

## ***Background Research Summary***

### **Approaches to quality assurance and issues arising from international research**

Background research has been undertaken to inform the development of self-assessment and external evaluation and review within the context of:

- a shared vision of ‘quality ‘ within tertiary education;
- a focus on outcomes;
- minimising the burden of compliance; and
- an external review process based on the principles of evaluation methodology.

A big picture approach was undertaken to identify current notions of quality within tertiary education, approaches to external quality assurance, approaches to quality measurement, existing tensions and conceptual models.

The notion of quality within tertiary education internationally is increasingly moving towards an emphasis on educational quality. This is particularly so in jurisdictions where internal quality assurance processes and procedures are already established nationwide. Such an emphasis raises the challenge of how to measure learners’ educational experience beyond the usual quantitative data (retention, completion, qualification rates) to include an understanding of learners’ journeys or in other words the value-added by engagement with educational experiences.

Approaches to external quality assurance have frequently developed in response to external concerns about educational standards, the efficiency of the higher education system, doubt about innovation and capacity, the need to establish a quality culture in institutions, and, more recently, the need for transparent quality assurance processes across jurisdictions to support cross-border education.

The research points to the need to be very clear about the rationale, purpose, object and focus of external quality assurance given the past tendency for external quality assurance to ‘inflate’ when new concerns arise even though earlier concerns may have been resolved.

There is no single blueprint for the focus of external quality assurance. Three conceptual models are described from current literature and elements of each have contributed to the proposed self-assessment and external evaluation and review focus and processes. The models depict the importance of learner outcomes and the learning experience, and the need to determine the effectiveness of the important processes that contribute to these.

Reference is also made to the capability requirements of the external review team, which includes pedagogical knowledge, expertise in evaluation, and research informed understandings of learning and teaching.

Tension or a policy implementation gap is referred to in the literature when required responses to perceived external concerns are in conflict with what is important to institutions. Such tension can be minimised by involving the sector in a shared vision of quality.

Further research is being undertaken to describe the context of external quality assurance and how self-assessment and external review are carried out across individual jurisdictions.