

**Quality Assurance and
Accreditation:
A Glossary of Basic Terms
and Definitions**

compiled by
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Preface

The present publication is a revised and updated version of the *Quality Assurance and Accreditation: Glossary of Basic Terms and Definitions* which was published in 2004. The initiative to produce such a glossary was undertaken in the context of the Invitational Roundtable on “Indicators for Institutional and Programme Accreditation in Higher Education/Tertiary Education” (3-8 April 2003, Bucharest), that was organized in the framework of the UNESCO-CEPES project “Strategic Indicators for Higher Education in the Twenty-First Century.”¹ The need to improve the quantitative assessment of higher education at system and institutional levels, the main objective of the project, has been complemented by this effort to compile in a succinct and easily accessible format main terms and definitions in the areas of quality assurance and accreditation in higher education.

Even if its elaboration required a thorough analysis and diligent search of appropriate sources, the main purpose of this glossary is a pragmatic one – to facilitate understanding of various terms applied in the fields of quality assurance and accreditation. It may also be used as a reference tool to understand the connotations of the terms in circulation. This revised and updated version also reflects new developments in quality assurance and accreditation. Thus the present version as such includes:

- a series of new terms and sub-terms have been introduced, such as: Code of professional ethics; Competencies; Typology of higher education institutions; National and European Qualification

¹ The project was implemented within the Japanese-Funds-in-Trust for the Promotion of International Co-operation and Mutual Understanding, with assistance offered by the German Academic Exchange Service – DAAD, Bonn, Germany. More details are available at www.cepes.ro.

Framework; European Register of External Quality Assurance Agencies, European standards; Study programme, etc.;

- a number of entries has been revised taking new developments and due attention to clarity of description;
- new documents that were published since 2004 (mainly linked to the implementation of quality assurance and accreditation within the Bologna Process) have been used and introduced as definition sources;
- the list of accreditation and quality evaluation bodies in Europe, the United States and Canada has been updated.

This project being the result of teamwork I would like to thank all UNESCO-CEPES staff members who have contributed to its realization, particularly, Lazăr Vlăsceanu, Laura Grünberg, and Dan Pârlea.

Like its earlier version, it is my conviction that even more so this revised version of the glossary will be found by its user a very useful tool facilitating dealing with a very complex, very pertinent but increasingly complex – that of quality assurance and accreditation, which is one of the underlying principles of the Bologna Process and developments in higher education in general.

Jan Sadlak

Director of UNESCO-CEPES

Introduction

There has always been an individual and social need to improve the quality of life of people, including the quality of what they learn over many years of organized schooling, how they learn it, and why they learn it. Concerns about the quality of higher education are also not recent, being an intrinsic part of any discussion on the subject. Over the years, various developments have taken place relative to the assessment, monitoring, and improvement of the quality of different components of higher education (its governance, its contents, its forms of pedagogy, the services offered, etc.). What is new refers to those developments which are related to quality assurance and its management. Concepts such as “quality assessment”, “quality evaluation”, and “quality assurance” are widely used today within the wider processes of managing quality. Frequently used, these concepts are also frequently misused.

Many other attempts have been made to prepare such glossaries, as the references listed for the present glossary indicate. Among these, most are national, sub-national, or regional, with only few of global relevance. To propose a glossary meant to include a more universal set of meanings, while preserving a certain level of national and regional relevance, has thus been a challenging and risky task. We nevertheless embarked on such an endeavour, convinced of the need to compile not so much a diversity but a commonality of meanings. The implication was that of observing how specific meanings are shared and how they operate in different contexts.

We have encountered many expected and unexpected difficulties in producing this glossary. The task proved to be challenging as we discovered many contradictions and paradoxes in the literature surveyed for this purpose, thus

we decided to reveal and publicly share some of the problems encountered in the preparation of this glossary.

In exploring the vocabulary of the field, we were confronted with a domain called "Quality Assurance", which was inflated with concepts, terms, and definitions. It was clear, however, from what we found, that this domain is also seeking a language of its own, not simply one substituting for a number of national, sub-regional languages. Indeed, in order for a domain to exist, to have identity and autonomy, to be fully respected and recognized, it needs a language of its own so as to express itself as widely and efficiently as possible. It needs a revolution of the dictionary.

