

**Globally Accepted Approaches to Quality Assurance in  
Education:  
A Comparative Analysis of Frameworks, Principles, and  
Institutional Practice**

*A Doctoral Dissertation*

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## **Abstract**

This doctoral dissertation provides an extensive comparative analysis of the principal quality assurance approaches that have achieved broad international acceptance in education. It examines the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG), the INQAAHE International Standards and Guidelines, the United States accreditation model associated with the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), regional frameworks in the Asia-Pacific (APQN, AUN-QA), African initiatives (AfriQAN and the ASG-QA), Latin American networks, and management-system standards such as ISO 21001. Drawing on the INQAAHE Global Trends studies of 2020 and 2025, comparative scholarship, and policy documents from UNESCO, CHEA, and regional networks, the work identifies shared principles of transparency, peer review, attention to learning outcomes or student achievement, cyclical external review, and continuous improvement. It also documents significant regional variation in governance, the balance between accountability and enhancement, resource conditions, and the treatment of cross-border and online provision. The dissertation argues that global acceptance of these approaches rests on substantive alignment with widely referenced principles rather than on exclusive formal affiliation with any single originating organisation. Implications for institutions, quality assurance agencies, and cross-border recognition are examined in detail.

## **Chapter 1: Introduction and Research Context**

Quality assurance has become a central feature of educational systems worldwide. The expansion of higher education, the growth of private and online provision, increased student mobility, and demands for public accountability have all contributed to the development of external review mechanisms. At the same time, no single quality assurance model has universal legal force. Instead, several frameworks have gained wide recognition because of the clarity of their principles, the established use of peer review, and their adoption or adaptation by institutions and agencies seeking external reference points.

This dissertation examines the approaches that have achieved broad international acceptance. The term “globally accepted” is used to describe frameworks that are regularly referenced, adapted, or used as benchmarks across national borders, even where formal membership or legal recognition is not a prerequisite. The central research questions are: What are the main quality assurance approaches that have achieved broad international acceptance? What core principles do these approaches share? How do regional variations in governance, resource conditions, and policy priorities affect their practical application? What are the implications for institutions and quality assurance bodies that seek to align with more than one framework?

The study is documentary and analytical. It draws on published standards, the INQAAHE Global Trends volumes, comparative literature on quality assurance, and policy guidance from international organisations. The dissertation is organised as follows. Chapter 2 reviews the development of quality assurance as a field and the distinction between accountability and improvement. Chapter 3 examines the European Standards and Guidelines in detail. Chapter 4 analyses the INQAAHE International Standards and Guidelines and the findings of the Global Trends studies. Chapter 5 considers the United States accreditation model and the role of CHEA. Chapter 6 addresses regional frameworks in the Asia-Pacific, Africa, and Latin America. Chapter 7 discusses management-system standards, with particular attention to ISO 21001. Chapter 8 presents a comparative analysis of shared principles and points of divergence. Chapter 9 examines implications for practice, including multi-framework alignment, and concludes.

## **Chapter 2: The Development of Quality Assurance as a Field of Practice and Scholarship**

The modern field of quality assurance in higher education developed in response to several interrelated pressures. Massification of higher education systems increased the diversity of providers and raised questions about the comparability of standards. Constraints on public funding and demands for accountability encouraged governments to establish or strengthen external review mechanisms. Internationalisation of student mobility and institutional partnerships created demand for quality signals that could be recognised across borders.

Scholarly work has examined both the regulatory and the developmental dimensions of quality assurance. External review can serve an accountability function by providing public assurance that minimum standards are met. It can also support an improvement function by assisting institutions in identifying strengths and areas for development. The balance between these functions varies by national context and by the design of particular quality assurance systems. Research by Stensaker and others has explored how quality ideas are translated into institutional practice and how institutions negotiate the expectations of external review with their own academic cultures.

The field has also seen the growth of meta-organisations and networks. Bodies such as INQAAHE, ENQA, APQN, and AfriQAN facilitate the exchange of practice and, in some cases, provide external review of quality assurance agencies. These networks do not hold regulatory authority over institutions, but their standards and guidelines have become important reference points. The INQAAHE Global Trends studies of 2020 and 2025 represent the most systematic comparative mapping of internal and external quality assurance across major world regions. They document both areas of convergence and persistent regional differences in capacity, governance, and emphasis.

