspective. *Current Issues in Emerging eLearning*, 3(1), 58–84. Available at <https://scholarworks.umb.edu/ciee/vol3/iss1/5/>.

qualified staff. In Africa, the latter phenomenon is characterised by movement of academic staff to the developed world. On the continent, there is also movement of qualified staff from northern countries to South Africa. Arnold (2001) argues that universities in the SSA region increasingly find it difficult to attract and retain world-class faculty members in the face of attractive offers from South African universities, research institutes and multinational corporations.¹⁰ Inability to attract world-class professoriate staff has huge quality implications in African universities.

For African economies to develop more rapidly and for the continent to participate meaningfully in the global economy, brain drain must be checked. The brain drain caused by many tertiary education graduates in SSA leaving their home countries after completing their graduate studies not only is a waste of scarce public resources but also is detrimental to capacity development in these societies (Davas et al., 2017).¹¹ Thus, integrated higher education markets, which are a direct result of globalisation discourses on liberalisation, pose a serious threat to peripheral institutions in terms of competition from metropolitan South African and overseas universities.

The shortage of experienced professors in African universities has resulted in the increasing use of what has euphemistically come to be known as “green sticks.” These are young graduates from honours and master’s programmes who are engaged as academics while they also study for their PhDs, usually in the same institutions where they teach. While this is an innovative way of sustaining academic programmes and indeed of replenishing the rapidly depleting pool of academics in Africa, overreliance on such “green sticks” has the potential to compromise sound scholarship if not carefully managed.

Experienced professors normally belong to intricate networks of disciplinary communities of practice. Such academic linkages form critical pathways through which knowledge is disseminated across the entire breadth and length of the globe. Young academics lack this capital and need to work alongside established professors for them to master expertise in curriculum development and in conducting sound research.



Learning activity 1.5: Reflective learning journal post

1. Compile a profile of the academic staff in one university you know in your country. Use the template in Table 2 below:

¹⁰ Arnold, D. (2001) Globalisation of higher education: What it means for India. Paper presented at the Roundtable on Internationalization of Higher Education in India. Association of Indian Universities, Karnataka, 26–28 February 2001.

¹¹ Davas, P., Gao, S., Shen, Y., & Bawany, B. (2017). *Sharing higher education's promise beyond the few in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Washington, DC: World Bank.

Table 2. Staff qualifications in chosen university

Qualifications	Teaching experience			
	0–4 years	5–9 years	10–15 years	+15 years
No degree				
Bachelor's				
Honours				
Master's				
PhD				

2. What limitations are likely to be posed by the staffing profile you have compiled?

Upload your table and your comment on limitations to your reflective learning journal.

Unit summary



In this unit, you've learned about important trends that shape higher education in Africa, each of which has a profound effect on the quality of education provided. These trends include the imbalance between demand and supply of higher education; exponential increases in enrolments in traditional universities amidst declining public funding; increasing private provision; diversification of modes of provision characterized by increasing distance education; increasing use of educational technologies; and the challenges of brain drain. All these factors have profound implications for the quality of higher education in Africa.

Assignment 1



In the wake of the trends highlighted in this unit, what are the key elements that need to be monitored in a university to ensure quality of delivery?

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Unit 2

Challenges of Higher Education in Africa

Introduction

Unit 2 takes you through the main challenges faced by higher education providers in Africa. Most of these challenges are a result of the trends highlighted in Unit 1. Thus, there is a direct link between the first two units of this module, as the trends lead to challenges. However, it is always important to remember that the African continent is not a homogeneous region, particularly as far as higher education provision is concerned. The extent of the challenges highlighted in this unit therefore varies from context to context. It is, though, true that most of the challenges encountered are common across countries and across institutions. You will be asked to compare the challenges highlighted in the unit with those of your institution, drawing from your experience.



Unit Outcomes

Upon completion of this unit, you will be able to:

- explain how human resource constraints are impacting on the quality of higher education in Africa
- give examples of how public funding of higher education affects the quality of higher education in your institution
- assess the relevance of higher education to local market needs
- appreciate the importance of capacity building in quality assurance in your university

2.1 Declining experienced professoriate

In Unit 1, we discussed the challenges related to a declining professoriate staff, which have the potential to erode the academic standing of African institutions. In the region, there are institutions that operate not only with young, inexperienced staff who have no doctorates, but also with extreme staff shortages.

The main challenge of relying heavily on underqualified and inexperienced staff is that staff members are unable to benchmark their performance and that of their students with reference to international standards. This is a key quality issue in higher education, as the quality of a university is compared with that of other

institutions, as are their graduates. It is also true that in a globalised world, a university trains not just for the local context but for any market in the world. This phenomenon — the “glocalisation”¹² of higher education — is increasingly gaining currency in university training.

Staff with wide experience working in diverse university environments are generally assumed to be more competent and well versed with research, course development and teaching methods. Such staff also have a better chance of being or becoming more networked and having opportunities for sharing ideas at an international level. Experience in teaching elsewhere helps to bring a diversity of academic cultures into the university, apart from improving practice through the exchange of ideas. Academic collaborative activities enable academics to view issues of knowledge and knowledge dissemination from multiple perspectives, and they have the overall effect of adding value to staff practice. Overreliance on “green sticks” militates against the achievement of sound scholarship in a university. This is notwithstanding the fact that all academics have a starting point and grow into seasoned experts. Where such novices work alongside experienced professors, they stand a better chance of developing sound scholarship more quickly than where they are left to feel their way on their own.



Learning activity 2.1: Journal post reflection

1. Suggest how the problem of declining experienced staff in universities in your country can be addressed.
2. What measures can be taken to ensure that universities in Africa remain sufficiently well staffed to meet their academic goals?

2.2 Lack of sufficient resources for institutions

With a few exceptions, universities in Africa are grossly under resourced. The growing enrolments discussed in Unit 1 have resulted in the spreading of available resources more thinly across institutions and per student enrolled. So while higher education budgets in many countries are increasing, allocation per student has actually gone down over the years. This places a lot of strain on the smooth running of universities in many African countries. Declining public funding militates against the achievement of high-quality academic goals. Many universities in the region suffer from one or more of the following: research is poorly funded; laboratory facilities are inadequate; textbook resources are scarce; there is an acute

¹² Taking care of the local imperatives while you draw upon and are informed by the global.

shortage of student accommodation, resulting in many students living under appalling conditions where they are exploited; many students go hungry and cannot concentrate on their studies; and most governments cannot afford to pay student grants to alleviate challenges faced by students from poor socio-economic backgrounds. In many instances, class sizes are so big that lecturers can hardly give attention to individual students. Even marking students' assignments and providing timely, valuable feedback are challenges for academics because of large class sizes. The all-important aspect of tracking students to monitor their performance and provide timely support is not possible. The sum total of all these challenges is compromised quality of scholarship in universities.

Given the role of educational technology in enhancing teaching and learning today, it is important for universities to provide students with sufficient bandwidth to enable them to access information from various sources and maximise their interactions with peers and course facilitators on the institutional LMS. Where Internet connectivity is not stable, neither students nor lecturers can afford to harness the potential of such technology to improve the quality of learning.

Apart from Internet challenges resulting primarily from limited bandwidth, electricity supply is highly unreliable in many countries, and this has negative effects on university functions. In spite of the abundance of sunlight in the region, there is very little use of solar energy to augment the scarce grid power in African universities.



Learning activity 2.2: Discussion forum

1. How does the trend in Table 3 compare with the trend in your local universities?

Table 3. Academic qualifications and publications of surveyed staff at three universities in southern Africa¹³

		Number of Published Articles in a Five-Year Period					
		0	1-4	5-9	10-14	15+	Total
Qualifications	honours	2	1	0	0	0	3
	master's	18	19	2	0	0	39
	doctorate	4	21	16	8	6	55
	Total	24	41	18	8	6	97

¹³ Source: Mhlanga, E. (2013). *Quality assurance in higher education in southern Africa: Challenges and opportunities*. Oxford: Peter Lang.

2. What are the major constraints on research and publications in your local public universities?
3. Suggest how your local universities can improve both the number and the quality of research publications.

Commentary

One of the criteria for judging the quality of university performance is the level of research output, in terms of both quantity and quality. It is through research that universities generate knowledge and discover important innovations. In Activity 2.2, you analysed Table 3, which shows the results of a study conducted at three universities in three different countries in southern Africa. It was evident that research output was directly linked to the staff's academic qualifications. Of course, this is notwithstanding other variables, such as workload, funding support and incentive schemes that are linked to research and publications.

2.3 Inadequate relevant teaching and learning materials

In the preceding section, we highlighted general resource constraints as one of the factors affecting the quality of learning and research. A key challenge faced by many African universities is an acute shortage of teaching and learning resources. This has a negative effect on both lecturers' and students' work. Clearly, certain disciplines are more affected than others. Many African universities can scarcely afford to import expensive books from overseas sources due to cuts in public subsidies, nor can they afford to subscribe to important databases that are sources of good journal articles. In some institutions, students make do with hardly anything more than just the lecturer's notes. The dearth of teaching and learning resources compromises the quality of student engagement with content, which can, in turn, seriously impede the development of analytical and problem-solving skills. It also deprives students of the opportunity to get multiple perspectives on issues, particularly in the social sciences.

