

Concepts and Terminology for Use in Accreditation and Quality Assurance in Saudi Arabia

To assist in achieving common understanding of important concepts and terms used in the system of accreditation and quality assurance, the NCAAA has determined that for its purposes the terms identified below will have the meanings described. The definitions are shown in *italics*, followed by explanatory notes.

Accountability

The responsibility of an individual, an institution or an organization to another authority for his or her, or its activities.

In post secondary education an institution is usually “accountable” and must provide reports to a government or government agency that provides it with funds or approves its establishment. Within an institution faculty and staff are “accountable” to senior management and senior management in turn is responsible to a Board or Council.

In systems of accreditation and quality assurance there is usually a separation of the organizations responsible for institutional accountability and those responsible for independent quality assessment.

Accreditation

Formal certification by a recognised authority that a program or an institution meets required standards.

To be accredited, institutions or programs must comply with generally expected standards of good practice. The Commission has defined the standards it will apply in two documents, *Standards for Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education Institutions* and *Standards for Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education Programs*. Reference is also made to several other documents including a *National Qualifications Framework* that describes expected general standards of learning outcomes in four domains of learning and a statement showing the application of these standards to distance education programs. Standards for technical training are in preparation. These statements are expressed in general terms applicable to all fields of study. It is also necessary for programs to meet requirements for professional practice in many professional fields. Details of these requirements are not yet available from the Commission. Until they are available institutions are expected to give consideration to the requirements of specialized international accreditors in the field of study concerned. Accreditation may be given initially on a provisional basis, and this will normally be done when plans for a new program or institution are considered. After a program has been in operation for sufficient time for the first group of students to complete their program a review will be conducted, the provisional designation may be removed and the program given full accreditation. Accreditation will normally be valid for a period of five years after which programs will need to be reviewed for reaccreditation on a five yearly basis.

In the quality assurance systems of different countries there are several different forms of accreditation. See descriptions of institutional accreditation, program accreditation, professional accreditation, provisional accreditation, and international accreditation.

Assessment

A process of measuring performance in relation to established standards or criteria

Assessment is commonly applied in two different contexts: the assessment of students performance on tests or examinations or other assigned tasks in order to measure their achievement of intended learning outcomes; and the process of measuring the quality of performance of elements within an educational institution.

In the second of these senses the term is used for assessment of quality of teaching, the effectiveness of a program or a course in achieving its objectives, or the effectiveness of many other elements of an institution’s operations.

Standards of performance for the purposes of these assessments can be derived from different sources, but from the perspective of the Commission in carrying out its accreditation and approval responsibilities the standards are defined in the documents it has approved for these purposes, particularly the *National Qualifications Framework* and the *Standards for Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Higher Education Institutions*.

Audit

An independent review to verify that reports represent a true and correct record of activity, and that recognized standards have been met.

The term “audit” is widely used for financial audits conducted by an independent authority to certify the accuracy of financial reports and compliance with accounting standards.

In post secondary quality systems the term is used for external independent reviews of an institution’s quality and the processes of quality assurance it has established. These reviews are principally based on reports of self-studies carried out by an institution, and, like financial audits, verify the conclusions of those self studies. Although standards of good practice are considered in this process, in a quality audit it is customary to give particular attention to the objectives established by an institution and to report on whether the processes used in an institution are effective in achieving those objectives.

Benchmarks

Points of comparison or levels of performance used for establishing objectives and evaluating performance.

Benchmarks may be current levels of performance at an institution (for example, the current completion rate for students in business studies), standards established by an external agency, or standards of performance at another institution or group of institutions selected for comparison. (For example, the number of research publications per full time academic staff member at the University of xxxxx). An institution may select another institution similar to itself as a benchmark against which it can compare the quality of its work, or particular parts of an institution against which equivalent groups within their own institution can be compared. It is usually considered desirable in making these comparisons to use indicators (such as those noted above) that can be stated in specific terms.

Blended Learning

A program in which students are taught through a combination of regular on campus instruction and distance education or packaged materials.