Quality assurance is not limited to higher education. Similar concerns with standards, transparency, and continuous improvement appear in pre-tertiary education, vocational education and training, and professional education. Management-system standards such as ISO 21001 have been developed specifically for educational organisations and are used alongside academic quality frameworks by many institutions.

### **Chapter 3: The European Standards and Guidelines (ESG)**

The Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, commonly known as the ESG, were adopted in 2015. They represent the most widely referenced regional framework for higher education quality assurance. The ESG are organised in three parts. Part 1 addresses internal quality assurance within institutions and includes standards on policy for quality assurance, design and approval of programmes, student-centred learning, teaching and assessment, student admission and progression, teaching staff, learning resources and student support, information management, public information, and ongoing monitoring and periodic review of programmes. Part 2 addresses external quality assurance and includes standards on the consideration of internal quality assurance, the design of external quality assurance methodologies, implementation processes, peer-review experts, criteria for outcomes, reporting, complaints and appeals, and thematic analysis. Part 3 addresses the quality assurance of quality assurance agencies and includes standards on activities, policies and processes for quality assurance, independence, thematic analysis, resources, internal quality assurance and professional conduct, and cyclical external review of agencies.

The European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) registers agencies that have demonstrated substantial compliance with the ESG through an external review. Registration is voluntary but has become an important signal of alignment. The ESG do not prescribe detailed procedures. They set expectations against which institutions and agencies can design their own processes. This characteristic has facilitated their use as a reference point by organisations outside the European Higher Education Area. International quality review services offered by European agencies and voluntary alignment by institutions and agencies in other regions have contributed to the global visibility of the framework.

The ESG emphasise student-centred learning and the use of learning outcomes. They also expect the involvement of stakeholders, including students, in quality assurance processes. Cyclical external review is a core feature. These elements appear, in varying forms, in other widely referenced frameworks.

## **Chapter 4: INQAAHE International Standards and Guidelines and the Global Trends Studies**

The International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) has developed International Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Tertiary Education. The 2025 edition addresses the diversification of provision, including cross-border education, online learning, and micro-credentials. The standards support alignment reviews for external quality assurance agencies and provide a global reference that is not limited to any single region.

INQAAHE's Global Trends studies constitute the most comprehensive comparative mapping of quality assurance practice. The first study, published in 2020, and the second, published in 2025, cover Africa, the Arab States, Asia-Pacific, Eastern and Western Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, and North America. The studies examine both internal quality assurance within institutions and external quality assurance by agencies. They document variation in the maturity of systems, the balance between accountability and enhancement, the capacity of agencies, and the professionalisation of quality assurance practice. At the same time, they identify shared concerns with efficiency, relevance, trust, and the credibility of external review.

The INQAAHE standards are used by agencies seeking international benchmarking. Alignment with the standards does not require membership of INQAAHE as a precondition for substantive use of the published criteria. Agencies may design their processes to be consistent with the standards and document that consistency for external readers. The Global Trends studies provide empirical context for understanding how such alignment operates in different regional settings.

## **Chapter 5: The United States Accreditation Model and the Role of CHEA**

In the United States, quality assurance is characterised by non-governmental accreditation. Institutional accreditors evaluate entire institutions, while specialised or programmatic accreditors evaluate particular programmes or schools. The Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) recognises accrediting organisations that meet its standards for academic quality, accountability, and continuous improvement. Recognition by CHEA is distinct from recognition by the U.S. Department of Education, which is linked to eligibility for federal student aid programmes.

The U.S. model emphasises institutional mission, peer review by academic and professional peers, and evidence of student achievement. Accreditors are expected to respect the diversity of institutional missions while requiring evidence that the institution is achieving its stated purposes. The process typically involves self-evaluation by the

institution, review by a peer team, and a decision by the accrediting organisation. Periodic reaffirmation of accreditation is a standard feature.