Thus, the quality of teaching and learning as well as of research outputs is negatively affected by the acute shortages of teaching and learning resources in African universities. Where such resources are available, they tend to lack relevance to the African context, since most of them are developed in foreign contexts and not necessarily for Africa. To the student, the language and the culture are foreign, and often academics do not contextualise the materials.

Use of open educational resources

One way of alleviating resource constraints in Africa is to draw on the wealth of open educational resources (OER) that now exist in many databases. OER are any type of educational material in the public

domain, or resources introduced with an open licence. These resources are free, and anyone can legally copy, use, adapt and reshare them without seeking any permission from the original creator. OER range from textbooks to curricula, syllabi, lecture notes, assignments, tests, projects, audio, video and animation. Redesigning university curricula provides a good opportunity for integrating OER in the teaching and learning processes in African universities.

Other than the plethora of rich teaching and learning resources that are published with an open licence and are readily available in various databases, there are plenty of courses that are also openly licensed that universities can freely access and adapt to suit their contexts. Through such adaptations, curricula can be made more responsive and therefore more relevant to the needs of African economies, and learning-support resources can be made available.



Learning activity 2.3: Reflection

- a. Based on your experience in local universities, post in the discussion forum your opinions about limited resource availability in any local university you are familiar with.
- b. How does this availability affect the quality of teaching and learning in the university?
- c. Read Resource 5: Understanding OER, which delineates some of the benefits and challenges of using OER in teaching and learning in higher education. The resource also gives you information on different types of open licences, so you can better understand how to ethically use openly licensed resources.
- d. What is your understanding of OER, and what potential do they have to enhance the quality of educational provision at a higher education institution?



Commentary

Your answer to question (a) might have included: lack of critical engagement by students as a result of not being exposed to other people's ideas through wide reading; poor research by academic staff and postgraduate students; and overuse of transmission methods of teaching, leading to rote learning, among other issues.

From the reading, you will have discerned that OER are educational resources distinguished by the licence under which they are published — open licences that allow free use without seeking permission or paying for a licence.

If resource provision is key to a university's functions, then we need to have ways of evaluating resources as an important aspect of quality in a university. Thus, quality assurance frameworks that take into account the availability of sufficient resources for a particular student enrolment and the quality of such resources need to be developed. We will revisit this aspect in Unit 3.

2.4 Misalignment between academic education and the world of work

Governments and the general public invest in higher education because they believe that it yields both social and individual benefits. In fact, university education is generally perceived as a strategy for economic development. This link between university education and the market is increasingly being questioned in Africa. To the economist, this issue is about the benefits of public investment in higher education: Does university education yield anticipated social benefits?

Linked to this aspect is the high rate of graduate unemployment that is rampant in many African countries (and, indeed, the world over). Increasingly, graduate employability is becoming a key measure of quality in higher education.



Learning activity 2.4.1: Reflection

Do the following exercise as part of your reflection on the employability of higher education graduates in your country.

- a. Put a tick (✓) in the appropriate box for each of the statements/questions numbered 1–8. Share your answers in the discussion forum.

Table 4. Increasing student employability

Employability Statement/Question		Response	
		Yes	No
1.	Can you give an estimate of the rate of graduate employability in your country?		
2.	In your university, do you conduct tracer studies to establish what happens to your students after they graduate?		
3.	Is there a requirement by your government or your national quality assurance agency to conduct tracer studies?		
4.	Does your university offer any form of career guidance as part of university education?		
5.	In developing academic programmes, do universities in your country generally consult industry?		
6.	Given the scarcity of employment for university graduates, should governments curb participation in higher education and cuts in public subsidies?		
7.	Many graduates from a university or universities in my country need support in searching for jobs.		
8.	Graduate unemployment has both social and individual costs.		

- b. Select any one aspect you responded to in the table, and explain how you think it contributes to employability in your context.

Commentary on activity 2.4.1

Saint (2000)¹⁴ aptly captures the main challenges faced in higher education in Africa. These include: inability to accommodate the volume and variety of student demand; education that is too costly and not sufficiently relevant to the labour market; teaching methods that are too inflexible to accommodate a diverse student body; educational quality that is not assured, and erosion of the university sense of academic community. Your interest in this module is quality assurance (QA), therefore it is worthwhile pursuing this aspect in order to find a solution to it.



Learning activity 2.4.2: Journal post

1. In your view, what measures can be taken to ensure that university education in your country is relevant?
2. In Section 2.1 of this module, your attention was drawn to the notion of the “glocalisation” of higher education. While it is desirable to make higher education relevant for the local context, how can you ensure that it is also relevant for the global market? Should QA of higher education take this aspect into consideration, and if so, why?

2.5 Lack of capacity in quality assurance of university educations

In many universities in the region, the staff are not familiar with explicit QA processes and procedures. QA in these universities is traditionally associated with various university committee processes, external examinations, and occasional student feedback on teaching processes in a course. Thus, there is a somewhat narrow perception of QA. Much of what happens in terms of the teaching and learning processes is kept private by course instructors. Academics are generally not familiar with explicit regular review exercises that seek to establish how well they are performing based on clearly defined standards. They are not used to the practice of collecting evidence of what they do and what impact they are having on student learning.

As you will discover in Unit 3, in most parts of the world, there has been a shift from implicit forms of QA to QA activities involving the development of explicit QA policies, the establishment of QA

¹⁴ Saint, W. (2000). Tertiary distance education and technology in Sub-Saharan Africa [Working paper]. *Education and Technology Technical Notes Series*, vol. 5, no. 1. New York: World Bank. Available at <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/569781468767434481/Tertiary-distance-education-and-technology-in-Sub-Saharan-Africa>.

structures (in the form of QA offices or units and personnel), and the regular evaluation of institutional performance.

As Woodhouse (2000, p. 21) notes, most agencies require a higher education institution (HEI) to provide some information about itself, perhaps with some evaluative comments. At the other end of the spectrum, the best external QA agencies stress self-review as the basis for an external review. Here, the HEI is expected to carry out a full self-review, indicating the state of quality in the HEI and, in some cases, also how the HEI informs itself about the state of quality. The agency then validates the results of this review.¹⁵ However, a major challenge in universities in Africa is that not many people are skilled in conducting these reviews.



Learning activity 2.5: Reflection

In this activity, you are invited to think of aspects that you would need to consider when addressing each of the challenges in Table 5. You can draw on your experience, or you can base your answers on any of the resources you have read earlier in this course.

Table 5. Addressing quality challenges

Challenge		Important Measures to Take
1.	Lack of experienced professors	
2.	Shortage of contextually relevant teaching and learning resources	
3.	Poor student support services	
4.	Misalignment between educational programmes and the world of work	
5.	Poor student assessment systems	
6.	Lack of human capacity in quality assurance	
7.	Handling of large numbers of students from poor socio-economic backgrounds	

¹⁵ Woodhouse, D. (2000). External quality assurance: National and international aspects. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 14(2), 20–27.

Unit summary



In this unit, you learned about some of the main challenges that African universities face, which tend to impact on the quality of their educational provision. This, in turn, has a negative impact on the quality of some of the graduates emerging from African universities. Many challenges were highlighted, such as a declining professoriate with relevant experience, lack of sufficient resourcing of institutions amid rising enrolments, a culture of not developing contextually relevant teaching and learning materials, misalignment between academic education and the world of work, and a lack of human capacity in the explicit quality assurance of university services.

These factors strongly influence the outcomes of higher education and the benefits society enjoys from investments in that level of education. Increasingly, universities in Africa are criticised for being white elephants whose products do not fit in well into society. This speaks to the need to review our notions of QA in higher education and include processes that happen after graduation.

To enhance quality in higher education, we need to develop QA frameworks with clearly defined quality standards in all the areas where challenges are faced.

Assignment



Explain the main challenges affecting the quality of university education in your country, and describe what QA measures have been put in place to try to address these challenges.

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Woodhouse, D. (2000). External quality assurance: National and international aspects. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 14(2), 20–27.

Unit 3

Addressing the Quality of Higher Education in Africa

Introduction

In this unit, you will learn about the concepts of quality and quality assurance (QA) as they apply to higher education. The unit introduces you to QA approaches that address its core topics: continuous self-improvement in an institution, and monitoring of progress through the collection and analysis of data. The unit will familiarise you with internal review processes and the whole process of completing the loop to institute improvement



Unit Outcomes

Upon completion of this unit, you will be able to:

- explain what quality and quality assurance mean in an African higher education context
- describe approaches that you can use to enhance quality in your academic unit/institution
- conduct small-scale self-reviews (involving a programme or course, a department or a faculty) and develop improvement plans
- appreciate the importance of self-reviews by collecting and analysing data for quality improvement

3.1 Our understanding of quality in higher education

Both quality and quality assurance are very elusive terms, particularly as applied to higher education. There is always disagreement over what constitutes quality higher education, with some people also arguing about who should determine that quality.

