

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this section is to make definitions related to accreditation for quality assurance available to policy-makers and higher education practitioners. We have endeavoured to offer the most common terms and our aim was not to present a complete glossary, due to space constraints.

Many of the terms used in this glossary are used in other areas of knowledge, academic and economic activity. However, in this context they all refer and are used for higher education accreditation for quality assurance.

Academic recognition: A set of procedures and processes for the acknowledgement and acceptance (subject to conditions) of higher education qualifications between institutions and countries.

Accountability: The requirement, when undertaking an activity, to expressly address the concerns, requirements or perspectives of others.

Accreditation: The process of external quality review used in higher education to scrutinize colleges, universities and higher education programmes for quality assurance and quality improvement. Success results in an accredited institution and/or programme with a label, score or grade.

Action: A term used in the United States to imply a judgment or decision following an accreditation. It is a judgment by an accrediting organization regarding accreditation for new institutions and programmes or review of accreditation for ongoing institutions and programmes. It includes, for example, denial of accreditation (adverse action), probation and warning.

Agency: In the context of quality in higher education, an agency is any organization that undertakes any kind of monitoring, evaluation or review of the quality of higher education. These accrediting bodies ensure that students in educational programmes receive an education consistent with standards for entry into practice or advanced practice in their respective fields or disciplines. Agencies are very important to var-

ious stakeholders (students, faculty, institutions, donors and a range of financial sources).

Assessment: A general term that embraces all methods used to judge the performance of an individual, group or organization.

Assessment of student learning: The process of evaluating the extent to which participants in education have developed their knowledge, understanding and abilities.

Assessment of teaching and learning: The process of evaluating the quality and appropriateness of the learning process, including teacher performance and pedagogic approach.

Self-assessment: The process of critically reviewing the quality of one's own performance and provision.

Audit: A process of review of an institution or programme to determine if its curriculum, staff and infrastructure meet its stated aims and objectives. An audit focuses on accountability of institutions and programmes. An audit report is a codification of the process, findings and outcomes of the audit process, usually prepared by the auditors and project team.

Authorized validating agency (AVA): An AVA is an organization or consortium licensed to certify, authorize or authenticate programmes of study.

Benchmark: A point of reference against which something may be measured. In higher education, a benchmark statement provides a reference point against which outcomes can be measured and refers to a particular specification of programme characteristics and indicative standards.

Benchmarking: A process that enables comparison of inputs, processes or outputs between institutions (or parts of institutions) or within a single institution over time.

Best practice: A superior method or an innovative process involving an actual accepted range of safe and reasonable practices resulting in the improved performance of a higher educa-

GLOSSARY

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tion institution or programme, usually recognized as 'best' by peer organizations.

Certification: The process of formally recognizing achievement or compliance; it can be used to signify the achievement of an individual, such as a student, or of an institution.

Code of practice: A documented set of recommended or preferred processes, actions or organizational structures to be applied in a given setting.

Credit: A generally agreed-upon value used to measure student workload in terms of learning time required to complete course units, resulting in learning outcomes.

Credit transfer: The ability to transport credits (for learning) from one setting to another.

Criteria: Specified elements against which a judgment is made.

Descriptor (level): Level descriptors are statements that provide a broad indication of learning appropriate to attainment at a particular level, describing the characteristics and context of learning expected at that level. They are designed to support the review of specified learning outcomes and assessment criteria in order to develop particular modules and units and to assign credits at the appropriate level.

Qualification descriptors: Statements that set out the outcomes of principal higher education qualifications at given levels (usually of an awarded degree) and demonstrate the nature of change between levels. At some levels, there may be more than one type of qualification.

Effectiveness: The extent to which an activity fulfils its intended purpose or function.

Efficiency (educational): The ability to perform well or achieve a result without wasting resources, effort, time or money (using the smallest quantity of resources possible). Educational efficiency can be measured in physical terms (technical efficiency) or in terms of cost (economic efficiency). Greater educational efficiency is achieved when the same amount and standard of educational services are produced at a lower cost.

Employability: The acquisition of attributes (knowledge, skills and abilities) that make graduates more likely to be successful in their chosen occupations (whether paid or unpaid employment).

European Credit Transfer System (ECTS): A system for recognizing credit for learning and facilitating the

movement of the recognized credits between institutions and across national borders.