CHEA's Guiding Principles for Artificial Intelligence in Accreditation and Recognition, issued in 2025, extend this tradition into the context of emerging technologies. The principles emphasise human control of the decision-making process, the use of authentic and verifiable data, adherence to ethical guidelines of transparency and accountability, protection and security of data, and the reliability of AI systems. These principles are consistent with the broader emphasis in U.S. accreditation on professional judgment and transparency.

The U.S. model has influenced quality assurance practice internationally through the participation of U.S. accreditors in international networks and through the use of U.S. accreditation by institutions outside the United States seeking additional external recognition.

## **Chapter 6: Regional Frameworks in the Asia-Pacific, Africa, and Latin America**

Regional frameworks have developed in response to the specific conditions and policy priorities of different parts of the world. In the Asia-Pacific region, the Asia-Pacific Quality Network (APQN) and the ASEAN University Network-Quality Assurance (AUN-QA) provide platforms for capacity building, external review, and the exchange of practice. These frameworks emphasise both the assurance of minimum standards and the enhancement of institutional capacity. They operate alongside national quality assurance arrangements and support mutual understanding among agencies in the region.

In Africa, the African Quality Assurance Network (AfriQAN) and the African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ASG-QA), developed under the Harmonisation of African Higher Education Quality Assurance and Accreditation (HAQAA) initiative, address the need for continental reference points. The ASG-QA draw on the ESG while adapting expectations to the African context. Implementation varies across countries according to national capacity, regulatory structures, and resource availability. The HAQAA initiative has supported capacity building and the development of tools for quality enhancement and cross-border recognition.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, networks such as RIACES contribute regional perspectives on quality assurance and accreditation. These frameworks share with other regional approaches an emphasis on external review and continuous improvement, while reflecting differences in governance traditions, resource conditions, and the relative weight given to accountability and enhancement functions.

Comparative studies indicate that regional frameworks facilitate mutual understanding among agencies within a region and provide additional reference points for institutions seeking recognition beyond their national systems. They do not replace national quality assurance arrangements but operate alongside them. The INQAAHE Global Trends studies document the development and challenges of these regional systems in comparative perspective.

## **Chapter 7: Management-System Standards and ISO 21001**

ISO 21001 provides a management-system standard specifically designed for educational organisations. It focuses on the needs of learners and other beneficiaries, stakeholder satisfaction, and continual improvement. The standard is applicable to schools, universities, vocational training providers, and corporate learning functions. It is structured in a manner consistent with other ISO management-system standards, which facilitates integration with existing management systems where these are already in place.

ISO 21001 is distinct from academic accreditation frameworks. It addresses organisational processes for the design, delivery, and evaluation of education rather than the academic content or the level of qualifications awarded. Many institutions use ISO 21001 alongside academic accreditation to strengthen the management of educational processes, information systems, and stakeholder engagement. The 2025 edition of the standard continues the learner-centred orientation and accommodates technology-enhanced and hybrid forms of education.

Other ISO standards are also used by educational organisations. ISO 9001 provides a general quality management system framework. ISO/IEC 40180 addresses quality in technology-enhanced learning. These standards provide tools for process management and continuous improvement but do not themselves constitute academic accreditation. Their use alongside academic quality frameworks is common among institutions seeking to strengthen both academic and organisational dimensions of quality.

## **Chapter 8: Comparative Analysis of Shared Principles and Regional Variation**

The approaches examined in this dissertation share several core principles despite differences in legal status, organisational form, and regional context. Transparency of process and outcomes is expected across the ESG, INQAAHE standards, U.S. accreditation, and regional frameworks. Peer or expert review is a common method of external evaluation. Attention to learning outcomes or student achievement appears consistently. Cyclical external review and an expectation of continuous improvement are

widely present. Stakeholder involvement, including the participation of students, is emphasised in several frameworks.

Points of divergence include the degree of centralisation of quality assurance arrangements, the formal role of government versus non-governmental organisations, the relative emphasis on accountability versus enhancement, and the treatment of cross-border and online provision. Resource conditions and national regulatory traditions also shape implementation. The INQAAHE Global Trends studies of 2020 and 2025 document these patterns of convergence and divergence across regions and provide evidence of both the professionalisation of quality assurance practice and persistent capacity challenges in some regions.

