

Internationalisation of Quality Assurance: The Role of Networks of Quality Agencies

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The purpose of networks

Established in 1991, INQAAHE is a global network of higher education quality assurance agencies. In mid-2009, there are some 140 organisations from over 70 countries in Full Membership of INQAAHE, and a total of over 200 members across all categories of membership. Higher education in the 21st century is increasingly global in two major respects. Firstly, higher education is a national matter and governments plan for, provide for, provide for and allow for higher education, both public and private. This gives the quality assurance of higher education a national, domestic character. However, many aspects arise independently in many different countries, and therefore many governments are facing similar issues with respect to higher education. In this sense, quality assurance in higher education becomes a global issue in which a global organisation and international interchange of information can play a vitally useful role. Secondly, there are other aspects that occur at the global or international level, such as the increasing flow of higher education across national borders. In this case too, global and regional systems and structures are needed to address these aspects satisfactorily.

The need for secure and respected national arrangements for managing the quality of higher education provision and the standards of qualifications is now widely acknowledged. Higher education is universally recognised as a major driver of economic and social development, in both more and less affluent countries. The assurance of quality and standards of higher education is now widely recognised as a fundamental prerequisite requirement if we are to be confident that the huge potential benefits of higher education for individuals, economies and societies will be achieved: if provision is to be fit for purpose. Quality assurance agencies, more and less experienced, now look to each other to share internationally expertise and experience in the management of quality and standards.

Following the creation of INQAAHE in 1991, many others have been formed, usually in regions, and usually where there already existed some other mechanism for association between the relevant countries (such as the European Commission in Europe or CARICOM in the Caribbean or AQAN in the ASEAN countries). Some of the networks that have been established are as follows (INQAAHE, 2009b).

- Global: International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) (1991)
- Nordic Network of Quality Assurance Agencies (1992)
- Central America (CSUCA, 1997)
- Francophone Africa: Conseil Africain et Malgache pour l'Enseignement Supérieur (CAMES, 2000)
- Latin America and Spain: Red Ibero-Americana de la Calidad del Education Superior (RIACES, 1999/2003)
- European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (2000) / European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA, 2004)
- Central and Eastern European Network (CEEN, 2000/2002)

- Caribbean countries: Caribbean Area Network for Quality Assurance in Tertiary Education (CANQATE, 2002/2003)
- Asia Pacific Quality Network (APQN, 2003)
- European Consortium for Accreditation in higher education (ECA, 2003)
- Countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States: Eurasian Education Quality Assurance Network (EAQAN, 2004)
- Arab Quality Assurance Network for Higher Education (ANQAHE, 2007)
- Africa (AQANet, 2004 / AfriQAN, 2007)
- ASEAN Quality Assurance Network (AQAN, 2008)

Networks of EQAs need not be built on geographical proximity, but proximity of other interests. For example, there is a network of Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and there is some evidence that this may provide the matrix for a network of QA agencies, including those from small but non-island states. There is also the grouping of professional accreditors in engineering, known as The Washington Accord.

Table: Analysis and classification of network objectives

Objective	INQAAHE	ENQA	CEEN	EAQAN	APQN	RIACES	CANQATE	AfriQAN	ANQAHE	CAMES
Info-sharing, liaison, collaboration	*	*	*			*	*	*	*	*
Good practice, quality improvements	*		*	*	*	*	*	*	*	
New agencies, capacity-building	*				*	*		*	*	
Standards	*								*	
Credit transfer & recognition	*				*	*		*		*
Policy forum, advice, research	*	*			*		*	*		
TNE		*			*			*		
Agency review	*	*								
Consultants	*		*				*			
Mutual recognition			*		*		*			*
Monitoring					*					
Advocacy	*	*			*		*	*		*
Funding							*			
EHEA		*								
CARICOM							*			

The top three are the most common, but when networks were asked in January 2008 about their then current highest priorities, the four most common priorities reported did not overlap with the formal objectives. They were:

- Capacity Building
- Showing External QA is effective
- Dealing with different types of Institutions
- The cost of EQA – efficiency

Other global factors

In addition, the higher education market itself is becoming increasingly global. Global, for example, on the demand side in terms of the mobility of undergraduates studying in full or in part abroad; students moving between countries and continents as they move between undergraduate and postgraduate study; and lifelong learners moving between countries and continents as their careers and personal and professional lives develop. Global, for example, on the supply side as the trend increases in the borderless provision of much IT-based learning and the growth of institutions offering provision in other countries through the establishment of branch campuses or through arrangements with local providers. There are many variations on these themes round the world today. A lack of effective, transparent and internationally respected quality assurance arrangements will act as major brake on such international mobility and transferability of qualifications, to the detriment of all concerned. In this context also, INQAAHE, along with regional bodies and other networks of quality agencies, acts as the international forum for the support of good practice.

It is in these two very broad contexts that INQAAHE has a unique role in sustaining an active international community of quality assurance agencies, providing a global intelligence and support service to encourage:

- the development of knowledge and understanding of the practice of quality assurance in higher education;
- global information exchange between individual practitioners, agencies and, regional networks;
- the further reflection and refinement of the practice and policy of individual agencies
- the support of new agencies;
- international benchmarking;
- global recognition of qualifications; and
- international mobility of students and lifelong learners.

INQAAHE's Mission

INQAAHE, as the global network of quality assurance agencies in higher education, exists to

- enable quality assurance agencies to share information and experiences;
- lead the theoretical and practical foundations of the profession;
- develop and promote standards of professional practice in QA; and
- encourage and assist continuous improvement in member agencies, including professional development and capacity-building;

for the benefit of HE institutions, their students and their societies.

INQAAHE's strategy to achieve its mission has four (inter-related) dimensions, namely political, theoretical, developmental and informational:

- Political: Relating to governments, world bodies and regional bodies
- Theoretical: Using global intelligence to extend knowledge on external quality assurance
- Developmental: Using global intelligence to support practice development
- Informational: Global information dissemination and exchange

For each dimension, there are core activities that are being undertaken over the period of the Plan (2008-2012). These are fleshed out and implemented through the operations of various working groups in the following areas:

- Website for information dissemination
- Good practice database (GPQA)
- Clearinghouse of policies, procedures and practices in QA (QAHEC)
- Graduate program in QA (QAP)
- Query Service
- Consultants database
- Conferences / Fora
- Support for Regional and other QA networks
- Guidelines of Good Practice in QA and encouragement to and support for QA agencies to adhere to these
- Reviews
- Journal / Bulletin
- Comparative studies among EQAs / Mutual Recognition / Memoranda of Co-operation
- Mechanism for addressing accreditation mills
- Support system for small states
- Development Fund

Conclusion

QA networks exist to share information among, and build capacity in, their members, to enable them to carry out more effectively their tasks of accreditation, assessment, audit, enhancement and regulation, with the ultimate aim of ensuring that all students in HE receive not merely a higher education but a higher quality education.

References

- INQAAHE (2009a), 'INQAAHE Strategic Plan, 2008-2012', revised 2009, INQAAHE, The Hague
- INQAAHE (2009b), 'Graduate Qualification in Quality Assurance', INQAAHE, The Hague