

<b>Subject</b>	External Quality Assurance
<b>Module</b>	Networks Of External Quality Agencies
<b>Topic</b>	3.3 INQAAHE: The First International Network

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## 1. Introduction



The International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) is a worldwide network active in the theory and practice of quality assurance in higher education. This topic describes the establishment and growth of INQAAHE, its objectives, purposes, and role in the assessment, improvement and maintenance of quality in higher education.

### Objectives: INQAAHE: The First International Network

Upon completion of this topic, you should be able to

- identify the rationale for the establishment of INQAAHE
- list the objectives of INQAAHE
- trace the growth of INQAAHE
- describe some of the initiatives taken by INQAAHE related to quality in higher education

## 2. Founding

In 1991, a number of EQA agencies, meeting in Hong Kong, agreed on the value of forming a network for mutual support and assistance. This led to the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE). INQAAHE was intended to be supportive and inclusive, with no mandate or desire to control or direct QA agencies. The term 'network' was chosen to indicate this, to stress collegial interaction, and to signal the intent to provide mutual support. Consistent with this, its central aim was stated as information-sharing between agencies, with the other objectives listed as aspirational.

The first objectives stated that "through this information-sharing and otherwise" the Network should

- promote good practices in the maintenance and improvement of quality in higher education;
- facilitate research into the practice of quality management in higher education;

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- be able to provide advice and expertise to assist the development of new QA agencies;
- facilitate links between accrediting bodies whose effects extend across national borders;
- help members to determine the standards of institutions and other providers of education operating across national borders;
- permit better-informed international recognition of qualifications;
- be able to assist in the development and use of credit transfer schemes to enhance student mobility between institutions within and across national borders; and
- enable members to recognise dubious accrediting practices and organisations.

As part of its inclusiveness, no subscription fees were charged for the first four years, with the Hong Kong Council for Academic Accreditation (HKCAA) providing resources for a newsletter and member database. In 1995 a Constitution was adopted and membership fees introduced. These fees have been kept sufficiently low as not to exclude less pecunious agencies from developing countries, and all Network labor and travel has been contributed by its officers on their own or from their agency's resources. Agencies from lower income countries (LIC) and less developed countries (LDC) as defined by UNESCO are charged only half fees. INQAAHE also offers a reciprocal fee reduction to members of regional networks.

### 3. Discussion

#### Discussion: Networks vs. Associations

Are "networks" and "associations" the same or different? Note that the emphasis is about establishing platforms for cooperation, information sharing, working together and learning from each other.

### 4. Growth and Outreach

From an initial membership of about 15, the Network has grown to a membership of over 200 from over 60 countries. This represents a global coverage. Along the way, other categories of membership were created.

- Full Members are EQA agencies;
- Associate Members are other bodies with a direct interest in EQA, but with no actual evaluation role;
- Institution Members are institutions in good standing with the respective EQA agencies; and
- Affiliates are individuals.

In 1999, INQAAHE was incorporated and registered in New Zealand, where it has formal legal status. It remains a voluntary, self-declared association of organisations, with no external mandate from another body, such as the United Nations. In contrast, some of the regional networks have a mandate from, or at least a close association with, another regional body (e.g., ENQA – the European Union; RIACES – Mercosur; CANQATE – CARICOM; ANQAHE – the Association of Arab Universities; AfriQAN – the Association of African Universities). INQAAHE's mandate comes from its members; its international relations come from the status it has gained over time by assisting and representing its members.

From an early stage, INQAAHE has sought to collaborate with other world bodies, and globally-oriented national bodies with an interest in or responsibility for matters relating to quality in higher education. As an example, in the year it was incorporated, INQAAHE signed an agreement with UNESCO under the University

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Twining and Networking (UNITWIN) scheme. The potential for active engagement under this scheme was limited, as it was more oriented to partnerships between institutions. Then in 2005, INQAAHE was formally recognised by UNESCO as a Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO). Ever mindful of its intention to assist incipient agencies, INQAAHE has on several occasions negotiated support for developing country members through UNESCO and other bodies. In 2000, INQAAHE formally introduced its own Scholarships & Mentoring Fund (later renamed the INQAAHE Development Fund). This channels some of the membership fees, augmented by voluntary member donations, into advising and training activities.

INQAAHE received a World Bank grant for regional capacity-building in QA through the Asia-Pacific Quality Network (APQN). After some years of extending this support, region by region, the World Bank decided in 2007 to coalesce these funds in a program called the Global Initiative for Quality Assurance Capacity-Building (GIOAC), administered by UNESCO. Funds from this program flow to QA networks; INQAAHE is represented on the GIOAC steering group with the responsibility for ensuring that the Group is aware of the needs and interests of **all** the QA networks. INQAAHE has also used some of the funds received from this program to directly support other QA networks.

In 2007, INQAAHE drew up a 'position paper' on working together with other networks and has since convened several meetings of networks. With the growth of regional networks that concentrate more on operational aspects of QA agencies, INQAAHE's emphasis has turned more toward policy development, relations with other world agencies (such as UNESCO, OECD, World Bank), and the evaluation of quality agencies. Nonetheless, INQAAHE continues to provide some very practical services to members.

INQAAHE's membership is open to any valid QA agency, whether long-standing, mature, or new and inexperienced. INQAAHE has excluded organisations that are not bona fide agencies (such as accreditation mills). It is possible for agencies to have conflicting interests, or be in disagreement, but INQAAHE aims to serve each agency according to INQAAHE's objectives.

## 5. Discussion

### Discussion: Establishing a Network

Consider the following questions:

1. How much money does a network need?
2. How much 'administration', 'management', 'government', 'bureaucracy', does a network need? How would you assess whether the benefits of a network merit this superstructure?

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## 6. Summary

This topic covered the following main points:

- INQAAHE was founded in 1991, with its central aim as information-sharing among different EQA agencies.
- INQAAHE had neither any mandate nor desire to control QA agencies; its mandate comes from its members.
- From an initial membership of about 15, INQAAHE has grown to a membership of over 200 from over 60 countries. INQAAHE's membership is open to any valid QA agency, whether long-standing and mature or new and inexperienced.
- INQAAHE has collaborated with other world bodies (such as UNESCO, OECD, World Bank) in a number of initiatives relating to quality in higher education. INQAAHE's emphasis now is turning more towards policy development, relations with other world agencies and the evaluation of quality agencies.