A significant practical implication is that substantive alignment with widely accepted principles does not require formal affiliation with the organisations that published the standards. An institution or quality assurance body may design its processes to be consistent with elements of the ESG, the INQAAHE standards, ISO 21001, and other frameworks, provided that the alignment is clearly documented and transparent. This approach preserves organisational autonomy while allowing the organisation to be understood by external readers who are familiar with the source frameworks. Clear public information about the principles adopted and the processes used to implement them supports informed judgment by partners, students, and the public.

## **Chapter 9: Implications for Practice and Conclusion**

The comparative analysis has several implications for practice. Institutions seeking international recognition may benefit from documenting how their internal quality processes align with widely referenced principles, even where formal affiliation with a particular network is not pursued. Quality assurance agencies may design review criteria that draw on more than one framework, provided that the sources of the criteria and the manner of their application are clearly stated. Cross-border partnerships and recognition arrangements may be facilitated by reference to shared principles rather than by exclusive reliance on any single national or regional system.

For voluntary international quality assurance bodies, the findings support continued emphasis on transparent process, public verification of status, and clear distinction between quality assurance review and national degree-awarding authority. AI-related and technology-related considerations can be incorporated into self-evaluation guidance and review criteria by reference to existing principles of transparency, human judgment, and educational purpose, as illustrated by CHEA's 2025 principles and UNESCO guidance.

The dissertation concludes that globally accepted quality assurance approaches rest on a set of shared principles of transparency, peer review, attention to learning outcomes,

cyclical review, and continuous improvement. Regional frameworks and management-system standards offer complementary reference points. Organisations may align with the substance of these approaches, and may combine elements from more than one, without formal affiliation with the originating bodies. Clear public documentation of the principles adopted and the processes used to implement them remains essential for external understanding and trust.

Further research is needed on the long-term effects of multi-framework alignment on institutional practice, on the experiences of agencies that have undergone external review against more than one set of standards, and on the implications of emerging technologies for the application of established quality assurance principles. Empirical studies of institutional self-evaluation practices and of the use of public listings for verification would also contribute to understanding of how alignment operates in practice.

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*Note: This dissertation is prepared for academic and institutional discussion. QAHE accreditation remains a voluntary quality assurance process and does not confer degree-awarding authority.*

## **Chapter 10: Literature Review of the Accountability–Improvement Debate in Quality Assurance**

The relationship between accountability and improvement has been a central concern in the scholarly literature on quality assurance in higher education. External quality assurance is frequently expected to serve both functions: to provide public assurance that standards are met, and to support institutions in enhancing their educational provision. The balance between these functions, and the extent to which they are compatible or in tension, has been examined by numerous researchers.

Early work on quality assurance in higher education, including contributions associated with the development of the European Standards and Guidelines, emphasised both accountability to external stakeholders and the use of review processes for institutional development. Harvey and colleagues examined the purposes of quality assurance and the ways in which different systems prioritise one function over the other. Subsequent research has explored how institutions experience and respond to external review, and whether the accountability requirements of external systems support or constrain internal enhancement activities.

Stensaker's work has been particularly influential in examining the translation of quality ideas into institutional practice and the organisational consequences of quality assurance. Studies have shown that institutions develop internal quality systems partly in response to external expectations, but that the form and use of these systems are also shaped by institutional cultures, leadership, and resource conditions. The concept of “quality work” has been used to focus attention on the everyday practices through which quality is maintained and enhanced, rather than solely on formal structures and procedures.

The accountability–improvement debate is also visible in the design of quality assurance frameworks. The ESG include standards that address both external reporting and internal processes for improvement. INQAAHE's Global Trends studies document variation across regions in the relative emphasis placed on accountability and enhancement. In some systems, external review is primarily oriented toward compliance and public assurance; in others, greater weight is given to developmental support for institutions. Resource constraints, regulatory traditions, and the maturity of quality assurance systems influence how this balance is struck in practice.