Although you may not be able to define quality, I am sure you can name its attributes. Think of how you chose which institution to attend, or how you choose the institution to which you send your child or a relative.

Conceptualisation of quality and quality assurance

The importance of definition

Any discourse on quality assurance should start by clarifying the terms “quality” and “quality assurance.” Such conceptual clarification is important, as it makes it possible for the various stakeholders in a university to share common goals regarding the quality of the education provided to students. As Barnett (1994) asserts, university institutions carry particular social and cultural identities.¹⁶ The debate on quality can therefore be seen as a battleground where these identities are brought to the surface and pitched against each other. Barnett (1994, p. 71) contends:

Consequently, our methods of evaluating quality spring from more deep-seated beliefs as to what counts as quality. But, and more significantly, these beliefs over what counts as quality themselves derive from more fundamental assumptions as to the ideal nature of higher education.



Learning activity 3.1.1: Reflection

The way an institution perceives quality has a profound influence on the QA policies that are developed and the quality enhancement strategies that are adopted.

Reflect on whether this statement is true of your institution. Provide reasons for your answer.

As increasing numbers of people throughout the world participate in higher education, issues of quality have begun to occupy a more central position. Even more significant has been the change in the way people perceive the quality of university education in general, and the role of a university in particular. Generally, the key stakeholders in most higher education systems are the state, the market and the academy. These are shown in Figure 2.

¹⁶ Barnett, R. (1994). Power, enlightenment and quality evaluation. *European Journal of Education*, 29(2), 165–179.



Figure 2. Key university stakeholders: state, market and academy

These stakeholders typically have a difficult time reaching a consensus on what purposes university institutions should serve and how they should operate.

In QA, it is always important to understand what is to be assured. If you work in a university, you will probably know the sort of things that you always pay particular attention to and why. You also probably recall what other people always raise concerns about.

Perhaps the most comprehensive and traditional definition of quality is provided by Harvey and Green.¹⁷ The two authors give the following five conceptualisations of quality (1993, p. 11):

- quality as exceptional (excellence)
- quality as perfection
- quality as fitness for purpose
- quality as value for money
- quality as transformational

These conceptualisations are discussed below.

Quality as excellence

In this conceptualisation, quality is perceived as something distinctive, something special, which cannot be attained by many. The notion of centres of excellence in higher education probably derives from this conception. Mission statements for most universities suggest the excellence notion of quality.

¹⁷ Harvey, L., & Green, D. (1993). Defining quality. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, 18(1), 9–34.

Quality as perfection

As *perfection*, quality relates closely to the notion of “zero defect” commonly employed in industrial settings, where physical products of a production chain have to meet the exact design specifications of the desired product, in its perfect form, without any defects (Harvey & Green, 1993, p. 15).

Quality as fitness for purpose and as value for money

Fitness for purpose is generally the quality conception of stakeholders external to the university community, who normally put a heavy premium on the instrumental function of higher education. The market, for instance, looks at the ability of institutions to produce graduates who are immediately functional in the world of work. Graduates have to fit into the workplace without compromising efficiency profits. In Lockett’s view (2005, p. 23), QA approaches that are informed by rationality external to the educational institution and that regard students as clients, citizens or potential voters subscribe to this understanding of quality as fitness for purpose.¹⁸

This conception of quality is often linked to governments wish to align the output of higher education institutions with broad national goals and to use universities as an apparatus to address broader social problems. In this sense, the fitness-for-purpose conception of quality is closely linked to the *value for money* conception — hence the accountability nature of this approach to QA. Institutions that subscribe to this notion of quality extensively involve professional bodies and the employers of university graduates to specify their requirements and to accredit their programmes.

The fitness-for-purpose definition of quality is a developmental approach to quality, and this is particularly significant for higher education. As customer specifications change with time, so do universities’ aims. Bradbery (1991) contends that the product remains a quality product by maintaining its value to the customer.¹⁹ The assumption here is that the quality of university delivery is not static; rather, it is necessarily dynamic, as it is responsive to changes in the work environment.

The notion of fitness for purpose is often confused with a different but related concept: *fitness of purpose*. Whilst the former speaks to the alignment of an institution’s activities with its mission, the latter relates to relevance to the community and society the university

¹⁸ Lockett, K. (2005). A critical policy analysis of the proposed national quality assurance system for South African higher education. In M. Smout (ed.), *The Decade Ahead: Challenges for Quality Assurance in South African Higher Education*. Pretoria, South Africa: SAUVCA.

¹⁹ Bradbery, P. (1991). The process is the content. In R. Atkinson & C. McBeath (eds.), *Quality in Distance Education: ASPESA Forum 1991* (pp. 387–397). Bathurst, Australia: Australian and South Pacific External Studies Association.

serves. The quality question to ask in fitness *of* purpose is whether the university is still a relevant institution in society.

Quality as transformation

Quality as *transformation* connotes pedagogical implications — the extent of transformation that occurs in the learner as a consequence of the learning process. Quality in this case is defined in terms of the “value added” in the learner, and learner assessment seeks to establish the amount of such value added. The amount of value added is not tangible, and its quantification is problematic, yet this is what the academy uses to determine value.



Learning activity 3.1.2: Reflection

A. Conception of quality

- a. Think of the conception of quality as exceptional from an ODL point of view. Explain one aspect in which you consider your university or any one university in your country to excel. Post your explanation in the discussion forum.
- b. Read at least two posts from your peers, then post your feedback on the issues raised.
- c. Does the mission statement of your institution in any way suggest the excellence notion of quality? Explain your response



B. Definition of quality

- a. In your view, how applicable is the perfection definition of quality in your institution? Explain.
- b. Read posts by two of your peers. What are their general views on this conception of quality?
- c. How does your university measure the value added to graduates?

3.2 Manifestations of conceptions of quality

While these various perceptions of quality are treated separately in the literature, it is important to note that in real practice, several notions of the concept manifest themselves in the QA policies and practices of any given institution. In South Africa, for instance, “the Higher Education Quality Committee’s understanding of quality encompasses fitness for purpose, value for money, and individual and social transformation, within an overarching fitness of purpose

framework” (CHE, 2005, p. 4).²⁰ This all-encompassing national perception of quality obviously influences the approach universities take to implementing their QA arrangements. For instance, the QA policy of one of the public universities in the country reads:

University documents²¹ show that the University regards quality as maintaining the standing we claim we have whilst attaining the goals we set (“fitness for purpose”²²) and where possible exceeding our standing (excellence²³). The claims we make, and our desire for excellence, are not limited to the academic realm; service excellence is espoused by our support staff. Quality also concerns making the best use of resources (efficiency/“value for money”) and being accountable to individuals and the communities which we affect, be they individual students or staff (“transformation”), local communities, the nation (“fitness of purpose”) or international research communities. Quality thus lies in attaining, maintaining and improving our excellence in learning, teaching and research (both [*sic*] of which include community engagement), and in the functions which support the core functions of the University. (CHE, 2005, p. 5)

This example illustrates how particular perceptions of quality influence the kinds of QA policies that institutions develop and where emphasis is placed when it comes to implementation of those policies. This is in keeping with the trend shown in the literature, where QA practices tend to draw mainly from value-for-money (efficiency) and excellence rationales; thus, the trend is one of QA practices that privilege self-improvement (to enhance institutional excellence) but operate within an accountability framework.²⁴

²⁰ CHE. (2004). *Higher Education Quality Committee: Framework for Institutional Audits*. Pretoria, South Africa: CHE.

²¹ This references the Wits mission statement as well as institutional values in the strategic plan.

²² The terms in quotation marks are all contained in the definition of quality of the Higher Education Quality Committee.

²³ Excellence is a term we use perhaps too lightly; what it means for us should be something that we debate and consider intellectually. In the context of this quoted document, the term is used to mean the attainment or pursuit of academically desirable standards — of being very good at what we consciously choose to do.

²⁴ Kristensen (1997), cited in Harvey, L. (2002). Evaluation for what? *Teaching in Higher Education*, 7(3), 245–261. Harvey, L. (1996). Quality is not free! Quality monitoring alone will not improve quality. Lecture presented at the 18th Annual EAIR Forum on Higher Education in the Market

What institutions seek to achieve is informed by and is also within the interest of the wider (academic) society. Thus, quality is first perceived in terms of societal expectations — that is, the expectations of employers, like professional bodies and industry. A blend of the customer-satisfaction and the fitness-for-purpose views of quality seems to form a significant dimension of the conception of quality for most institutions. The obvious implication of this is the involvement of external stakeholders, such as professional organisations, in quality assuring academic programmes offered by universities.

The relativist notion of quality

Relativism holds that like beauty, quality is perceived differently by different people — it resides in the eyes of the beholder! Obviously, this is a dangerous position to work with in a university.

Think of some of the challenges that are likely to be faced by using such a relativist notion of quality.

The objectivist notion of quality

In this view, quality is something that can easily be defined and measured using clearly defined standards and benchmarks. It is objective.

Quality as standards that are set

This perspective holds that in education, it is important to understand quality in terms of standards that an institution sets itself to achieve within given timeframes.