It seemed to us that we were in the midst of such a revolution. The "paradox of density", as described by M. Dogan and R. Phare (1990), that the more "crowded" a given academic/scientific domain is, the less creativity one will find in it and the more confusion and repetition will be present, seems all too applicable to the field of quality assurance. Following the "infancy stage", during which creativity and innovation could be described as "over-productive", the domain then presented itself as mature, as living "its adulthood", and as being surrounded by an overwhelming diversity of terms and concepts. This evolution justifies the need of the domain for some stability, coherence, order, and certainties. Thus, the field is seeking, or should be seeking, a more general/collective language of expression and operation.

In the context of the domain's need to create its own language, the following questions arise: What is the present state of affairs? Has the "dictionary revolution" ended? Are the main terms and concepts about the quality of education consistently defined? How are their meanings shared? Is there a minimal consensus among specialists as to what they are discussing? How are they using terms and concepts within particular on-going educational reforms? It seems that the answer to all these questions, for the time being, at least, is a resounding "no". As Dirk Van Damme said, "despite the widespread use of the term [quality], a more or less agreed upon definition has not yet materialized. Rather, a multitude of meanings and conceptual confusion are the result" (Van Damme, 2003). There are, of course, others who might have a contrary view and they would not refrain from asserting their point of view as the one universally valid.²

The "revolution" has not yet run its course owing to a set of problems that we discovered when surveying major specialized literature. A 'linguistic baroque world' exists in the field of quality assurance. There are many flowery ingredients, a very rich linguistic creativity without an "edifice" into which they can be incorporated. In the following we will address a number of issues, based on a

² Lee Harvey in 'Understanding Quality', in FROMENT, Eric, KOHLER, Eric, PURSER, Jürgen , and WILSON, Lesley, ed. *EUA Bologna Handbook. Making Bologna Work*, Berlin: Dr. Josef Raabe Verlag, 2006, Chapter B4.1, p. 15.

selection of surveyed literature, that illustrate (not demonstrate) the process of identification of certain trends:

Confusion: There is an obvious lack of consensus in the specialized literature. Many authors mention various meanings for the same concept, and, at the same time, indicate that certain terms lack any consistent definition. One regularly reads statements such as:

- “In much contemporary discourse on education, the word, quality, is frequently mentioned, although it is rarely defined”;
- “Assessment has many meanings and uses”;
- “Standards and criteria [are among] the most confusing terms”;
- “A performance standard is a specific result or level of achievement that is deemed exemplary or appropriate. But confusion abounds. The word is sometimes used in education as a synonym for high expectations; at other times, ‘standard’ is used as a synonym for benchmark.... Often one can also hear standards discussed as if they were general guidelines or principles.... Often speakers confuse content standards with performance standards. Finally, standards are routinely confused with the criteria for judging performance”;
- “Quality assessment, quality measurement, and review of quality are all taken here to be

synonymous with evaluation, especially when there is an external element to the procedure”.

Ambiguity: It is difficult not to question the abundance of terms and concepts and to avoid thinking about the need to “restrict” the vocabulary, allowing it to be more coherent and consistent. Linguistic proficiency seems to be more prolific than the creative generation of practices of improvement.

Quite frequently, several terms are used within same sense. “Standards” are in fact interchangeably related to “criteria” in the United States, and these are very different from criteria as defined in Europe. “Quality control” is often used interchangeably with “quality assurance” and “quality management”. Quality assurance is often considered part of quality management of higher education, while sometimes both are used synonymously. An “evaluation report” is also called “audit report” or “assessment report”. An “Institutional audit” is considered to be the same as an “institutional review”, and a “peer review” the same as a “external review”.

One may also find ambiguities in sentences such as: “The criteria provide a framework to enable an institution to demonstrate that it is worthy of the status that it seeks”.

Circularity: Sometimes circular reasoning is used in defining terms, (e.g. “indicators indicate” or “standards standardize”); nevertheless, avoiding circularity is a basic requirement for a good definition.