Empirical studies have examined student participation in quality assurance, the use of data and indicators, and the effects of external review on institutional behaviour. Findings are mixed. Some studies report that external review can stimulate internal reflection and improvement when institutions have the capacity and autonomy to act on review findings. Other studies identify risks that compliance requirements may encourage institutions to focus on documentation and formal processes at the expense of substantive

educational improvement. The literature generally supports the view that both accountability and improvement functions can be served by quality assurance systems, but that the design of the system, the capacity of institutions, and the nature of the relationship between agencies and institutions affect the outcomes.

For organisations seeking to align with multiple frameworks, the accountability–improvement literature suggests the value of documenting both the external assurance provided by review processes and the internal mechanisms through which findings are used for enhancement. Transparency about how external expectations are translated into institutional practice can support understanding by partners and stakeholders familiar with different quality assurance traditions.

## **Chapter 11: Case Study of Multi-Framework Alignment**

This case study examines how an educational organisation can align its quality processes with more than one widely referenced framework without formal affiliation to the originating bodies. The example is constructed from publicly described practices and is intended to illustrate the practical steps involved in multi-framework alignment.

The organisation in this case operates as a private higher education provider offering programmes in professional and management fields. It maintains an internal quality system that includes programme design and review, assessment practices, faculty development, student support, and periodic self-evaluation. The organisation has chosen to document the alignment of its processes with three reference points: the ESG (particularly the standards on internal quality assurance and learning outcomes), the INQAAHE International Standards and Guidelines (particularly those addressing diversification of provision and transparency), and ISO 21001 (particularly the requirements related to learner needs, stakeholder engagement, and continual improvement).

Alignment with the ESG is demonstrated through the organisation’s programme approval and review processes, which require the specification of learning outcomes, the involvement of external academic input, and the periodic review of programmes against their stated aims. Student feedback is collected and considered in programme review. These practices are consistent with ESG Part 1 standards on programme design, student-centred learning, and ongoing monitoring.

Alignment with INQAAHE standards is addressed through the organisation’s approach to cross-border and online provision. The organisation documents how it ensures that students studying at a distance receive comparable support and assessment to those studying on campus, and how it handles complaints and appeals. Public information

about programmes and quality processes is maintained on the organisation's website, supporting transparency expectations.

Alignment with ISO 21001 is addressed through the organisation's management system for educational processes. The organisation has documented procedures for identifying learner needs, designing educational provision, monitoring delivery, and using feedback for improvement. Management review of the educational management system is conducted periodically. The organisation does not claim ISO 21001 certification; it documents that its internal processes are consistent with the standard's requirements.

The organisation publishes a quality statement that identifies the frameworks referenced, summarises the main processes used to address the relevant expectations, and clarifies that the alignment is voluntary and does not constitute formal recognition by the bodies that published the standards. External partners and prospective students can review this statement alongside the organisation's programme information.

This case illustrates that multi-framework alignment is primarily a matter of process design and transparent documentation. The organisation retains control over its own procedures while making it possible for external readers to understand how its practices relate to widely referenced principles. The approach does not require membership of any of the source organisations.

## **Chapter 12: Extended Analysis of Artificial Intelligence Implications for Existing Quality Assurance Standards**

The rapid development of generative artificial intelligence has raised questions about the continued applicability of existing quality assurance standards. Systematic reviews published in 2025 and 2026 document widespread use of generative AI in higher education for feedback, writing support, tutoring, and assessment-related tasks. At the same time, concerns have been raised about assessment validity, academic integrity, equity of access, and the potential erosion of critical thinking if AI use is ungoverned.

Existing quality assurance frameworks emphasise principles that remain relevant in an AI-enabled environment. The ESG and INQAAHE standards expect institutions to demonstrate that assessment is valid and reliable in relation to stated learning outcomes. When students can use generative AI to produce assessed work, institutions must consider whether the assessment continues to provide evidence of the intended learning. Quality assurance processes can address this by examining institutional policies on AI use, the design of assessments, and the methods used to ensure academic integrity.