Quality assurance

Quality assurance refers to the arrangements that are put in place to ensure that desired goals are achieved. It is a proactive rather than a reactive process.



Learning activity 3.2: Reflection

- a. Explain which conception of quality you would choose for your institution or country and why.
- b. Post your views in the discussion forum.

3.3 Approaches to quality enhancement in higher education

As a concept, QA is different from quality. Harvey (2006) argues that the difference between **quality** and **quality assurance** is

Place: Strategies of Survival and Success. Budapest University, Hungary, 25–28 August.

conceptually similar to that between the concept of intelligence and IQ tests, which purport to measure intelligence.

University institutions use various approaches to quality assure their processes. These include input from various university committees, feedback from students, progress reports and records, senate regulations to guide and check on compliance with expectations, and peer reviews. In Africa, the most common approach has traditionally been peer reviews, mainly of examination processes. Lately, many countries have established national quality agencies that oversee quality compliance by all institutions in a country. Thus, the main emphasis has tended to be on external QA by these agencies. To be effective, external QA should be premised on sound internal QA arrangements in an institution. It is the latter that have the potential to improve the quality of an institution. Thus, an effective QA framework should consist of external and internal QA mechanisms.

An effective quality assurance model for African higher education institutions

The primary aim of any QA model should be to improve the educational services of providers in order to maximise the benefits for learners. In this regard, consideration should be taken of the context for which a given QA system is designed in order to take sufficient care of the quality needs of institutions. Research has shown that some models of QA work better than others. Examples are bureaucratic rather than collegial models, or outward-looking (external) rather than inward-looking (internal) models. This is mainly because of where emphasis is placed in the QA system. In this unit, we understand a QA model to be a system of quality enhancement that consists of structures, instruments and processes. Structures are QA bureaus or units that are put in place and are supported by the necessary resources to enable them to coordinate, support and drive the QA agenda of an institution. Instruments are all the tools — like quality criteria, and review and reporting templates — that are used in the institution to achieve some type of uniformity. Processes are the actual QA activities that happen in an institution. Such a system is underpinned by a particular rationale premised on what quality higher education is and how it can be promoted. With regards to higher education in particular, people's understanding of higher education pedagogy has a strong bearing on what features they choose for a QA model.

The QA approach recommended here is premised on self-improvement. The model rests on the delicate balance between internal and external evaluation. In this case, internal evaluation consists of regular self-review processes by providers, based on explicitly defined quality standards, which are commonly developed and shared widely within an institution. The primary purpose of such self-reviews is to enlighten the institution on its strengths and weaknesses, on the basis of which improvement plans are made and implemented. This process is ongoing and self-driven. Thus, we advocate for a QA model with a strong internal dimension that plays the role of self-enlightenment and continuous self-improvement.

The second dimension of the proposed model is the external review. National quality agencies should have standing panels of trained reviewers consisting of people with expertise in the different disciplines and in QA. They should also have a good understanding of higher education — its purpose, its target market and how it should operate to meet its national and societal mandates. The team of reviewers is responsible for conducting programme reviews as per the programme of the national QA agency. In addition to conducting such reviews, the team should work together with the national agency in developing capacity for QA in institutions. This is particularly important in Africa, which has a dearth of such capacity.

The external dimension of the model involves monitoring and promoting quality in higher education institutions through national regulating policy and regular site visits to institutions by the QA agency. The purpose of the external dimension is to assure the general public, the educational community and other stakeholders that higher education offerings in the country are credible. Apart from giving institutions a positive public image, external quality regulation of providers also protects learners against possible malpractices in a system. Most importantly, the oversight role of the national agency gives it confidence to report to the public on the standards of higher education provision in the country, and to benchmark higher education practice to international standards.

Regularising quality assurance through policy

To deliver quality, an institution needs to formalise its actions through a QA policy that is stated explicitly and is well communicated to all parties in the entire university. An explicit QA policy spells out an institutional position on quality and the procedures and processes that are followed to enhance that quality. There is a sense in which a QA policy can be viewed as an institutional value position, a commitment to action that is demonstrable, defensible and externally verifiable. It creates awareness among the different actors within the institution of their roles in pushing forward the quality agenda of the institution. As any other policy does, a QA policy provides guidelines on what constitutes quality in an institution, and how that quality should be enhanced.

Harman's (1984, p. 13) view of policy is:

the implicit or explicit specification of courses of purposive action being followed or to be followed in dealing with a recognized problem or matter of concern, and directed towards the accomplishment of some intended or desired set of goals. Policy also can be thought of as a position or stance developed in

response to a problem or issue of conflict, and directed towards a particular objective.²⁵

Ideally, the policy statement is mirrored in the mission of the institution and is aligned with the national position. The statement is not simply a commitment by the institution to attain defined standards; it also guides and regulates the activities of all stakeholders within the institution. It directs efforts and investments, and it guides institutional planning. In the absence of policy, institutional activities are not harmonised, and people do not feel obliged to do certain things.

Institutional policy process

It is one thing to develop policy and yet another to implement the policy in a way that gives it effect in practice. Hence, the perception of policy as text on one hand and practice on the other is valid.



Learning activity 3.3.1: Journal

Read pages 1–4 of Harvey’s article (Resource 7) on understanding quality, and write a paragraph on your understanding of the difference between quality and QA. Upload your paragraph to your journal.



Learning activity 3.3.2: Discussion forum

For this activity, post your responses in the discussion forum.

- a. What are some of the factors that constrain effective implementation of such policy in the institution?
- b. Suggest the best ways of ensuring effective QA policy implementation in your institution.

Commentary

Institutional QA policy falls under the broad category of educational policy, which is now a field of study in its own right. If you are interested in understanding more about educational policy, do a Google search for resources on educational policy, and read at least two resources.

Content of a quality assurance policy

The contents and details of QA policies vary from context to context. In all instances, the guiding principle is whether the policy document provides sufficient guidance for practice in that context. If you are

²⁵ Harman, G. (1984). Conceptual and theoretical issues. In J. R. Hough (ed.), *Educational Policy: An International Survey* (pp. 13–29). London: Croom Helm.

asked to develop an institutional QA policy, you may wonder what you should include in the policy document.



Learning activity 3.3.3: Wiki entry

Refer to two examples of QA policies in the COL resource at the following link.

Resource 9: <http://oasis.col.org/bitstream/handle/11599/946/QA-Policies-OS-2015.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

What are the key aspects of an institutional QA policy?

Commentary

Remember that those are only examples; your policy does not need to resemble the examples given in that resource. It may have much more detail than what the examples show, but the principle of providing guidance remains.

Internal quality assurance

In this unit, we emphasise the importance of strengthening internal QA mechanisms in institutions as the hallmark of quality enhancement. This thrust is in keeping with the common argument that the responsibility for QA lies with the providing institution. Unless efforts are made to strengthen capacity to implement robust internal QA in an institution, universities might never develop a sound quality culture. It is important to support university stakeholders in changing their perceptions of QA, from something they do to meet the requirements of external stakeholders to processes they own and that serve their own purposes. The aim is to build a QA system that is internally driven and premised on a collegiality rationale. In section 3.6 of this unit, you will be exposed to additional practical ways of implementing effective internal QA in your institution.



Learning activity 3.3.4: Discussion forum

Read Resource 10 by Martin (2018), “How Internal Quality Assurance Can Drive Success.” Based on an international study that was conducted amongst higher education institutions, Martin reports on the different factors that motivate universities to implement internal QA.

Post your views on the following in the discussion forum:

- a. What are the differences between **government control** and **quality assurance** of higher education?
- b. How can internal quality assurance be rid of compliance and accountability notions?

Commentary

Government control, sometimes referred to as state interference, is different from QA in that in the latter, there is greater institutional autonomy and often, QA is the responsibility of a buffer organisation rather than of government.

To rid internal QA of compliance culture and foster meaningful improvement, it is very important to involve all stakeholders in a university in the process of developing QA systems. Various advocacy strategies should also be used at the institutional level to get people to understand the purpose of QA, and to maximise buy-in. A system of incentives can also be used to reward those people/departments that excel.

3.4 Benchmarking our quality

In your institution, how do you benchmark institutional performance?

In today's globalised world, it is important to benchmark the standard of higher education in your institution and in your country in line with those of other countries. Unless you do this, graduates from your institution may not fit into the economies of other countries. There is a sense in which it can be argued that whilst we should meet local human resource skills requirements, largely we also educate for a global economy. Thus, we do not set our quality standards in a vacuum; indeed, we look at what is happening elsewhere to benchmark our standards. In fact, even prospective students and parents consider the relative standards of an institution compared to other institutions in the country and abroad when they make decisions on where to enrol for a degree programme, if other factors such as affordability are comparable. The academic standing of an institution is increasingly becoming an important factor in attracting students and therefore in determining its sustainability. Institutions that offer poor-quality education are likely to lose students and may close down in the near future. This is particularly true given the current high competition in the higher education market in developing countries.