Poetical/Lyrical Approaches: Possibly, one should simply accept being postmodern in a postmodern world, thus accepting ambiguity and a sort of deconstructivist perspective, like that of “mapping without routes” – as is suggested in a quote selected. What we have labeled as “poetic approaches” are enjoyable, subtle readings, with regard to the topic; however, we felt that they might also act as serious impediments in any attempt to clarify meanings. The following quotations may illustrate this point:

- “If we all think alike we are not thinking. We need to create a constructive ambiguity, or... provide [ourselves] with a map rather than a route”;
- “Institutional audits are the reasonable ways in which we can assure reasonable accountability while maintaining reasonable institutional autonomy”;
- “Benchmarking is the practice of being humble enough to admit that someone else is better at something and wise [enough] to learn how to match and even surpass [us] at it”;
- “Quality assurance is a matter of awareness and commitment which one might call quality culture”;
- “Quality assurance is, at best, a matter of mind, hence pertaining to quality culture”.

Flowery language: Here is a sample of what we mean by “flowery” ways of treating the topic:

“Assessing minimum standards of quality is a matter of empiricism in that they are defined by what relevant stakeholders-academics [have said] so far as academic quality is concerned, and potential employers, for questions of subsequent employability, more or less unanimously agree on as being an utter and evident requirement that has to be met by any academic study programme launched under that self-proclaimed name, purpose, and ambition”.

Of course, the passage in question is not a definition and should not be judged as such. But such “essayistic” ways of writing about quality assurance may have various impacts on audiences and are more likely to induce a sense of uncertainty than one of stability. There is also the question of balance. If isolated, such baroque language is “harmless” and definitely charming. If overused, it can leave one out of breath. It certainly cannot be helpful in inducing any coherent meaning or understanding of the domain.

Tendencies like these are consequences of certain already acknowledged major problems that are dealt with in the specialized literature. They are evoked for further reflection.

Definitions: As there are many types of definitions for a given term or concept (descriptive, with focus on genesis, origins, implicit/explicit, real/nominal, structural, etc.), there are also many operational meanings in use. Options in defining a term are made

taking into consideration the operational necessities. Often the contextual meaning attributed to the term is not clear, and the impression is that of a general definition. Normally, and from the start, there should be both a theoretical and a technical or operational option for defining any concept. Such is not always the case when surveying the literature seeking appropriate definitions.

New Bureaucracy: One should be reminded of the numerous examples of how institutions found their way out of the bureaucratic system by window dressing while hiding away the “litter”. As the American sociologist, E. Goffman (1959), described the matter, the front stage was dressed in such a bright light that the back stage remained hidden in an impenetrable darkness. No doubt, the opposition of glaring luminosity to pitch darkness is not necessarily the most appropriate metaphor when dealing with gray areas. Bureaucracy has entered into the field of quality assurance in many ways: with its advantages in terms of control, predictability, and efficiency, but also with its constraints, imposing hierarchies of power in terms of language or influences for the adoption of one definition and not another. Bureaucracy has developed institutions and networks that work for the creation of a ‘language of its own’ for the field. Over time, an overspecialized jargon has been created, surrounding the topic with a certain mystic, and separating communities of research and practitioners in the field

of higher education into sub-domains, thus making communication between fields increasingly difficult.

Linguistics: Linguistic problems are present within the general context of the globalization of higher education. As far as the quality assurance field is concerned, translation is a serious barrier to the creation of a truly shared vocabulary. For instance, the distinction between “assessment” and “evaluation” has no linguistic equivalence in the Latin languages, particularly French, Italian, Spanish, and Romanian. So, the various different definitions of such English terms are if not meaningless, at least not applicable in the national contexts in question.

Borrowing of terms: Numerous terms and concepts have been borrowed from outside the educational area. Their adaptation and use in higher education is problematic, as they were mainly framed for a specific sector and then adapted to another, radically different one. Benchmarking, for example, had roots, first in geology, and then in certain private industrial companies, being used first by the Xerox Corporation. The term was subsequently taken into the field of education as a means of comparing and assisting universities in becoming competitive. More recently, the concept has been used at the level of a single discipline or subject. The same could be said for other terms.

“Technical” Problems: Defining quality is a question of measuring human achievement, technically a

problematic task. Those involved in the definition of terms, and thus in making decisions, should be aware of and sensitive to the difficulties and implicit subjectivity in defining and measuring achievement.

Politics: Assessment is in itself a socio-political activity. Defining assessment procedures, extracting information from the process, and then taking decisions – all these processes have social and political implications and may have far-reaching personal and social consequences, intended and unintended, positive and negative.