Evaluation: The general process of systematic and critical analysis leading to judgments and/or recommendations regarding the quality of a higher education institution or programme. Evaluation is carried out through internal or external procedures.

External evaluation: The process whereby a specialized agency collects data, information and evidence about an institution (institutional evaluation), a particular unit of a given institution, or a core activity of an institution, in order to make a statement about its quality. External evaluation is carried out by a team of external experts, peers or inspectors, and usually requires three distinct operations:

- (i) Analysis of the self-study report.
- (ii) A site visit.
- (iii) The drafting of an evaluation report.

Internal evaluation/self-evaluation: The process of self-evaluation consists of the systematic collection of administrative data, the questioning of students and graduates, and the holding of moderated interviews with lecturers and students, resulting in a self-study report. Self-evaluation is basically a collective institutional reflection and an opportunity for quality enhancement. The resulting report further serves to provide information to the review team in charge of the external evaluation.

Fitness for purpose: Fitness for purpose equates quality with the fulfillment of a specification or stated outcomes.

Fitness of purpose: Fitness of purpose evaluates whether the quality-related intentions of an organization are adequate.

Grading: The process of scoring or ranking student academic work as part of assessing student learning.

Graduate: Someone who has successfully completed a higher education programme at the bachelor degree level or higher.

Indicators: Operational variables that refer to specific empirically measurable characteristics of higher education institutions or programmes on which evidence can be collected that allows for a determination of whether or not standards are being met. There are different types of indicators:

- (i) Indicators of economy (following and respecting budgets).
- (ii) Indicators of efficiency (actual productivity or output per input unit).

- (iii) Indicators of effectiveness (degree of attainment of objectives).

Performance indicators: Representations (usually numeric) of the state of, or outcome from, an education organization or its programmes or processes. They are a set of tangible measures designed to provide public accountability. This often includes admission and graduate data, research records, employment of graduates, cost per student, student/staff ratios, staff workloads, student relevance, class size, laboratory and other equipment, equity, libraries, information technology and other learning resources. Performance indicators should be subject to informed interpretation and judgment.

Joint degree: A degree awarded by more than one higher education institution.

League table: A chart that ranks higher education institutions or programmes of study.

Licensure: An individual's approval to practise a profession once minimal requirements are met. Licensure usually is obtained through examination or graduation from an accredited institution. In some countries, a period of practical experience also may be required.

Institutional licensure: Institutional licensure is state government approval to conduct business as an educational institution.

Licensing: The process by which a government agency grants institutions official permission to operate before obtaining accredited status and to perform specified functions.

Management audit: In higher education, a management audit is a process of checking that management structures and abilities are appropriate for assuring quality, integrity or standards of provision and outcomes.

Mobility: Mobility is shorthand for students and academics studying and working in other institutions, whether in the same country or abroad.

Monitoring: Monitoring has two meanings: (i) the specific process of keeping quality activities under review; (ii) a generic term covering all forms of internal and external quality assurance and improvement processes including audit, assessment, accreditation and external examination.

National accreditors: (USA) Organizations that accredit public and private degree-granting, non-profit and for-profit institutions. They also frequently accredit single-purpose institutions, including distance learning colleges and uni-

versities, private career institutions and faith-based colleges and universities.

Objective: A learning objective is a specific statement about what students are expected to learn or be able to do as a result of studying a programme. An implementation objective is a measurable operationalization of a policy, strategy or mission.

Outcomes: Shorthand for (i) the product or endeavour of a higher education institution (or sector), including student learning and skill development, research outputs and contributions to the wider society locally or internationally (institutional outcomes); and (ii) learning outcome.

Process: In the context of quality, a process is a set of activities, structures and guidelines that: (i) constitute an individual's or organization's procedures for ensuring its own quality or standards; and (ii) constitute a mechanism for reviewing or monitoring the quality or standards of another entity.

Profession: A profession is a group of people in a learned occupation, the members of which agree to abide by specified rules of conduct when practising the occupation.

Professional and specialized accreditors: (USA) Professional and statutory bodies that approve or recognize specific programmes in the context of the requirements for professional qualification. They accredit specific programmes or schools, such as law schools, medical schools, engineering schools and health profession programmes. Some such organizations have a prescribed statutory responsibility to approve or recognize programmes and/or determine the academic standards and professional and vocational components of such programmes.