Learning activity 3.4: Discussion forum

Read Resource 11: "The Interplay of Globalisation, Internationalisation, State and Market Forces,"²⁶ which is an extract from a monograph on QA. It gives you important insights on why universities should benchmark according to international standards.

²⁶ Mhlanga, E. (2013). *Quality Assurance in Higher Education in Southern Africa: Challenges and Opportunities*. Oxford: Peter Lang.

After going through this resource, explain how your university (or any university of your choice in your country) benchmarks its standards according to international standards. Post your answer in the discussion forum. Read at least two posts from your peers to understand how other universities benchmark their quality.

3.5 Balancing external with internal quality assurance

You may have noted from the discussion in Section 3.2 that external and internal QA are complementary. Whilst the former is primarily associated with accountability, it can be conducted in such a way that university stakeholders come to understand it as part of the system improvement process. Thus, the manner in which QA is handled in a given context determines how institutions will view and implement it.

The QA model proposed above is represented diagrammatically in Figure 3.

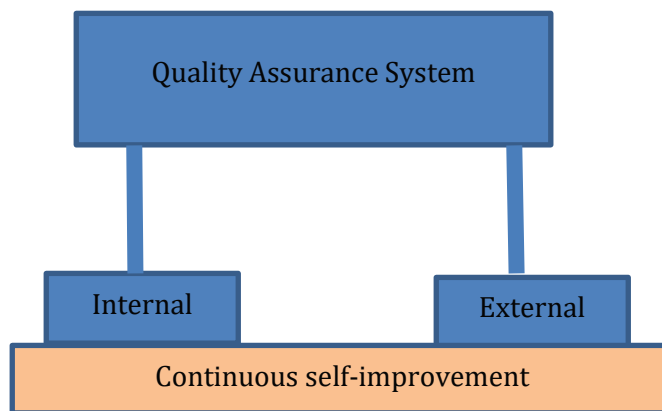


Figure 3. A balanced QA system in distance education



Learning activity 3.5: Journal

Arrange the activities below under external QA and internal QA. Some activities might fall into both categories.

Table 6. External and internal QA

Activity	External QA	Internal QA
Institutional self-assessment on implementation and performance.		
Self-evaluation report and portfolio documents		
Site visits		
Peer team report		
Monitoring		
Setting goals, operations and outcomes by institution		
Introducing changes and improvements (improvement plan)		
Feedback		

3.6 Quality assurance as a data-driven process

For an institution to improve, it has to be clear about where it stands on any aspect of performance. It is on the basis of accurate data that the institution enlightens itself about its performance and devises plans for improvement. Improvement science informs us that it is difficult to improve what is vaguely understood! In QA, regular data collection using carefully defined quality criteria is one of the best ways of informing actors about where they are doing well and where improvement is needed. Thus, self-reviews help an institution collect reliable data that can meaningfully feed into planning processes.



Learning activity 3.6: Discussion forum

In the discussion forum, post a short paragraph where you respond to the following prompts:

- Describe the kind of data you collect in your institution that feeds back into planning.
- How regularly are the data collected?
- What measures are taken to ensure accuracy of the data?

3.7 Internal quality assurance as the key driver for quality enhancement

It has been alluded to in this unit that internal QA is the hallmark of continuous quality improvement in an institution. In this section, you are going to look at the specific internal QA processes that you should undertake on a regular basis if your institution's quality is to improve.

What are self-reviews?

In QA, self-reviews are a reflection process whereby actors seek to measure their performance in a systematic and objective manner with a view to instituting improvement. The self-review process is like casting light into one's own house to see every bit of dust in every corner so targeted clean up can be done. In the absence of such light, one may never know with certainty in which corner there is dust. The efficacy of such self-review exercises is therefore key, as it determines the quality of the review results. In other words, self-review is self-introspection.

Who should conduct self-reviews?

In unit 2.5 of this module, Woodhouse (2000) reminded us that in most countries, higher education institutions (HEIs) are required to provide information about themselves, perhaps with some evaluative comments. We were also reminded that external QA agencies often require institutions to conduct self-reviews as the basis for external reviews. The HEI is expected to carry out a full self-review, indicating the state of quality in the HEI and, in some cases, how the HEI informs itself about the state of quality. The agency then validates the results of this review (Woodhouse, 2000, p. 21). Thus, self-reviews can be conducted at a systemic level to provide insights about how the whole institution is performing.

We also noted in Unit 2 that academics who deal with students on a day-to-day basis should conduct regular self-reviews in order for them to understand how an academic unit, a programme or even a single course in an academic department is performing. Self-reviews can therefore be conducted at the small-scale level. Where a culture of quality is institutionalised, academics can do self-reviews even on specific aspects of delivery, like learner support, or student assessment, or materials design. The results of such self-reviews are primarily used by people in the same academic unit — the very people who commission and conduct the reviews. Thus, the process is not only internally owned and serving internal purposes; it is also a self-enlightening process.

Steps in conducting self-reviews

Step 1: Identify an area or aspect to be self-reviewed, and agree on a review time frame.

Step 2: Put in place a Self-Review Committee.

Step 3: Train/induct the Self-Review Committee so that they all master the norms of the process. This includes getting them to understand and interpret the review guidelines/quality criteria well enough.

Step 4: Prepare a Self-Evaluation Report. This is done by the division to be reviewed and involves getting them to assemble all the necessary evidence and provide it in a manner that is easy to locate.

Step 5: Conduct the self-review.

Step 6: Compile a Self-Review Report highlighting where the division is doing well and where improvement is needed. The report is compiled in such a way that it carries clear recommendations that should be implemented.

Step 7: The Self-Review Report is shared with the head of the relevant department and the rest of the department's staff. In many institutions, the report may also be shared with other management staff, such as the Dean and the Vice-Chancellor, Academic.

Step 8: The division that underwent a review prepares a Self-Improvement Plan (SIP) that outlines how the division will address the recommendations included in the Self-Review Report. The SIP specifies timelines within which improvements will be implemented. See the details of SIPs below.

Step 9: The division that has been reviewed implements the SIP.

Step 10: After a reasonable period of time that is within the specified time frame, the division that underwent a review prepares a progress review report. The report is submitted to the relevant authority in the university.

This process is cyclical, as in the next round of reviews, it is anticipated that weaknesses identified in previous reviews will have been rectified.



Learning activity 3.7.1: Reflection

To what extent do self-reviews in your university/country follow the steps outlined above? Summarise the challenges you face in conducting such reviews.

Developing a self-improvement plan (SIP)

For self-reviews to bring about meaningful improvement, the recommendations coming out of the review process should be implemented in a systematic way. For this to happen, a reviewed institution or department should plan a comprehensive SIP. In doing so, the department takes into account the nature of the recommendation and what is required to address that recommendation. Some recommendations require more time and

more resources to implement, while others can be implemented on a short-term basis and using few resources.

There is no recommended uniform structure for a SIP, although there are general principles that guide the development of such plans. In this section of the course, you are exposed to some of the main principles that guide the development of SIPs.

Firstly, the plan should show the **recommendation** that came out of the review report. It is important that the department concerned interpret the recommendation and understand it correctly. It is also important that reviewers make the recommendations as clear as possible so that readers can understand them.

For each recommendation, **specific actions** to be taken must be defined. Some recommendations require several actions; others may require just one.

Responsibilities should also be defined, as well as the actors who will undertake these responsibilities. This is in two forms: the people who will implement the actions, and the overseer of the process.

For actions to be implemented, **resources** are needed. Therefore, the plan should define the resources required for those actions to be implemented. It is important to solicit the support of management if such resources are to be released.

Timelines within which improvement actions will be implemented should be indicated in the SIP.

Finally, the plan should specify the **indicators/evidence** that will show the desired results have been achieved.

Institutional audits and programme reviews

In many countries in Africa where national QA agencies have been established, the main quality regulatory mechanisms used are institutional audits and programme accreditation. Audits have their origin in the requirements for financial accountability in the private sector but are now a commonplace feature of QA discourse in education.

In higher education, an institutional audit is a process of assessing an institution's capacity to manage and improve the quality of its teaching, learning, research and community service. It is an objective assessment of whether QA systems and procedures are in place in an institution, how adequate they are, and how effectively they are implemented.

Institutional audits are an integral part of universities' external QA systems. Through audits, governments seek to make HEIs more accountable and responsive to social and economic needs. Audits also reinforce the effectiveness of internal mechanisms for managing and monitoring educational provision.



Learning activity 3.7.2: Discussion forum

In your view, why do you think institutional audits are necessary? Post your answer in the discussion forum. Read what other colleagues have posted, and comment on at least two posts in the forum.

Focus of audits

An institutional audit is an evidence-based process carried out through peer review. It can have various foci, such as management systems, finance and governance, or teaching and learning. It generally seeks to establish the fit between the institution's mission and what prevails in the institution by way of facilities and resources, service provision, management and governance.

Benefits of audits

In as much as audits enhance the quality of higher education, many stakeholders benefit either directly or indirectly from them. Some of these beneficiaries include students, government, the public and the audited institution.



Learning activity 3.73: Journal

- a. Match the benefits listed from A to D with the appropriate beneficiary in the table below.