These are some examples of problems many of the shareholders in the field of higher education should be aware of. In our attempt to eliminate some of them, we tried to introduce a certain systematization.

When compiling the terms and definitions included in this glossary a distinction was made between key terms and associated terms. The key terms are those that, in our opinion, open a wider area for theoretical and practical exploration in the fields of quality assurance and accreditation (*e.g.* benchmarking, recognition, etc.), while associated terms are derived from the key terms and, it is hoped, contribute to further clarifications of their meanings. It is also worth noting that most of the key terms are closely related to one another and should thus be viewed as parts of the same integrated system.

This glossary should be viewed as the result of a process of comparing developments in the fields of quality assurance and accreditation. It may also be viewed as an

attempt to integrate meanings that are, more often than not, context bound. Cutting across the boundaries between the contexts of a cultural or academic type proved to be a difficult task, but it has become clear that only by agreeing on specific core definitions of the most important terms genuine dialogue and substantive comparisons can become possible.

The definitions proposed in this glossary have been compiled from some of the most recent and representative sources; nevertheless, much attention has also been paid to the history of specific developments and applications.

There were several reasons for compiling this glossary. The first was to put some order into the meanings attached to various frequently used terms in the field of quality assurance. The second was to open up new possibilities of relating the terms. Then, too, the hope was to reflect the complexity but also the weaknesses of certain existing conceptual frameworks. Last, but not least, the attempt was made to point out certain boundary meanings that might lead, when and if considered thoroughly, to the elaboration of a more consistent discourse in the field.

However, the completed glossary, as it stands now, leads to the feeling that both accreditation and quality assurance are, at this stage, too heavily loaded with context-bound practices. How global a glossary on accreditation and quality assurance can really be remains a question for the future. At present, all that can be done is to reflect on a more integrated conceptual model that may

provide for improved dialogue and compatible developments.

This glossary is structured to present key terms (in alphabetical order), each one associated, when the case arises, with specific, derived terms. Each key term presentation is followed by certain related terms (the meanings of which assist in its further clarification) and by the specific sources of information. The list of terms and definitions is followed by a list of national accreditation and quality assurance bodies.

As stated above, we compiled this glossary with an eye to commonalities, rather than to differences, in a search for a more universal approach to the domain of quality assurance. Its intention is not to contribute to the “MacDonaldization” of the field, as George Ritzer (1995) might say, but to contribute to efforts underway to create a basis of shared language (that will allow diversity to better express itself).

We are aware that any definition is simply a working tool of the mind and that defining a term does not prevent the underlying concepts from further development. We understand that quality assurance concepts will continue to develop presenting a permanent challenge for experts and practitioners. We hope that throughout this process, the vocabulary of quality assurance will become increasingly shared and less disputed.

Last but not least, we would like to thank our colleagues from the Documentation Unit, in particular

Elisaveta Buică, for their contribution to this revised version.

Lazăr Vlăsceanu, Laura Grünberg, and Dan Pârlea

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Terms and Definitions

ACCREDITATION

1. The process by which a (non-)governmental or private body evaluates the quality of a higher education institution as a whole or of a specific educational programme in order to formally recognize it as having met certain pre-determined minimal criteria or standards. The result of this process is usually the awarding of a status (a yes/no decision), of recognition, and sometimes of a license to operate within a time-limited validity. The process can imply initial and periodic self-study and evaluation by external peers. The accreditation process generally involves three specific steps: (i) *a self-evaluation process* conducted by the faculty, the administrators, and the staff of the institution or academic programme, resulting in a report that takes as its reference the set of standards and criteria of the accrediting body; (ii) *a study visit*, conducted by a team of peers, selected by the accrediting organization, which reviews the evidence, visits the premises, and interviews the academic and administrative staff, resulting in an assessment report, including a recommendation to the commission of the accrediting body; (iii) *an examination by the commission* of the evidence and recommendation on the basis of the given set of criteria concerning quality and resulting in a final

judgment and the communication of the formal decision to the institution and other constituencies, if appropriate.

2. The instrument by which one institution, without its own degree awarding powers or choosing not to use its awarding powers, gains wide authority to award, and/or gains recognition of its qualifications from another competent authority, and to exercise powers and responsibility for academic provision. This authority might be the State, a government agency, or another domestic or foreign higher education institution.