UNESCO's Guidance for Generative AI in Education and Research (2023) advocates a human-centred approach that prioritises human agency, equity, and pedagogical purpose.

CHEA's Guiding Principles for Artificial Intelligence in Accreditation and Recognition (2025) emphasise that AI should support rather than replace human judgment in accreditation decisions, that data used should be authentic, and that transparency and data protection should be maintained. These principles are consistent with the broader emphasis in quality assurance frameworks on professional judgment, transparency, and the protection of educational purpose.

Quality assurance agencies can address AI within existing standards rather than creating entirely new parallel structures. Practical measures include expecting institutions to have policies on AI use in teaching and assessment, to disclose how AI is used in self-evaluation and evidence preparation where relevant, and to maintain human oversight of high-stakes decisions. Periodic review of AI tools and outcomes can be incorporated into existing expectations for continuous improvement and risk monitoring.

Equity considerations are also relevant. Access to generative AI tools is uneven. Quality assurance processes that examine student support and learning resources can include attention to whether AI-related tools are available equitably and whether institutional policies address potential disadvantages. The INQAAHE standards' attention to diversification of provision provides a basis for examining AI-related issues in online and cross-border contexts.

The analysis indicates that existing quality assurance principles are compatible with the presence of AI when institutions and agencies maintain focus on learning outcomes, assessment validity, transparency, equity, and human judgment. AI can support quality enhancement through personalised feedback, data analysis, and administrative efficiency, provided that its use is governed and that high-stakes decisions remain under human control. Clear documentation of institutional AI policies and practices supports external understanding within existing quality assurance frameworks.

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## **Chapter 13: Additional Case Studies of Multi-Framework Alignment**

### **Case Study 2: Vocational Training Provider Aligning with ISO 21001 and Regional Expectations**

A vocational training organisation offering short-cycle professional programmes documents alignment with ISO 21001 for its educational management system and with selected expectations from regional quality frameworks concerning programme relevance and employer engagement. The organisation maintains procedures for identifying labour-market needs, involving industry representatives in programme review, collecting learner feedback, and conducting management review of educational processes. It publishes a statement identifying the standards referenced and clarifying that the alignment is voluntary. External partners can examine the statement alongside programme information and learner outcome summaries.

### **Case Study 3: Online Higher Education Provider Referencing ESG and INQAAHE Principles**

An online higher education provider documents how its programme design, assessment, and student support processes address ESG expectations on learning outcomes, student-centred learning, and ongoing monitoring. It also addresses INQAAHE-related expectations concerning transparency of information and handling of complaints in a cross-border context. The provider maintains public information on programme aims, assessment methods, and quality processes. Self-evaluation reports prepared for external review explicitly map internal processes to the referenced standards. The provider does not claim formal recognition by the bodies that published the standards; it provides documentation that external reviewers can evaluate.

### **Case Study 4: Institution Combining Academic Accreditation Review with ISO 9001 and ISO 21001**

An institution holding academic accreditation also maintains management systems consistent with ISO 9001 and ISO 21001. Academic review processes address programme quality, faculty qualifications, and student achievement. The management systems address organisational processes, documentation control, and continual improvement. The institution maintains separate but coordinated documentation for academic review and management-system audit. Public information distinguishes between the academic accreditation status and the management-system certifications. This arrangement allows the institution to address both academic and organisational dimensions of quality while remaining clear about the scope of each form of external recognition.

## **Chapter 14: Expanded Literature Review**

Additional scholarship has examined the effects of external quality assurance on institutional behaviour and the conditions under which review processes support enhancement. Studies of student participation in quality assurance panels indicate that students can take on multiple roles, including representative, partner, and expert, depending on the design of the process and the preparation provided (Jungblut & Stensaker). Research on the use of indicators and data in quality assurance has explored both the potential for evidence-informed decision-making and the risks of narrowing attention to measurable outcomes at the expense of broader educational purposes.