Arrangements can be made for blended modes of instruction in a variety of ways including a regular on campus course in which sections of the course are taught using packaged self contained materials, or a program in which some courses are taught using distance education methodology and some through on campus lectures, tutorials of other face to face methodology. In situations where blended approaches are used appropriate forms of student assistance and support must be provided to support students learning in both forms of instruction.

Credits

Points or hours allocated by an institution to specify the work requirements, or the volume or amount of learning expected for a unit, subject or program of study.

It is common practice to assign a number of credits to units or courses within a program and to specify a number of credits for a total program. Credits may be associated with program inputs such as hours of instruction, laboratory work, or expectations for time spent in self-directed study. The term “credit hours” is used in these systems based on formulae that give differing levels of recognition for formal instruction, laboratory or tutorial participation, and practical work. In some other systems the term “credit points” is used for the notional amount of learning achieved by an average learner over a period of time. The number of credits allocated for a particular amount of work or learning varies between countries. For example some countries use the American based Carnegie credit hour system which allocates 30 credit hours for the amount of academic work normally expected in a full time academic year of

study at undergraduate level. Some other countries use 120 points for an equivalent volume of learning. Common practice in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is to use 30 credit hours (or slightly more depending on the number of contact hours and mode of instruction) for the work expected in an academic year.

Distance Education

A mode of teaching and learning in which students undertake a major proportion of their studies on an individual basis at a location or locations away from a campus of an institution.

Student learning may be supported by print or electronic materials, and a variety of mechanisms are sometimes used for interaction between students, through the internet, video or radio linkages, or periodic study group activities in appropriate locations. Similarly interaction with faculty may take a variety of forms used to provide for

A distance education institution is one that offers all its programs by distance education (whether through print-based materials or through electronic learning or a combination of both) to students who do not attend classes on campus, but instead study in their own locations, often at a time of their own choosing. Where combinations of distance education processes or packaged self contained materials are used within courses, or for different courses within a program, the terms blended learning or dual mode instruction are frequently used to describe what is done. Dual mode institutions are ones that offer a combination of distance education and campus based programs.

Domains of Learning

Broad categories of types of learning expected in a program of study.

Descriptions of the knowledge and skill students are expected to gain in a program are grouped into broad categories called domains. Although the number and titles for these groupings vary, domains commonly include five to seven broad categories that involve different types of learning and strategies for teaching and assessment of learning in those categories. The domains used in the higher education component of the *National Qualifications Framework* for Saudi Arabia are Knowledge, (the ability to recall and present information), Cognitive Skills (the ability to apply concepts and principles in thinking and problem solving), Interpersonal Skills and Responsibility, (the ability to work effectively in groups, exercise leadership, and take responsibility for their own independent learning, and the ethical and moral development that is associated with these abilities), and Communication, Information Technology and Numerical Skills (including basic mathematical and communication skills and ability to use communications technology). Psychomotor skills are very important in some fields of study and are considered as an additional domain where relevant to the program concerned.

Dual Mode Institution

Dual mode institutions are institutions that offer some programs to students through distance education and some through traditional campus based instruction.

It is increasingly common for institutions to use electronic materials and learning packages as supplements to the methods of instruction in campus based studies and these may take a variety of forms. Where this is done the approach may have many similarities to distance education methodology. However the terms “dual mode” is normally used for institutions that offer both off campus distance education programs and campus based instruction.

Evaluation

The process of assessing and assigning value to a facility or activity.

The term evaluation is sometimes used interchangeably with assessment but it has a slightly different meaning associated with judgments about the quality or value of the matter being considered. The “valuing” component of consideration may be more open ended and interpretive than an assessment which is normally associated with measurement of performance in relation to fixed and predetermined standards.

External Quality Assurance

Processes of review and evaluation of institutions and their programmes and activities by an independent external agency.

External quality assurance normally involves periodic, independent peer reviews based on reports of internal self-studies and designed for the dual purposes of assessing quality and validating the conclusions of internal studies.

External quality assessments are usually more selective than internal reviews, and may pay particular attention to student learning outcomes and other matters identified as policy priorities by the institution, or by the government or government to which the institution is responsible. External quality assurance may involve consideration of selected key performance indicators to be used in reviews on a national basis.