Institutional Accreditation: The terms refer to the accreditation of an entire institution, including all its programmes, sites, and methods of delivery, without any implication to the quality of the study programmes of the institution.

Regional Accreditation (USA): Accreditation granted to a higher education institution by a recognized accrediting association or commission that conducts accreditation procedures in a particular geographic area (usually that of three or more states). The United States has six regional accrediting commissions.

Specialized Accreditation: The accreditation of individual units or programmes (e.g. professional education), by “specialized” or “programme” accrediting bodies applying specific standards for curriculum and course content.

Duration of Accreditation: Accreditation decisions are limited in time. The duration of validity of the accreditation license is established by the accrediting body, which generally holds the right to suspend or to renew the license, upon the satisfactory resolution of any identified issues.

Accreditation of Prior Learning: The process by which individuals are awarded credit toward qualifications based on their prior learning and (sometimes) experience (also called experiential learning). The credit is awarded upon clear evidence that the respective learning has resulted in the student having achieved the appropriate learning outcomes.

Accreditation Status: The formal recognition benefiting an institution or specialized programme for meeting the appropriate standards of educational quality established by the accrediting body at a regional, national, or specialized level.

Accreditation Survey: The evaluation of an institution to identify its level of compliance with the applicable standards of the accreditation body and to make determinations concerning its accreditation status. The survey includes an evaluation of documents and information (evidence) provided by the personnel of the higher education institution, following on-site observations by mandated visitors.

Portfolio for Accreditation: An accumulation of evidence (record of achievement) about specific

proficiencies and the characteristics of an institution in relation to a specific type of activity, especially to learning standards. This operation can be performed either by the concerned institution or by an external assessor.

Accreditation Body: A (non-)governmental or private educational association of national or regional scope that develops evaluation standards and criteria and conducts peer evaluations and expert visits to assess whether or not those criteria are met. It is entitled to accord formal status and sometimes a license to operate to individual higher education institutions or programmes, following the successful examination of the application and evaluation of the respective educational unit. There are different types of accreditation bodies (*e.g.* agencies, councils, commissions, etc.), focused on general accreditation, specialized accreditation, professional accreditation, regional accreditation, national accreditation, distance education accreditation, etc. Also, one of the OECD-UNESCO recommendations requests agencies to sustain and strengthen the existing regional and international networks.

RELATED TERMS: Assessment, Criteria, Evaluation, Quality, Quality Assurance, Recognition, Standards.

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ASSESSMENT

1. The process of the systematic gathering, quantifying, and using of information in view of judging the instructional effectiveness and the curricular adequacy of a higher education institution as a whole (institutional assessment) or of its educational programmes (programme assessment). It implies the evaluation of the core

activities of the higher education institution (quantitative and qualitative evidence of educational activities and research outcomes). Assessment is necessary in order to validate a formal accreditation decision, but it does not necessarily lead to an accreditation outcome.

2. A technically designed process for evaluating student learning outcomes and for improving student learning and development as well as teaching effectiveness.

Assessment of Individual Qualifications: The formal written appraisal or evaluation of qualifications of an individual by a competent authority in order to grant him or her recognition for future academic and/or professional development.

RELATED TERMS: Evaluation, Accreditation, Outcomes, Quality Assessment.

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AUDIT

The process of reviewing an institution or a programme that is primarily focused on its accountability, and determining if the stated aims and objectives (in terms of curriculum, staff, infrastructure, etc.) are met. In the United Kingdom, when an audit is an institutional process carried

out internally, the process is described (since 2002) as an “institutional review” process.

Institutional Audit/Institutional Review: An evidence-based process carried out through peer review that investigates the procedures and the mechanisms by which an institution ensures its quality assurance and quality enhancement. When it specifically addresses the final responsibility for the management of quality and standards that rests with an institution as a whole, the process is called an institutional review.