Qualification: The award to which a formal programme of study contributes.

Quality: Quality refers to 'fitness for purpose' – meeting or conforming to generally accepted standards as defined by an accrediting or quality assurance body.

Quality assessment: A diagnostic review and evaluation of teaching, learning and outcomes based on a detailed examination of curricula, structure and effectiveness of the institution or programme. It aims to determine if the institution or programme meets generally accepted standards of excellence.

Quality assurance: A planned and systematic review process of an institution or programme to determine that acceptable standards of education, scholarship and infrastructure are being maintained and enhanced.

Quality audit: A test of an institution's quality assurance and control system through a self-evaluation and external review of its programmes, staff and infrastructure. It aims to provide an assessment of an institution's system of accountability, internal review mechanisms and effectiveness. An external body confirms that the institution's quality assurance process complies with accepted standards.

Ranking: The rating and ordering of higher education institutions or programmes of study based on various criteria.

Re-accreditation: The reestablishment or restatement (usually on a fixed periodic cycle) of the status, legitimacy or appropriateness of an institution, programme (that is, set of modules) or module of study or of the professional recognition of an individual.

Recognition: The formal acknowledgement of the status of an organization, institution or programme.

Mutual recognition: The agreement between two organizations to recognize each other's processes or programmes.

Professional recognition: The formal acknowledgement of an individual's professional status and right to practise a profession in accordance with professional standards and subject to professional or regulatory controls.

Reciprocity: The acceptance by one agency of the outcomes of a quality process conducted by another agency.

Regional accreditors: (USA) Regional accreditors accredit public and private, non-profit and for-profit, two- and four-year institutions in a specific geographic area. They carry out a comprehensive review of all institutional functions.

Review: A generic term for any process that explores the quality of higher education. It refers to explorations of quality that do not result in judgments or decisions.

Peer review: The external review and evaluation of the quality and effectiveness of an institution's academic programmes, staffing and structure, carried out by a team of external evaluators who are specialists in the field reviewed and knowledgeable about higher education in general. Peer reviews may be based on standards set by accrediting organizations or on quality standards set more broadly.

Review team: A group of people undertaking a quality monitoring or evaluation process.

Site visit: A site visit is when an external evaluation team goes to an institution to evaluate verbal, written and visual evidence.

Stakeholder: A person (or group) that has an interest in the activities of an institution or organization.

Standards: The level of requirements and conditions that must be met by institutions or programmes to be accredited or certified by a quality assurance or accrediting agency. These conditions involve expectations about quality, attainment, effectiveness, financial viability, outcomes and sustainability.

Substantial equivalency: (USA) The certification of a non-US programme based on a finding that it is in all essential respects the equivalent of similar programmes in the United States and meets accepted quality standards. Substantial equivalency is mostly used in situations in which reciprocity agreements are not in place.

Student survey: An assessment method that uses surveys and interviews to ascertain enrolled students' satisfaction with programmes, services and various other aspects of their academic experience. Students are usually asked to respond to a series of open-ended, closed-ended or telephone questions. The survey may include in-class questionnaires, mail questionnaires, telephone questionnaires and/or interviews (standard, in-person or focus group). Student surveys are relatively inexpensive, easy to administer and can reach participants over a wide area. They are best suited for concise and non-sensitive topics. They can give a sense, from the student perspective, of what is happening at a given moment in time in a higher education institution. Some observers question their validity, reliability and relevance to academic policy.

Tuning: In the context of quality in higher education, tuning refers to the process in Europe of adjusting degree provision so that there are points of similarity across the European Higher Education Area.

Unit: Unit has two meanings in the context of quality in higher education, one as subject and one as object of quality review.

University: An institution of higher education that grants its own degrees including the award of PhD, normally undertakes leading-edge research and plays a critical social role.

Validation: An independent review of a self-assessment process by an outside quality assurance structure. Validation usually applies at the programme level. (UK) The process by which an institution with degree-awarding powers judges that a programme developed and delivered

by another institution or organization is of an appropriate quality and standard to offer its programme.

This glossary was written based on the references listed below and the articles of this report.

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