Goals or Aims

General statements of desired developments, which apply a mission to broad areas of activity and provide a guide for establishing objectives and detailed planning.

Goals or aims fall between mission, which defines a broad overall purpose, and specific objectives established as targets for achievement and which usually describe specific measurable outcomes by a specified time. They may relate to any aspect of an institution's activities.

Inputs

The resources available to and used by an institution to provide its programs.

Inputs include financial resources, facilities and equipment, faculty, and students. Indicators of quality of faculty as an input could include the number of faculty and their levels of qualifications and staff/student ratios. Indicators of equipment as an input could include such things as the ratio of computer terminals to students, or proportions of down time due to equipment malfunction.

Until recently quality assurance systems have relied heavily on input indicators as measures of quality, using things such as financial resources, qualifications of faculty, extent of library collections and availability of computer equipment. However although these are still important as enabling provisions, emphasis has shifted towards outcome measures relating to the quality of research and student learning outcomes.

Institutional Approval

The approval of an institution based on recognition that its resources, processes and learning outcomes meet required standards for an institution of its type and the level of its programs.

Approval of an institution will normally specify the fields of study the institution is able to offer and the levels at which that can be done. The final license issued to permit the institution to operate will specify the levels and range of programs it is permitted to offer. For example a college may be accredited to offer programs in business studies and engineering up to the level of bachelor, and in applied science up to the level of diploma. A university focusing on those particular fields may be approved to offer programs up to doctoral level in science, engineering and business and up to masters level in social sciences.

Institutional approval indicates that an institution is considered to have the capacity to offer programs in designated fields of study up to the level specified. The final license will formally specify what it is authorized to do. Each program offered within those limits must be accredited, to ensure that the program meets required standards.

Internal Quality Assurance

Processes of quality assurance carried out within and by or for a higher education institution.

Internal quality assurance includes not only the processes of monitoring and review that an institution manages itself, but also its use on its own initiative of outside people from other institutions, from industry or the professions,

or from other accreditation or quality assurance agencies to review and provide advice on its programs and activities. Internal quality assurance is normally comprehensive, dealing with inputs, processes and outcomes, with all areas of an institution's activities, and with faculty, staff and students in all parts of the institution.

International Accreditation

Accreditation of an institution or of its programs by an accreditation agency established in another country.

A number of institutions have arranged for evaluation and accreditation of their colleges or programs by international accrediting agencies as part of their quality assurance arrangements. This has proved valuable in stimulating rigorous internal reviews and enhancing quality, and in establishing their reputation. These activities are not required as part of the accreditation and quality assurance system in Saudi Arabia, but when they are carried out they are considered part of the institution's internal quality assurance and review processes, and the work done and conclusions reached will be considered and taken into account during the reviews conducted by the Commission.

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

Selected performance indicators regarded as particularly important for the purpose of assessing performance.

An institution may identify a short list of KPIs that it regards as particularly important in assessing performance, and require evidence on those KPIs from a number of sections of the institution in addition to any others that different groups may choose for their own purposes. Similarly, a national quality agency such as the Commission may identify a small list of KPIs reflecting national issues or policy objectives for use by all institutions.

Learning Outcomes

The learning that results from participation in a course or program.

The term learning outcomes is commonly used to refer to the learning that results from a course or program undertaken by students. Learning outcomes are the result of the teaching process. Reference is often made to *Intended Learning Outcomes* to mean the learning objectives a course or program is designed to develop.

The NCAAA has identified broad categories or types of learning outcomes in five groups or domains, knowledge, cognitive skills, interpersonal skills and responsibility, communication, IT and numerical skills, and psychomotor skills, and has described in general terms the level of knowledge and skill expected for different qualifications. There are differences in how these learning outcomes are developed by students and an important aspect of program and course planning is to plan for teaching processes and forms of assessment that will be appropriate for these different types of intended learning outcomes

Level

The intellectual standard and complexity of learning expected as students progress through a program of study.