Audit Report/Evaluation Report/Assessment Report: (i) The document prepared following a quality assessment peer review team site visit that is generally focused on institutional quality, academic standards, learning infrastructure, and staffing. The report about an institution describes the quality assurance (QA) arrangements of the institution and the effects of these arrangements on the quality of its programmes. The audit report is made available to the institution, first in draft form for initial comments, and then in its final, official form. It contains, among other things, the description of the methodology of the audit, the findings, the conclusions of the auditors, and various appendices listing the questions asked. In Europe, the document is often called an “evaluation report” or an “assessment report”. (ii) Such a report may also be prepared about an accreditation agency, describing its quality assurance arrangements and the effect of these arrangements on the quality of the programmes in the institutions for which it is responsible.

Internal Audit: There are currently three main modes for the provision of internal audit within higher education: (i) in-house teams employed as staff members by the respective institutions; (ii) audit consortia (which may provide services to a number of clients both within and outside the sector); and (iii) accountancy firms that undertake internal audits.

Management Audit: A management audit reviews the general management, policy, and policy-making of a given institution.

RELATED TERMS: Quality, Quality Audit, Peer Review.

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BENCHMARK

A standard, a reference point, or a criterion against which the quality of something can be measured, judged, and evaluated, and against which outcomes of a specified activity can be measured. The term, benchmark, means a measure of best practice performance. The existence of a

benchmark is one necessary step in the overall process of benchmarking.

Benchmark Information: Explicit national statements of academic standards or outcomes for individual subjects. Some countries (*e.g.* the United Kingdom) develop benchmarks of this type with regard to a certain group of subjects as part of their quality assurance process.

Subject Benchmark/Subject Benchmark Statements: Subject benchmark statements provide means for the academic community to describe the nature and characteristics of programmes in a specific subject and the general expectations about standards for the award of a qualification at a given level in a particular subject area. They are reference points in a quality assurance framework more than prescriptive statements about curricula.

Course Development Benchmarks: Guidelines regarding the minimum standards that are used for course design, development, and delivery.

RELATED TERMS: Criteria, Evaluation Indicators, Quality Assessment, Standards.

SOURCES: See **BENCHMARKING**

BENCHMARKING

A standardized method for collecting and reporting critical operational data in a way that enables relevant

comparisons among the performances of different organizations or programmes, usually with a view to establishing good practice, diagnosing problems in performance, and identifying areas of strength. Benchmarking gives the organization (or the programme) the external references and the best practices on which to base its evaluation and to design its working processes.

Benchmarking is also defined as:

- a diagnostic instrument (an aid to judgments on quality);
- a self-improvement tool (a quality management/assurance tool) allowing organizations (or programmes) to compare themselves with others regarding some aspects of performance, with a view to finding ways to improve current performance;
- an open and collaborative evaluation of services and processes with the aim of learning from good practices;
- a method of teaching an institution how to improve;
- an on-going, systematically oriented process of continuously measuring the work processes of one organization and comparing them with those of others by bringing an external focus to internal activities.

Benchmarking implies specific steps and structured procedures. Depending on what is being compared or the type of information an institution is gathering, there are different types of benchmarking: strategic benchmarking (focusing on what is done, on the strategies organizations use to compete); operational benchmarking (focusing on how things are done, on how well other organizations perform, and on how they achieve performance), or data-based benchmarking (statistical bench-marking that examines the comparison of data-based scores and conventional performance indicators). There is also internal/external and external collaborative/trans-industry/implicit benchmarking. Within different types, benchmarking may be either vertical (aiming at quantifying the costs, workloads, and learning productivity of a predefined programme area) or horizontal (looking at the costs of outcomes of a single process that cuts across more than one programme area). Some examples of benchmarking programmes are:

1. The USA was the first country to introduce benchmarking activities into higher education in the early 1990s. The NACUBO (National Association of Colleges and University Business Officers) Benchmarking Project has been established longer than any other project in the field. It started in 1991-1992 and has had a statistical and financial approach to benchmarking.
2. In the United Kingdom, benchmarking, as a quality assurance tool in higher education, came to the

forefront only after the 1997 Dearing Committee Report:

- The History 2000 Project, led by Paul Hyland, School of Historical and Cultural Studies, Bath College of Higher Education (example of benchmarking of academic practice, www.bathe.ac.uk/history2000/index.html);
 - The RMCS (Royal Military College of Science) Programme at Cranfield University (example of benchmarking in libraries);
 - The Higher Education Funding Council for Higher Education (HEFCHE). Value for Money Studies (VfM), launched in 1993, www.hefce.ac.uk/current/vgm.htm;
 - “The Commonwealth University International Benchmarking Club”, launched in 1996, by CHEMS (Commonwealth Higher Education Management Service), as an example of international benchmarking, www.acu.ac.uk/chems/benchmark/html.
3. In Europe, benchmarking in higher education is not common, but a series of initiatives has been developed:
- The Copenhagen Business School (CBS) benchmarking analysis of twelve higher education institutions, 1995;

- The German Benchmarking Club of Technical Universities (BMC), 1996;
- The Association of European Universities (CRE) “Institutional Quality Management Review” based on peer reviews and mutual visits among universities participating voluntarily in a cycle, each time focusing on a specific issue, is an example of implicit benchmarking www.unige.ch/eua (details in CHEMS, 1998).

Internal Benchmarking: Benchmarking (comparisons of) performances of similar programmes in different components of one higher education institution. Internal benchmarking is usually conducted at large decentralized institutions with several departments (or units) conducting similar programmes.

(External) Competitive Benchmarking: Benchmarking (comparisons of) performance in key areas, on specific measurable terms, based upon information from institution(s) that are viewed as competitors.

Functional (External Collaborative) Benchmarking: Benchmarking that involves comparisons of processes, practices, and performances with similar institutions of a larger group of institutions in the same field that are not immediate competitors.

Trans-Institutional Benchmarking: Benchmarking that looks across multiple institutions in search of new and innovative practices.

Implicit Benchmarking: A quasi-benchmarking that looks at the production and publication of data and of performance indicators that could be useful for meaningful cross-institutional comparative analysis. It is not based on the voluntary and proactive participation of institutions (as in the cases of other types), but as the result of the pressure of markets, central funding, and/or coordinating agencies. Many of the current benchmarking activities taking place in Europe are of this nature.

Generic Benchmarking: A comparison of institutions in terms of a basic practice process or service (e.g. communication lines, participation rate, and drop-out rate). It compares the basic level of an activity with a process in other institutions that has similar activity.

Process-Based Benchmarking: Goes beyond the comparison of data-based scores and conventional performance indicators (statistical benchmarking) and looks at the processes by which results are achieved. It examines activities made up of tasks, steps which cross the boundaries between the conventional functions found in all institutions. It goes beyond the comparison of data and looks at the processes by which the results are achieved.

RELATED TERMS: Criteria, Evaluation Indicators, Quality Assessment, Standards.

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BEST PRACTICE

A method or an innovative process involving a range of safe and reasonable practices resulting in the improved performance of a higher education institution or programme, usually recognized as “best” by other peer organizations. A best practice does not necessarily represent an absolute, ultimate example or pattern, its application assures the improved performance of a higher education institution or programme; rather, it identifies the best approach to a specific situation, as institutions and programmes vary greatly in constituencies and scope.

RELATED TERMS: Benchmarking, Code of Practice.

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HIGHER EDUCATION FUNDING COUNCIL FOR ENGLAND. *Best Practice in Collaboration between Higher Education Institutions and the Training and Enterprise Council*. Bristol: HEFCE, 1997. www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/1997/m7_97.htm.

TAIT, FRANK. “Enterprise Process Engineering: A Template Tailored for Higher Education”, in, *Cause/Effect Journal* 22 1 (1999). www.educause.edu/ir/library/html/cem9919.html.

CERTIFICATION

The process by which an agency or an association acknowledges the achievement of established quality standards and usually grants certain privileges to the target individual (student or teacher).

RELATED TERMS: Assessment, Standards.

SOURCE

AMERICAN SOCIETY FOR QUALITY. *Quality Glossary*.
Kalamazoo: Western Michigan State University, 2003.
www.wmich.edu/evalctr/ess/glossary/c/html.

CODE OF PRACTICE

A Code of Practice is a non-binding document that describes the minimum audit requirements and those that are considered to reveal a practice worthy of consideration. A Code identifies a comprehensive series of system-wide expected conduct covering matters relating to the management of academic quality and standards in higher education. It provides an authoritative reference point for institutions as they consciously, actively, and systematically assure the academic quality and standards of their programmes, awards, and qualifications. A Code assumes that, taking into account nationally agreed upon principles and practices, each institution has its own systems for independent verification both of its quality and standards and of the effectiveness of its quality

assurance systems. In developing a Code, extensive advice is sought from a range of knowledgeable practitioners.