Table 7. Benefits of audits

	Potential beneficiary	Benefit
1.	Students	
2.	Government	
3.	Public	
4.	Institution	

- A. Benefits from public investments
- B. Recognition by potential employers; credit transfer; getting value for money
- C. Enhanced reputation; attraction of financial support; attract and retain faculty of international repute; attract international students
- D. Guaranteed relevance of the institution's products
- b. Reflect on how competitive students from your university (or from any university you are familiar with in your country) are in the job market compared to students from other universities.

Programme accreditation

Audits seek to ensure that an institution is fit to deliver programmes at acceptable levels of quality. However, they do not go as far as looking at whether the programmes offered are appropriately designed. Programme accreditation processes do this.

Programme accreditation is a systematic review of an academic programme to ascertain whether it meets set standards. This process results in one of the following three possibilities:

- issuance of a certificate if the minimum standards are met
- non-issuance of a certificate if the standards are not met
- issuance of conditional accreditation status if standards are partly met

Where accreditation is granted, the status is not permanent. Often, the certificate of accreditation is valid for a limited period of time, after which another round of accreditation is carried out. This ensures that the provider continues to uphold quality to meet the required standards.



Learning activity 3.7.4: Discussion forum

In the discussion forum:

- a. Share with colleagues your frustrating and exciting experiences of programme accreditation in your institution or at any institution in your country.
- b. Explain some of the flaws for which you would deny a programme accreditation. What are the possible consequences of withdrawing accreditation for a running programme?
- c. What procedures do you follow in your institution/country to conduct programme accreditation? What constraints are faced in undertaking such accreditation processes?

Unit summary



In this unit, you learned about the concepts of quality and quality assurance as they apply to higher education. You were also exposed to approaches to QA in a higher education institution. Internal QA implemented through regular self-reviews was presented as the best approach for enhancing quality in an institution. The regular collection and analysis of data was emphasised. Finally, you were informed of the logical steps you can follow to conduct self-reviews.

The main message of this unit is that internal QA is the key driver of quality enhancement.

Assignment



1. Read Resource 12: “Teaching and Learning in the Digital Age: A New Understanding of Quality.”
 - a. Choose any two of the ten developments discussed in the paper, and explain how they can help shape QA in an African higher education institution.
 - b. Identify and elaborate on at least five quality indicators for each of the two developments you chose.

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Unit 4

Modes of Provision and Quality Assurance

Introduction

The rationale for Unit 4 is that many institutions in Africa, and indeed in the rest of the world, are gradually moving away from traditional contact teaching modes of educational delivery to more flexible and engaging forms. Amongst these modes of delivery are open and distance learning, blended learning and eLearning. In this unit, you will consider some of the approaches to quality assuring these new modes of delivery and how to apply them in your institutions.



Unit Outcomes

By the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- define the quality standards needed in a dual-mode institution
- develop quality guidelines for blended learning and for eLearning
- evaluate the quality of technology-supported learning design

4.1 Quality assurance in the context of diverse provision modes

As highlighted in Unit 1 of this module, due to increasing demand for higher education, many universities in Africa now deploy education through various modes of provision. These range from the traditional face-to-face mode that is campus based, to blended learning, distance learning and eLearning. As shown in the grid in section 1.4 of Unit 1, a vast range of delivery modes has been made possible by the use of educational technology. Much of the learning now happens independently, either on campus or away. In other parts of the world, there are instances where learning takes place completely away from campus, and students graduate without setting their foot on the campus of the institution they registered with.

While the advent of teaching and learning technology has increased the possibilities for independent learning, the challenge lies with the quality of student support and student engagement in some of these modes of provision. In fact, part of the challenge is that in using these modes of provision, QA often comes as an afterthought. This is

particularly so where national QA agencies have not yet been established or are still emerging.

What is often overlooked is that irrespective of the mode of provision, key aspects of education provision that make support for learning possible and maximise students' learning gains must always be taken care of in terms of QA. Given the definition of QA discussed earlier in this module, this means that mechanisms must be put in place up front to ensure that appropriate learning outcomes will be achieved. Once a programme kicks off, appropriate tracking should take place through the collection and analysis of data, to ensure that the programme is indeed on course — as evidenced by effective student support mechanisms and students achieving defined learning outcomes.



Learning activity 4.1.1: Journal reflection

- a. Choose an institution of your choice and list the modes of provision used in that institution. Indicate disciplines in which those modes of provision are used.
- b. What QA measures are in place for the various modes of provision?
- c. Describe some of the quality challenges that are applicable to your institution or in institutions in your country.

There are many challenges that institutions have to be aware of in using delivery modes that are technology supported. You have been exposed to many of these challenges in Unit 2 of this module. You will notice that some of these challenges are peculiar to Africa because of the infrastructural factors, cultures and level of societal development in the region. These peculiarities cannot be ignored when it comes to the QA of higher education.

Here are some examples of what one should always bear in mind when technology is used in teaching and learning:

- Not every student is technologically literate, as exposure to such technology in the home may be absent.
- Staff may not be conversant with the technological tools to be used, especially when it comes to designing for and supporting online learning.
- Bandwidth on campus may not be good enough to support the large numbers of students enrolled.
- Electricity supply may not be as reliable on campus and may be absent at home.
- There may be no QA frameworks in place and no people with expertise in quality assuring that particular mode of provision in the institution.

Which of these apply to your particular context?

In working with universities from different African countries, people approach the QA of distance education differently. In some countries, the same quality standards and QA body used in conventional face-to-face programmes are used in quality assuring distance education. In other countries, people prefer to use a different set of quality criteria and a different QA body for distance education. The argument for using the former is that the aspect of equivalence between distance and conventional learning would be achieved — by using the same standards and the same people, the measuring stick for the two stays the same. In the latter case, the argument is that distance education has aspects that are unique to that mode of provision, so a different QA framework should be used.

In a quality enhancement initiative supported by COL in southern Africa, a community of practice consisting of academics from universities and from national QA agencies in seven regional countries identified key areas around which QA guidelines for distance education were developed. Based on their experience and on the SWOT analysis they conducted through a workshop, the community of practice members focused primarily on areas that are key in delivering open and distance education. They also piloted the guidelines in their institutions and found them to be extremely useful for identifying strengths and weaknesses.

Enhancing the quality of teaching in a digital age

One of the most important challenges in higher education is poor pedagogy. This is mainly because academics are only specialists in disciplinary content, not in teaching and learning strategies. Thus, pedagogy should be one of the core aspects of QA in higher education institutions in Africa. In the absence of sound pedagogical approaches, no amount of technology use can enrich students' learning experiences in a way that entrenches deep learning. Appropriate technology has to be chosen and brought in to support a particular pedagogy.

In his book *Teaching in a Digital Age*, Tony Bates gives nine steps for teaching in a digital age:

- Step 1: Decide how you want to teach
- Step 2: Decide on the mode of delivery
- Step 3: Work in a team
- Step 4: Build on existing resources
- Step 5: Master the technology
- Step 6: Set appropriate learning goals
- Step 7: Design the course structure and learning activities
- Step 8: Communicate, communicate, communicate
- Step 9: Evaluate and innovate



Learning activity 4.1.2: Discussion forum

Study Resource 13, which is a draft of these guidelines. What guidelines do you think should be added? Upload your suggestions to the activity discussion forum.

Cross-border higher education and quality assurance

Like in many other parts of the world, the phenomenon of cross-border higher education is increasingly becoming visible in Africa. Cross-border higher education, also known as transnational provision of higher education, takes various forms. These include the recruitment of international students, the establishment of campuses abroad, franchise provision and online learning. Cross-border higher education is a result of the liberalisation of higher education through such agreements as the General Agreement on Trades and Services.

As Knight (2003, p. 5)²⁷ rightly observes, there is great concern in some developing states that the liberalisation of higher education may not only hamper the development of institutions in developing countries (particularly in Africa) through stiff competition, but also compromise the quality of programme offerings.

Transnational provision of higher education has awakened African states' interest in the regulation of domestic higher education policies, particularly in the area of QA. Such regulation is done primarily to protect local consumers against the provision of poor-quality university education by unscrupulous foreign and private providers who seek nothing more than profit.

The biggest challenge, however, is how to regulate this type of higher education, especially where online learning is provided. Transnational online providers do not necessarily announce their presence in the receiving country; this makes it very difficult for local regulators to know of their presence. Since they capitalise on technology to advertise and recruit students, they can afford to remain invisible until they have registered many students in a country. In Africa, where demand outstrips supply in higher education, many people are easily attracted to register with such providers. Also, since they do not shoulder any campus costs for sustaining students, most of the transnational providers charge competitively low fees, which makes them more attractive to potential students.

When foreign providers locate campuses in African countries, sometimes they resist quality regulation by local quality agencies on the basis that they are accredited in their home countries. While this might be true, experience shows that when they operate in African

²⁷ Knight, J. (2003). Trade in higher education services: The implications of GATS. In *The General Agreement on Trade in Services and South African higher education: What should South Africa do?* Kagisano CHE Higher Education Discussion Series, No. 3 (pp. 5–37). Pretoria, South Africa: Council on Higher Education.

countries, some of them tend to offer watered-down programmes that are not necessarily relevant to local market needs. Sometimes, they don't engage qualified academic staff.