The degree of difficulty or complexity of learning increases as students advance through a program and these increases are defined by descriptions of the learning outcomes that are expected. Levels may be defined for years of study—first year, second year, third year, and so on, or for academic awards such as a diploma, bachelor, master, and doctor.

License

Formal approval, normally by a government or a government agency, to operate or carry out certain activities.

A license may be given to an institution, formally authorizing it to commence operation and offer programs in fields and at levels specified in the license. If the license is revoked the institution must cease to operate. A different type of license may also be given to individuals permitting them to engage in certain activities. A license may be granted to individuals who have completed professional programs and who wish to practice in that profession.

Licensing and accreditation are closely linked. The granting of a license for an institution to operate normally follows or is conditional on assessment of its quality through an approval and accreditation process. The granting of a license for a person to practice in a profession normally follows accreditation of the program that such a person has completed.

Major Change in a Program

A major change in a program is one that affects the basis for its accreditation.

It is expected that adjustments will be required in programs and courses from time to time in response to changing circumstances and results of course and program evaluations. Such changes are highly desirable to ensure that programs are kept up to date. However if there is a major change to an accredited program it could affect the program's accreditation status and any such change should be approved by an institution's senior academic committee and notified to the Commission at least one full semester before it is introduced. The Commission can then assess the impact of the change on accreditation. Examples of major changes would be the addition or deletion of a major track within a program, (eg. accounting or international finance majors within a commerce or business degree), the addition or deletion of a core course (eg. mathematics in an engineering degree), a change in title that implied a new or different field of study or qualification in a different profession, re-orientation or development of a program to prepare students for a different occupation or profession, a change in the length of a program, or a new exit point within a longer program (eg. the granting of a diploma within a bachelors degree program). The Commission should also be notified if a succession of minor programs has a cumulative effect that is equivalent to a major change as described above..

Mission

A brief general statement setting out the principal policy objectives for development of an institution.

While stated in general terms a mission statement should be sufficiently precise to serve as a guide to planning and decision making at all levels of the organization, and should actually be used as a basis for decision making. (*For example, "To develop an international reputation for the quality of applied research and technology transfer, and for the creativity and entrepreneurial skill of graduates."*)

Mode of Instruction

The form of instruction such as lecture, tutorial, laboratory, individual assignment etc.

Organization for instruction is normally based on planned modes of instruction with credit hour allocations based on the amount of contact time in each of these modes. Examples are lectures, tutorials, or laboratories. The term should not be confused with teaching strategies which are the techniques used by an instructor operating within one or more of those modes to present information, develop problem solving skills or habits of responsibility. Different strategies can be incorporated into various modes of instruction as part of educational planning to develop desired learning outcomes.

Objectives

Specific statements that apply the mission and goals to particular areas of activity and indicate intended results.

Desirable objectives should be stated in specific measurable terms setting out intended levels of performance that are to be achieved within stated time periods. Objectives may relate to intended learning outcomes and may be referred to as learning, course or program objectives. Objectives may also be set for program or institutional developments not necessarily related to learning outcomes. Objectives may be expressed as specific performance levels on indicators. (*For example, "That by 2008, 80% of final year undergraduate students will have achieved a score of at least xxxx on xxxx (English language test)."*) Objectives may be criterion referenced (based on defined levels of performance) or norm referenced (based on comparisons of performance with other groups or institutions).

Outcomes

The results of teaching, learning and research processes of an institution.

This term is usually used for qualitative descriptions of what is produced by an institution or in a program as a result of its processes. For example, reference to student learning outcomes normally means the quality of their learning and what they are able to do as a result of completing the programs in which they were enrolled. Similarly research outcomes usually relate to the quality and impact of research rather than simply a count of numbers of publications or research projects completed.

Outputs

The products of an institutions activities, normally expressed in quantitative terms.

Outputs usually refer to quantitative measures of what is produced by an institution, such as the number of graduates or the number of faculty research publications.

Partner Institution

An institution with which a higher education institution has established a formal, contractual relationship for provision of services.