Examples of Codes:

- UNESCO-CEPES AND COUNCIL OF EUROPE. *Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education*. Riga: 2001. <http://mail.cepes.ro/hed/recogn/lisbon/riga/code.htm>.
- MIDDLE STATES COMMISSION ON HIGHER EDUCATION (MSACHE). *Code of Good Practice in Accrediting in Higher Education*. Philadelphia, 2001. www.msache.org/code_prac.html.
- THE QUALITY ASSURANCE AGENCY FOR HIGHER EDUCATION (QAA): Code of Practice for the Assurance of Academic Quality and Standards in Higher Education: Career Education, Information, and Guidance. www.qaa.ac.uk/public/COP/codesofpractice.htm.
- Code of Good Practice for the Members of the European Consortium for Accreditation in Higher Education (ECA) www.eaconsortium.net/index.php?section=content&id=1

RELATED TERMS: Best Practice, Quality Assurance, Standards.

SOURCES

HIGHER EDUCATION FUNDING COUNCIL FOR ENGLAND. *HEFCE Audit Code of Practice*. Bristol, 2002. www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2002/02_26/02_26.doc

CODE OF (PROFESSIONAL) ETHICS CONCERNING QUALITY ASSURANCE AND ACCREDITATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

A public document establishing a framework for ethical behaviour and decision making in the conduct of quality assurance and accreditation activities in higher education. As useful instruments for achieving transparency and comparability of internal and external quality assurance of higher education, codes of ethics usually consist of a set of basic principles, values and rules of conduct to be considered as reference points in quality assurance and accreditation work together with a set of procedural regulations for observing compliance with the Code. Tailored to the needs and values of the respective organization, codes of ethics may include references to issues such as conflict of interest, confidentiality, intellectual property, permanent development, trust, etc.

RELATED TERMS: Code of practice, Quality culture

SOURCES

INSTITUTE FOR GLOBAL ETHICS. www.globaethics.org.

International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal and External Auditing. The Institute of Internal Auditors. www.theiia.org-index.cfm?doc_id=1499&bhcp=1.

The Online Ethics Centres Glossary.
<http://onlineethics.org/glossary.html>.

QAA Code of Practice for the Assurance of Academic Quality and Standards in Higher Education. www.qaa.ac.uk/academicinfrastructure/codeOfPractice/fullintro.asp.

UNESCO-CEPES Ethical and Moral Dimensions for Higher Education and Science in Europe. Collection of Texts and Selected Bibliography. Bucharest, 2004.
www.cepes.ro/September/reader.pdf.

COMPETENCIES

A specific and measurable pattern of behaviors and knowledge that generates or predicts a high performance level in a given position or context of responsibilities. They account for the identification and application of ideas and solutions in order to solve problems with maximum efficiency and minimum use of resources.

Cognitive competencies: Skills that contribute to the objectives of individual knowledge development, also serving as individual protective factors contributing to successful adaptation. These may include competencies like: reasoning, information-gathering, information analysis, systems-thinking and pattern recognition, theory building, problem-solving, decision-making, planning and goal-setting.

Attitudinal competencies: Actions, values and norms that indicate and generate high performance, and also show that the different types of knowledge have been effectively developed by the subject.

Professional competencies: An individual's specialized knowledge of information sources, access, technology, services, and management, and the ability to critically and effectively evaluate, filter and use this knowledge in order to successfully accomplish specific assignments and obtain results.

RELATED TERMS: Efficiency, Outcomes, Recognition

SOURCES

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CREDITS

A credit is an agreed upon quantified means of expressing the level of learning based on the achievement of learning outcomes and their associated workloads. Generally, once gained, credit cannot be lost. Credit may have a relative value (as the case when they were first introduced) or absolute value (when they made the shift to an accumulation system - no longer calculated on an *ad hoc* proportional basis but on the basis of officially recognized criteria - that is the official length of a degree programme or unit).

Accumulation of Study Credits. Set credits gained by a student in a given higher education institution may be recognized in another institution, depending upon the commonality in terms of level and context, considered as transferable.

ECTS (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System). The main transparency tool for the recognition of