Learning activity 4.1.3: Journal

Earlier in this lesson, you were presented with Tony Bates' nine steps to be followed when using technology in teaching and learning. Read sections 11.2 to 11.11 of Resource 14: *Teaching in a Digital Age* to understand what is involved in these steps.

Reflection exercise

From your reading of those sections, explain how any two of the following pedagogical aspects of learning are strengthened through the use of technology:

- collaborative learning
- constructivism
- student engagement
- learning at an individual pace
- searching for information

Learning activity 4.1.4: Search the Web

Use Google Scholar to search for the General Agreement on Trades and Services (GATS) document and familiarise yourself with its provisions. Based on your understanding of GATS, what policy would you recommend for your government to adopt regarding the transnational provision of higher education?

Quality regulatory measures for cross-border higher education

UNESCO has developed a comprehensive set of quality guidelines that countries can draw upon to develop an effective national regulatory framework for cross-border higher education.



Read Resource 15, which explains these guidelines. Key sections to focus on in the resource are pages 13–23, which give recommendations for different stakeholders in higher education.



Reflection exercise 4.1.5

Which of these regulations are already being applied in your country? How effective are they in regulating cross-border higher education? Post your answer in the activity forum for review by your peers.

Commentary

You will notice from the reading that government is one of the key stakeholders in the regulation of cross-border higher education. This is because of their positioning as key policy makers and regulators. Higher education institutions are also key, as they are the custodians of academic programmes and of the quality standards set in the development and rolling out of the programmes.

Student bodies take care of student interests in higher education, including the quality of education they get from their institutions. In this regard, they should strive to keep the student body well informed about quality and QA issues. This enables students to be critical of institutions they register with and to check the credibility of such institutions before they register.

National QA agencies should include cross-border education in their QA frameworks. They should also establish working relationships with their counterparts in other countries to check the credibility of various providers within those countries.

There are also guidelines for professional bodies, which often play a critical role in protecting standards in their professions. Hence, the QA of cross-border higher education provision is a shared responsibility amongst various stakeholders.

4.2 Quality assurance of blended learning

In the last section of this module, we give particular attention to blended learning because of the increasing prevalence of this mode of provision in African universities. You are also referred to the accompanying COL course on this subject for more detail regarding this mode of provision: Quality Assurance in Blended Learning.

What is blended learning?

From your observation of how different institutions in Africa implement blended learning (BL), you will certainly come to the conclusion that BL is not one thing. Rather, it is a whole range of ways in which people mix conventional face-to-face with online learning in a complementary manner. The percentage of online learning varies quite significantly not only from institution to institution but also from programme to programme.

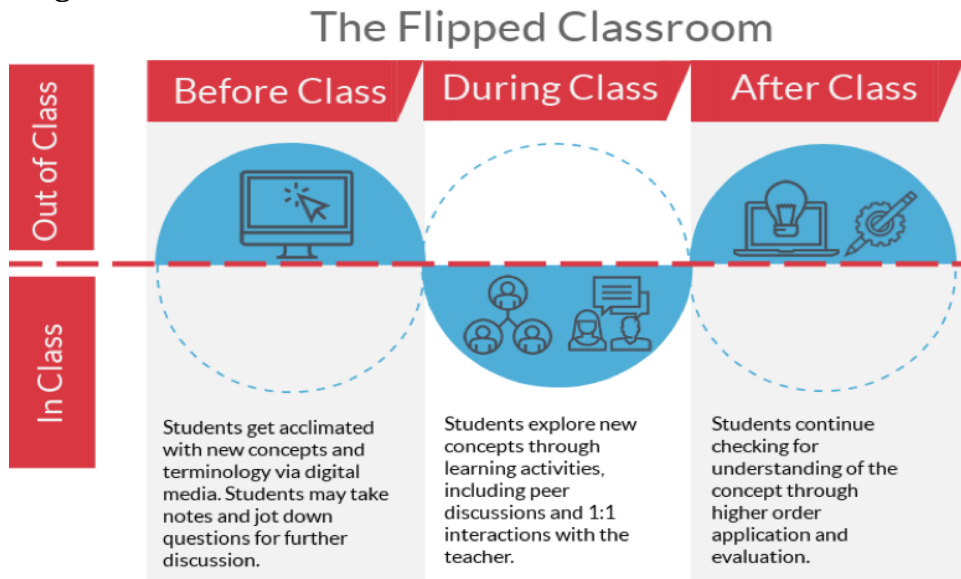
BL is also referred to by various other terms, including hybrid, mixed-mode, and flexible learning, as well as flipped classes or classrooms.

Garrison and Vaughan (2008) define BL as the “thoughtful fusion of face-to-face and online learning experiences.”²⁸

²⁸ Garrison, D. R., & Vaughan, N. (2008). *Blended learning in higher education*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Study diagrams 1 and 2 below, which illustrate the difference between traditional classroom teaching and learning and flipped classrooms, a form of BL.

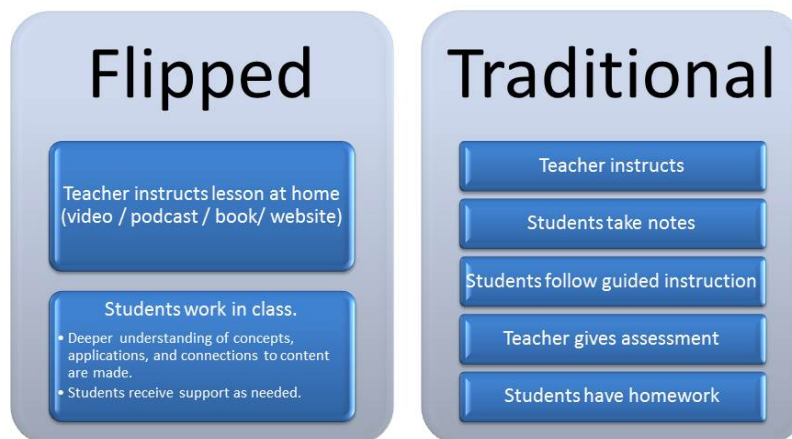
Diagram 1



Source: <https://www.odysseyware.com/blog/using-classpace-flipped-classroom>

Diagram 2

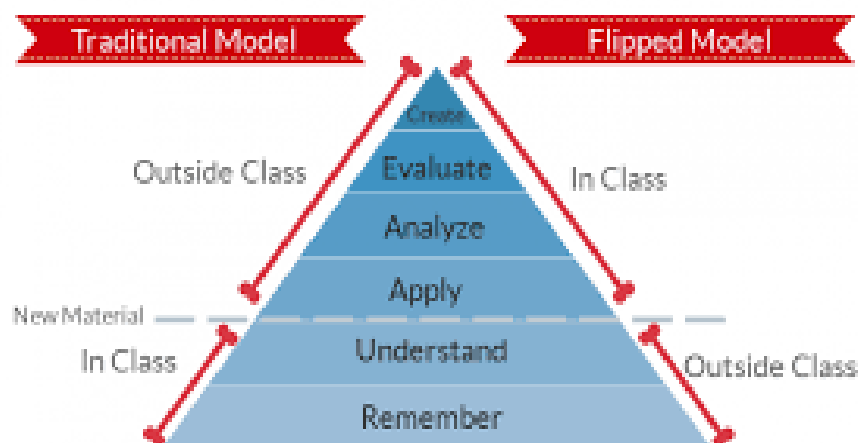
Flipped VS Traditional



Source: <http://www.dreambox.com/blog/flipped-classroom-elementary-school-too>

Diagram 3

Bloom's Taxonomy in a Flipped Classroom



Source: <https://www.odysseyware.com/blog/using-classpace-flipped-classroom>



Learning activity 4.2.1: Discussion forum

- Based on what you learned about BL in this lesson, explain how it differs from traditional classroom teaching.
- How is mastery of higher-order skills fostered in flipped classrooms?
- In your view, why are many universities going for BL?

Post your answers in the discussion forum.

How much is online learning in blended learning?

In BL, the optimum balance between face-to-face and online learning is hard to prescribe. There are many factors that determine this balance. For instance, Internet stability and bandwidth on campus can influence expectations of how much learning can happen online. Students' access to technological facilities at home is another factor. An important quality aspect of BL is that students are meaningfully engaging in learning activities during independent learning. Use of technology does not mean relegating students to the vagaries of the technology. BL has to be designed in such a way that meaningful learning takes place even when students are learning online.



Read Resource 16 on important facts you need to know about BL.

That resource gives you links to other important literature on various aspects of BL. You may want to pursue some of the literature resources to enrich your understanding.

Optimising learning gains through blended learning

The question many people ask is whether reducing contact time with students and asking them to learn online does, in fact, not amount to neglecting students and reducing the amount of learning. What would be your response to that?