The exact nature of partnership arrangements can vary. In some cases a partnership may simply involve provision of a number of support services to a local institution. In others arrangements are made for the academic awards of the partner institution to be granted for studies undertaken in a local institution under supervision. However regardless of whether the awards are granted by a local institution or by an overseas provider, the requirements for operating an institution or teaching a program in Saudi Arabia must be fully met.

Peer Review

Evaluation and report on a program, institution or part of an institution by expert evaluators from similar institutions or professions who are specialists in the field concerned or with the organization and management of higher education institutions.

An important element in this concept is that the evaluators are peers, with experience with similar programs or institutions, who understand the nature, purposes and challenges faced by an institution. It is important that their understanding is recognized by the institution under review. It is also essential that those involved be completely independent of the institution being reviewed so there is no real or perceived conflict of interest, carefully trained for their task and committed to assisting in improvement. They should be sensitive to the mission and objectives of the institution and programs involved and familiar with international standards for the type of program or institution under review.

Performance Indicators

Specific (and normally pre-selected) forms of evidence used by an institution or other agency to provide evidence about quality of performance.

Performance indicators should be as specific and as directly related as possible to the aims and objectives to which they relate. However direct measures of some of the most important objectives such as quality of students' learning are sometimes difficult to find. Consequently indirect evidence such as student evaluations of programs, employment outcomes, and employer surveys must sometimes be used. Since indirect indicators can be subject to other influences it is usual to use several different but related indicators for important objectives, and to interpret these using some independent system to verify the interpretations. The term triangulation is sometimes used where several indicators are used to provide evidence about an objective from different points of view. For example evidence about quality of faculty could be obtained from several indicators such as levels of qualifications, research output, and student ratings of teaching effectiveness.

Processes

The administrative arrangements, policies, and organizational procedures carried out by an institution in planning, reviewing and delivering its programs.

Processes are what is done in an institution to use the inputs available to it to produce its outputs and outcomes. The term includes teaching processes, assessment procedures, and processes for managing research and community activities as well as a wide range of other activities that have direct or indirect impact on educational programs.

Professional Accreditation

The accreditation of a program to prepare students for a profession, certifying that it develops the knowledge and skills needed to practice in the profession concerned at the standard of proficiency required.

Professional accreditation is designed to ensure that in addition to meeting general academic standards, programs develop the specific knowledge and skill to practice the profession concerned in the community. In most countries this applies in professional fields such as medicine and other health-related fields, engineering, accounting, psychology, law and many others. In some countries this form of specialized professional accreditation may be given by professional associations recognized by the government for this purpose, or by government agencies.

This form of accreditation differs from academic accreditation, which certifies that a program meets academic standards and conforms to requirements of a qualifications framework. In practice, both academic and professional accreditation are normally required for professional fields although the two may be combined in a single accreditation process.

Program

A coherent program of study followed by students in an academic field or leading to a professional qualification, the successful completion of which qualifies them for an academic award.

A program is regarded as an integrated package of courses and activities leading to a qualification, but the distinction between what is regarded as a single program or a cluster of related programs is difficult to define and may be best explained through examples.

A bachelors degree program to prepare a student as a civil engineer would be regarded as a different program from one to prepare a mechanical engineer, even though there may be some courses that are common to both. Similarly, if a student had completed the bachelors degree program and wished to take a post graduate program leading to a masters degree or a doctorate in the same general field, that would be regarded as a separate program. The test in these examples relates to there being a qualification that is regarded as being complete in itself, and in the case of a professional program, qualifying the person who has taken the program for professional practice in the field. The distinction does not necessarily relate to organization of an institution or college into departments. In the particular example given it is likely that a civil engineering department would offer both the undergraduate and the postgraduate programs. It would also be possible if an institution wished to organize itself in that way for a single department to offer programs in both civil and mechanical engineering.

The title of an academic award is not necessarily a useful guide to what should be regarded as a program. For example general titles such as Bachelor of Arts, or Business, or Science, could include many different programs. In an Arts degree there could be programs in history and or social sciences, in psychology, in social work, or many others. A Business degree could include separate programs for accountants, for economists, or for management and administration, and these would be different programs leading to quite different occupational skills.