Comparative work on quality assurance systems has documented differences between centralised, decentralised, and hybrid models. Centralised systems may promote consistency but can face challenges of capacity and local adaptation. Decentralised or institution-led systems may support innovation but require strong internal quality processes and clear external expectations. Hybrid arrangements attempt to combine external review with institutional autonomy. The INQAAHE Global Trends studies provide the most extensive comparative evidence on these patterns across regions.

Literature on cross-border quality assurance has examined the challenges of reviewing provision delivered in more than one jurisdiction and the role of international networks in supporting mutual understanding. Studies have noted that substantive alignment with widely referenced principles can facilitate recognition even where formal mutual recognition agreements do not exist, provided that processes and outcomes are transparent.

Recent work on artificial intelligence in education has examined implications for assessment design, academic integrity, and institutional governance. Systematic reviews indicate that institutions are experimenting with process-oriented and authentic assessment approaches in response to generative AI, and that perceptions of benefits and risks remain mixed among students and staff. Policy guidance from UNESCO and CHEA emphasises human-centred approaches and the preservation of human judgment in high-stakes decisions.

## **Chapter 15: Recommendations**

The following recommendations are offered for institutions, quality assurance agencies, and other stakeholders on the basis of the analysis presented in this dissertation.

1. Institutions seeking to demonstrate alignment with widely referenced quality assurance principles should document the specific processes used to address those principles and make this documentation available to external readers. Clear statements of the

frameworks referenced, and of the distinction between voluntary alignment and formal recognition, support informed judgment.

2. Quality assurance agencies may design review criteria that draw on more than one framework where this serves the purpose of the review, provided that the sources of the criteria and the manner of their application are transparent. Agencies should maintain clear distinctions between their own accreditation or review decisions and any national regulatory authority.
3. Where institutions use management-system standards such as ISO 21001 alongside academic quality frameworks, they should maintain coordinated but distinct documentation so that the scope of each form of external engagement is clear.
4. Institutions and agencies addressing artificial intelligence in teaching, assessment, and quality processes should ground their approaches in existing principles of learning outcomes, assessment validity, transparency, equity, and human judgment. Policies on AI use, disclosure of AI-related practices in self-evaluation, and human oversight of high-stakes decisions can be incorporated within current quality assurance expectations.
5. Public listings of accredited institutions and quality processes should be maintained and updated so that third parties can verify current status. Transparency of this kind supports the accountability function of quality assurance while allowing institutions to use review findings for internal improvement.
6. Further research should examine the long-term effects of multi-framework alignment on institutional practice, the experiences of agencies reviewed against more than one set of standards, and the effectiveness of institutional AI governance models in maintaining assessment validity and equity.

These recommendations are consistent with the shared principles identified across the frameworks examined in this dissertation. They support the view that substantive alignment with widely accepted quality assurance approaches can be achieved through transparent process design and documentation, without requiring formal affiliation with any single originating organisation.

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## **Chapter 16: Theoretical Foundations of Quality Assurance in Education**

Quality assurance in education rests on several theoretical foundations that inform both the design of frameworks and the interpretation of review processes. These foundations draw from organisational theory, theories of accountability and trust, theories of professional judgment, and concepts of learning and assessment. Understanding these foundations assists in explaining why certain principles appear across otherwise diverse quality assurance approaches and how those principles can be applied in different institutional contexts.

Organisational and institutional theory provides one foundation. Quality assurance systems can be understood as mechanisms through which external expectations are translated into organisational structures and practices. Institutions develop internal quality systems partly in response to external review requirements, but the form of these systems is also shaped by institutional history, leadership, academic cultures, and resource conditions. The concept of “quality work” focuses attention on the everyday practices through which quality is maintained and enhanced, rather than solely on formal policies and procedures. This perspective helps explain variation in how institutions respond to similar external frameworks.

Theories of accountability and trust supply a second foundation. External quality assurance is frequently justified as a means of providing public assurance that educational standards are met. At the same time, trust between institutions, quality assurance agencies, and the public depends on the perceived legitimacy and competence of review processes. Peer review is widely used because it draws on professional expertise while remaining external to the institution under review. Transparency of process and outcomes is expected to support both accountability and trust. Research on accountability in higher education has examined the conditions under which external review strengthens or strains relationships of trust.