Learning activity 4.2.2: Discussion forum

Read some of the concerns often raised about flipped classrooms, summarised in Table 8. In the right column are responses that Jon Bergmann gives, based on his experience of using flipped classrooms. Based on your own experience, comment on Jon's responses. Share your comments in the discussion forum.

Table 8. Common concerns about flipped classrooms

	Concerns	Counter views
1.	Fear that the flipped class would lead to less engaged students who simply look at videos	This is actually the opposite of what I experienced as a teacher and what others who employ the flip experience [<i>sic</i>]. We are discovering that what actually happens is that student engagement and student-teacher interaction increases. I feel this is one of the greatest strengths of the flip.
2.	The flipped class will lead to huge classes with little engagement	The thinking here is that you could have many more students in a class if the video was doing the direct instruction. This would make education cheaper because you would be able to hire fewer teachers. One thing I say whenever I share the story of the flip with people is that I talk to every kid in every class every day. One of the hallmarks of how I have flipped my classes is this statement. But, if I had class sizes which were too large, even this methodology will fail. The key to the flipped class is actually not the videos, it is the freedom those videos give the teacher to have engaging class activities and interaction with their students.
3.	The flipped class is just bad lecture[s] on video	The assumption by some is that if ALL we do is move the lecture online, we are only using technology for bad pedagogy. Their argument is that we need less lecture and more hands on, problem based, student generated, and inquiry learning. And I agree with these folks. However, I see the flip as a stepping stone for teachers who have lectured for all of their career. For them the idea of moving to an inquiry, problem based learning model would be very difficult. But the idea of simply recording what they already do and then move that to outside of the class is not a huge step.
4.	The flipped class hurts students who have limited access to technology	I am surprised at how often I continue to see this objection. When Aaron and I started the flip in 2007 we had a number of students without both computers and access to high speed internet. We HAD to solve this problem. We simply took 4-6 videos and burned them onto a DVD and handed the DVD's out to students. Some students who had a computer at home but not high speed internet brought in flash drives and took home the videos that way. If you really want to see an example of how the flip is working with a school with low SES, watch this video of Greg Green's school on the outskirts of Detroit.

Source: Bergmann. (2011). The Flipped Class Revisited, <http://www.jonbergmann.com/the-flipped-class-revisited>.

A key quality aspect of blended learning is to have a means of checking whether what students do when they are away from the classroom is worthwhile. In fact, the activities students engage in outside face-to-face sessions are directly linked to what happens during those sessions. There should be a seamless link between the two in terms of the learning. Diagram 2, “Flipped vs Traditional,” refers to the flipped classroom as the teacher instructing the student at home — through videos, podcasts, books and the Web. This shows that out-of-class learning by students is, in fact, structured learning, and the teacher designs the learning that is to take place.



Read Resource 17, which is an experience-based toolkit on BL developed by the University of Central Florida and the American Association of State Colleges and Universities. The toolkit gives essential quality aspects that designers of BL should emulate.



Learning activity 4.2.3: Discussion forum

- a. Which of the processes outlined in the toolkit do you not follow in your university?
- b. What other processes not covered in the toolkit do you follow to ensure high-quality learning in BL?

Post your answers in the discussion forum.

4.3 Quality assurance of MOOCs

In recent years, massive online open courses (MOOCs) have become a common feature of higher education the world over. This is mainly because these courses are generally cheap or even free and are flexible, thereby increasing access to higher education. In some instances, conventional institutions use MOOCs as supplementary ways of encouraging students to engage with content. In spite of their popularity, MOOCs have sometimes been criticised for low completion rates by students. There is therefore a compelling need for quality assuring this mode of delivery if large numbers of people who participate in them are to successfully complete the courses.



To learn about how to quality assure MOOCs, you are referred to Resource 18: Guidelines for Quality Assurance and Accreditation of MOOCs.



Learning activity 4.3: Discussion forum

- a. Which of the guidelines for governments outlined in the resource does your government follow?
- b. Of the three categories of quality guidelines for institutions that offer MOOCs — Presage Dimensions, Process Dimensions and Product Dimensions — which ones would you find difficult to implement in your institution and why?

Share your answers with other students in the discussion forum.

Unit summary



In this unit, you learned about the different modes of provision that are common in African higher education institutions. Unique to the African context is that some of these “non-traditional” modes are new, and not many people in universities are familiar with them. There is still a lot of tinkering with these technology-supported modes of provision, and the full benefits of using them have not yet been realised in most universities. There is, however, a gradual shift from traditional face-to-face (which is still the dominant mode) to blended learning and to eLearning. To harness the full potential of educational technologies, there is a need to develop sound QA guidelines. These guidelines should speak to key aspects of provision, such as: designing for learning with technology; supporting students who learn with technology; tracking students to identify their needs and provide timely support; assessment; the relevance and appropriateness of the technology itself; and ensuring access to technology by all students. Institutions need to provide a good rationale for adopting a particular mode of delivery. Wherever decisions about the use of technology are made, there must be consideration of the constraints students from disadvantaged and rural backgrounds face in accessing the technology and in using it to maximise their learning gains. Thus, student profiles are key factors to consider when designing for technology-supported learning.

Assignment

Based on your reading of Resource 15 and Resource 16, develop quality guidelines for use in your university (or any local university) to assure the quality of blended learning.

References

- Bergmann, Jon. (2011). The flipped class revisited [Blog post]. Available at <http://www.jonbergmann.com/the-flipped-class-revisited/>
- Butcher, N., & Wilson–Strydom, M. (n.d.). *A guide to quality in online learning*. Dallas: Academic Partnerships.
- Cleveland-Innes, M., & Wilton, D. (2018). *Guided blended learning*. Vancouver, Canada: COL. Available at <http://oasis.col.org/handle/11599/3095>
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Course evaluation

Having gone through this course, you are encouraged to spend a few minutes completing the course evaluation questionnaire below. Your views are extremely important, as they help us improve the course.

Appendix A: Course Expectations Survey

1. **What are your expectations of this course, and what are you hoping the learning outcome will be?**
2. **What are your main areas of interest in QA in higher education in Africa?**
3. **What are the areas in QA in higher education in Africa that you are hoping to learn more about during this course?
Please list them below.**
4. **How do you think you and your institution will benefit from this course?**
5. **Please briefly describe your previous experience with QA in the context of higher education.**
6. **What do you think are current challenges for QA in higher education in Africa today?**
7. **Please self-rate your current knowledge/skill level in the QA components listed below on a scale from 1 to 5.**
 - 1 – Very poor
 - 2 – Poor
 - 3 – Moderate
 - 4 – Good
 - 5 – Very good

Objective	Rating
<i>Explain trends that have a direct impact on quality in higher education in Africa generally and in your institution in particular</i>	
<i>Identify factors that have a negative impact on the quality of delivery in your institution</i>	
<i>Conduct internal quality reviews as a way of enhancing the quality of provision in your institution and country</i>	
<i>Develop improvement plans based on self-review processes</i>	
<i>Explain how the quality of cross-border higher education provision in your country can be assured</i>	
<i>Apply the knowledge and skills acquired from this module to improve the quality of provision in your institution and country</i>	

Appendix B: Course Evaluation Survey

1. On a scale from 1 to 5, how would you rate the following aspects related to the Quality Assurance in Higher Education in Africa course?

- 1 – Very poor
- 2 – Poor
- 3 – Moderate
- 4 – Good
- 5 – Very good

Criteria	Rating
<i>Overall quality of the course</i>	
<i>Tutor course facilitation</i>	
<i>Course support</i>	
<i>Course design</i>	
<i>Course content</i>	
<i>Course pace</i>	
<i>Course duration</i>	
<i>Contextualisation of QA content to the context of Africa</i>	

2. Please self-rate your current knowledge/skill level in the QA components listed below on a scale from 1 to 5.

- 1 – Very poor
- 2 – Poor
- 3 – Moderate
- 4 – Good
- 5 – Very good

Objective	Rating
<i>Explain trends that have a direct impact on quality in higher education in Africa generally and in your institution in particular</i>	
<i>Identify factors that have a negative impact on the quality of delivery in your institution</i>	

Objective	Rating
<i>Conduct internal quality reviews as a way of enhancing the quality of provision in your institution and country</i>	
<i>Develop improvement plans based on self-review processes</i>	
<i>Explain how the quality of cross-border higher education provision in your country can be assured</i>	
<i>Apply the knowledge and skills acquired from this module to improve the quality of provision in your institution and country</i>	

3. **Did the course meet your expectations? If no, please explain why not.**
4. **Did the course cover the areas of QA you stated in the course expectations survey you wanted to learn more about? If no, what areas were not covered and should be covered in this course in the future?**
5. **After having completed the course, are there any new areas of QA that you would like to learn more about?**
6. **After having completed the course, have your views on priorities in QA in higher education in Africa changed? Are there any areas that you now consider more important than you did before? If yes, please elaborate below.**
7. **After having completed the course, how do you think you and your institution will benefit from this course? Has this view changed since you started the course?**
8. **What do you think were positive aspects of the course?**
9. **What do you think were negative aspects of the course?**
10. **Do you have any suggestions for improvement?**
11. **Do you have any other comments?**