While the programs that have been used in these examples should be regarded as separate entities, and should be accredited as such, groups of related programs can be considered together in the accreditation process provided it is possible for external review panels to include the necessary expertise.

Program Accreditation.

Accreditation of a program of study certifying that it meets standards required for the delivery of a program in that field at the level concerned.

Accreditation of a programs involves a judgment that the quality and standards are appropriate for the award to which it leads. The assessment of standards takes into account both the nature of teaching and learning in different fields of study, and the level, complexity, and quantity of learning required for the award. The general standards of learning outcomes for programs that lead to awards such as bachelor, master or doctor are defined in the *National Qualifications Framework* and must be met in all programs leading to these awards, regardless of the type of institution offering the program. In addition to meeting the requirements of the Framework a program must meet the standards set out in “Standards for Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Higher Education Programs”, and in a professional program must provide the particular knowledge and skill required for practice in the field concerned.

Provisional Accreditation

Accreditation granted on a provisional or temporary basis for a new institution or program after assessment of plans for development.

For a new institution or program provisional accreditation may be given on the basis of detailed plans. This allows the institution to start operating, or to teach the program, with reasonable confidence that if the plans are implemented as proposed accreditation is likely to be granted. This process means that students can rely on the quality of the institution and of the provisionally accredited program when it is first introduced. The actions of the institution during this preliminary stage are monitored and reports on progress must be provided. Full accreditation must be applied for when the first group of students have completed their programs. If the plans are not implemented at an acceptable level of quality within the time specified the provisional accreditation will lapse and the license to operate or offer the program will be revoked.

Qualifications Framework

A document setting out the nature, amount, and levels or standards of learning required for academic or technical awards.

Qualifications frameworks specify increasing levels of mastery of knowledge and skill that are required for academic, vocational or technical awards.

Learning expectations are described in broad areas or domains, such as knowledge and the ability to recall information, cognitive skills such as the mastery of concepts, principles and theories and ability to apply them in problem solving and critical thinking, skills in communication and information technology, capacity for self directed learning, and ability to work effectively and constructively in group situations. Qualifications frameworks may also incorporate student attributes relating to values and cultural awareness that reflect national culture and educational policy.

In many cases the broadly defined frameworks are associated with more detailed specification of the particular knowledge and skill required for specific professional fields or disciplines of knowledge. These may be used as basic reference points for programs leading to professional accreditation and for the registration or licensing of graduates to practice in professional fields such as medicine, engineering, accounting, law, or education.

Quality

The value, worth, or standard of an institution or program in relation to generally accepted standards for an institution or program of its type.

Assessments of quality are generally based on performance in relation to accepted standards of good practice, but also “fitness for purpose” which recognizes that there are differing requirements for different types of institution or program, and important differences in mission that are relevant to consideration of an institutions quality.

Consideration is also given to “fitness of purpose” to take account of the appropriateness of the mission of an institution for the environment within which it operates.

The term “quality” is a relative one comparable to “value”, “worth” or “standard” in other contexts. To be of use in planning and evaluation in post secondary education the term should be related to some defined characteristics, and to some levels or benchmarks of performance.

When used as a general term without specification of any particular characteristics of the system (*for example as in “the quality of higher education” or “the quality of an institution”*) it will be taken to refer to a range of elements including but not limited to the level of student achievement, the ability and qualifications of faculty, the standard of facilities and equipment, the effectiveness of teaching, planning and administrative processes, and the relevance of programs. In the system of quality assurance and accreditation in Saudi Arabia reference in assessing quality should be made to the standards identified by the NCAAA in eleven areas of activity.

In any specific situation some aspects of performance may be of relatively high quality and others of relatively low quality, and the balance may depend on the mission and priorities of an institution. Consequently an overall assessment must take account of value judgements about the selection and relative importance of characteristics for consideration, and understanding of what should be regarded as good practice in relation to each of them.