Theories of professional judgment and peer review constitute a third foundation. Quality assurance frameworks commonly rely on expert or peer review rather than solely on quantitative indicators. This reliance reflects the view that educational quality involves complex judgments about learning, curriculum, assessment, and institutional context that cannot be fully captured by metrics alone. Professional judgment is expected to be exercised within a framework of stated criteria and to be open to scrutiny. The preservation of human judgment in high-stakes decisions remains a consistent theme across frameworks, including recent guidance on the use of artificial intelligence in accreditation and recognition.

Theories of learning and assessment provide a fourth foundation. Quality assurance standards that address learning outcomes, student-centred learning, and assessment validity draw on the expectation that educational provision should be designed and

evaluated in relation to what students are expected to know and be able to do. Assessment is expected to provide credible evidence of intended learning. When new technologies, including generative artificial intelligence, affect how students produce assessed work, questions of assessment validity become central to quality assurance. Frameworks that emphasise learning outcomes and assessment validity supply a basis for examining these questions without requiring entirely new theoretical structures.

Stakeholder and governance theories offer a further foundation. Quality assurance frameworks commonly expect the involvement of students, employers, and other stakeholders in programme design, review, and quality processes. This expectation reflects the view that educational quality is of interest to multiple parties and that their perspectives can inform both accountability and improvement. Governance arrangements for quality assurance agencies typically address independence, resources, and internal quality processes so that external review itself is subject to scrutiny.

These theoretical foundations help explain the persistence of certain principles across globally referenced quality assurance approaches. Transparency, peer review, attention to learning outcomes, cyclical review, and continuous improvement appear in multiple frameworks because they address recurring concerns about accountability, professional judgment, educational purpose, and organisational improvement. Regional and institutional variation in the application of these principles can be understood in light of differences in governance traditions, resource conditions, and organisational cultures. For organisations seeking to align with more than one framework, explicit attention to these foundations can support coherent process design and transparent documentation.

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## Chapter 17: Recent Scholarship on Quality Assurance (2024–2026)

Recent publications have continued to examine the development of quality assurance systems and their response to technological and institutional change. The second INQAAHE Global Trends study, edited by Karakhanyan and Kinser and published in 2025/2026, provides an updated comparative analysis of internal and external quality assurance across seven world regions. The volume addresses efficiency, relevance, and the transformative potential of quality assurance in the context of technological change and the Sustainable Development Goals (Karakhanyan & Kinser, 2025/2026).

Systematic reviews published in 2025 and 2026 have synthesised research on accreditation and quality assurance. Miranda (2025) reviewed literature on accreditation and quality assurance in higher education institutions, classifying studies according to inputs, processes, and outputs, and identifying gaps for future research. Other reviews have examined student contributions to quality assurance processes and the conditions under which external review supports institutional improvement.

Scholarship on artificial intelligence and quality assurance has expanded rapidly. A systematic review of higher education assessments in the age of generative AI, published in 2026, analysed 72 studies across 24 countries and identified shifts toward process-oriented, authentic, and oral assessment designs (International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education, 2026). Another 2026 review examined how institutions define quality and develop coping strategies in the context of AI (Zaky, 2026). Conceptual work has proposed frameworks such as “Quality Assurance 5.0,” which links artificial intelligence with continuous institutional learning while maintaining human oversight (Swem & Gasa, 2026).

Empirical and conceptual studies have also addressed digital transformation and quality management. Research on Quality 4.0 and digital knowledge management has examined relationships between technology-enabled quality practices and operational performance in higher education institutions. Studies of accreditation governance and quality culture, including comparative work on Malaysia and Indonesia, have emphasised the importance of moving beyond compliance toward embedded quality practices supported by leadership, staff engagement, and data use.

These recent contributions reinforce themes identified in earlier literature while extending analysis to contemporary challenges. They document both the continued relevance of established principles of transparency, peer review, and continuous improvement, and the need for quality assurance processes to address assessment validity, equity, and governance in AI-enabled environments. The INQAAHE Global Trends volumes remain the most comprehensive comparative source on regional variation in quality assurance practice.

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