“Quality” is sometimes defined by quality agencies as meaning the single dimension of “fitness for purpose”, an approach that gives particular prominence to the importance of diversity between institutions in mission and objectives. Under this definition the standard of performance is meant to be subsumed within the concept of fitness for the purposes (or mission and objectives) defined by institutions. This definition is sometimes criticised by others who believe it gives inadequate consideration to standards of performance.

Because of potential confusion arising from differing interpretations and a need for clear guidance for institutions about criteria for evaluations of quality, most quality agencies make specific reference to “general criteria of good practice” in defining criteria for evaluation, and provide guidelines or reference documents that spell out matters for consideration and descriptions of what is regarded as good practice.

Quality Assurance

Processes of assessment, evaluation and follow-up relating to quality of performance, which serve two distinct purposes:

- (a) To ensure that desired levels of quality are maintained and improved; and***
- (b) To assure stakeholders that quality is being maintained at levels comparable to good practice in highly regarded institutions elsewhere in the world.***

Stakeholders in this context include students, the government and the wider community, including parents, professional associations and industry.

Quality assurance normally involves both internal and external processes. Mechanisms for quality assurance are expected within each institution on a continuing basis as part of normal program provision and usually involve some external input. However the public credibility of claims of quality requires periodic external validation by an independent authority, and the independent external advice is also an important element in strategies for improvement.

Quality Improvement

Changes in inputs, processes and outcomes that improve the quality of performance, usually across the whole range of an institution’s activities. The term may be used to describe the strategies used by an institution or other organization to bring about these changes and verify their results.

While principal responsibility for quality improvement necessarily rests with an institution delivering programmes, actions taken by an outside authority through support services, incentives, or regulations may assist in a number of ways, and may also be described as quality improvement strategies. The term “quality enhancement” used in some quality assurance systems is considered to have the same meaning as “quality Improvement”.

Responsible Ministry

The Ministry responsible for the establishment, regulation, or supervision of a higher education institution.

A number of different Ministries have responsibility for postsecondary institutions in their field of activity, and have established regulations for their activities. They may provide funding support, assist with quality improvement, and normally have systems for accountability including annual reporting arrangements. In its assessments of quality for purposes of accreditation and quality assurance, the Commission considers both the activities of the institutions and the results of their interactions with the responsible Ministry with which they are involved.

Substantial Equivalence

A judgement that a unit, subject or other component of a program is equal in quality and equivalent in scope to one offered elsewhere.

This concept is particularly important when consideration is being given to allocation of credit for studies done at another institution, either within the country or elsewhere. The details of what is taught and the approach taken in teaching should vary according to the needs and background of different groups of students and the environment in which they live. Adaptations to meet these needs should not become a barrier to recognition for credit provided essential skills and understandings are developed and standards maintained.

Student Attributes

Special characteristics of students developed as a result of the particular policies and teaching strategies of an institution.

The development of particular student attributes is often an important part of the mission of an institution. For example an institution may adopt procedures to ensure students are particularly self-reliant, more creative and entrepreneurial, or more effective than would normally be the case in group situations. The term is normally reserved for attitudes, skills, habits of behaviour or personality characteristics that are exhibited in students' behaviour in outside situations rather than for purely academic learning outcomes which may refer to abilities rather than actual behaviour.

Teaching Strategies

The strategies used by an instructor to develop student learning.

Teaching strategies are the specific techniques used to develop student learning in various domains to develop student learning. Strategies may include, for example, question sequences to develop or apply concepts to new situations, value clarification, use of advance organizers to assist with memorization and recall of information, case studies, group problem solving tasks, simulations, role playing and so on. The term should not be confused with “modes of instruction”, a term used to describe the form of organization for teaching or the delivery of training, such as lecture, tutorial, or laboratory.

Value-Adding

The process of adding value (normally applied to the value of students knowledge and skill) as a result of the teaching and learning activities of an institution or program.

The general level of knowledge and skill of students entering programs can vary widely between institutions. Consequently the concept of “value-adding” is important in considering the contribution an institution makes to

students' learning. While an important concept in considering the quality of an institution's activities, it is difficult to apply objectively since documenting the extent of "value-added" depends on accurate measures of incoming knowledge and skill and valid attribution of causes of growth.