

Internationalisation of Quality Assurance: The Role Played by the Networks

David Woodhouse
President, INQAAHE
Executive Director, AUQA

1. Internationalisation and Quality Assurance

1.1 Internationalisation of QA

The first formal definition of internationalisation in higher education was proposed by Jane Knight and Hans de Wit in 1995:

“Internationalisation is the process of integrating an international or intercultural dimension into the teaching, research, and service functions of the institution.”

In 2003, Knight generalised this, as follows:

“Internationalisation at the national, sector, and institutional levels is defined as the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of postsecondary education.”

(Knight, 2003)

Attention to both the international aspects of higher education and the quality assurance of higher education have grown rapidly over the last 20 years, and it was recognised at an early stage that any QA systems for HE (whether internal or external to the educational institution) should cover the institutions' international activities.

For internal quality assurance, internationalising the curriculum requires corresponding attention to the procedures for programme development, implementation and monitoring. Increasing the number of foreign students entails providing relevant support for them. While both these aspects may simply be extensions of the institution's existing quality assurance processes, moving from domestic to foreign provision of teaching is likely to be a novelty, and hence needs very careful attention.

External quality assurance must in turn be able to validate the institutions' quality assurance of their international activities. The first two examples (internationalising the curriculum and taking in foreign students) do not pose any inherently new issues. The last two examples (on-line programmes and face-to-face courses abroad), however, do. Almost all EQAs have been established to cover a single nation or part thereof. Therefore, when quality considerations cross national borders, a new situation is created, for which such agencies are not well-suited.

Extending quality assurance procedures to covers international aspects may be called 'quality assurance of internationalisation' (Woodhouse, 2004a).

Considerations relevant to the 'QA of internationalisation' (of higher education) were the subject of an OECD publication in 1999 (Knight & de Wit, 1999). In that volume, van de Wende (van der Wende, 1999) contrasted this with the 'internationalisation of quality assurance'. This of course is extending the concept of internationalisation beyond

internationalisation of education to internationalisation of another area of activity, namely the QA of HE. To address this, one could adapt the 2003 Knight definition as follows:

“Internationalisation of QA in HE is defined as the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or implementation of QA systems and processes.”

Where the QA of internationalisation is about the scope of the QA activities, the internationalisation of QA relates more to the methods, somehow going beyond QA's usual national base. The internationalisation of QA can be thought of as 'cross-border QA'. Just as cross-border education is the responsibility of the institutions and QA agencies, so cross-border QA is the responsibility of the agencies and also of networks of agencies.

Hence I have been asked to speak today about the role of INQAAHE and other networks of agencies in the internationalisation of QA (of HE).

1.2 Internationalisation – the process

The word 'internationalisation' is often used as if it were a specific state, but actually it is a process. It might be a short-term process, such as a one-year plan in an institution to introduce some form of international activity. My attention today is on internationalisation as a long-term process, as QA has been internationalising for at least 20 years. This implies that QA was once not international, so what was it? I have already alluded above to the fact that it was (and largely still is) essentially national. One role of networks has been to draw national agencies out of their insular national shells.

In 1990, an international group of directors of a QA agency in Hong Kong conceived of the idea of a conference of the emerging QA agencies, and after the conference (in 1991) the agencies agreed that there would be value in associating together in a network for mutual support and assistance. Thus was formed the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE). INQAAHE was intended to be supportive and inclusive. It had no mandate nor desire to control or direct QA agencies, nor to homogenise or make 'one size fit all'. The use of the term 'network' was intended to indicate this, to stress collegial interaction, and to signal the intent of the agencies to provide mutual support, and a forum for sharing ideas and good practices. Consistently with this, it stated its central aim as information-sharing between agencies, with the other objectives listed as aspirational.

INQAAHE, and other networks that I'll mention in a moment, enable their member agencies to move through the internationalisation process by successively fuller and closer interaction. From simply acknowledging each other, agencies then talk to each other, then they share information about their institutions, then about each other. Then they interact through observation of review events, and this strengthens their ability to carry out QA of internationalisation. It can also lead to the high level of trust necessary to permit mutual recognition between the agencies of the network of their respective QA judgements.

1.3 International Reach of National Agencies

Higher education is a national matter and national governments plan for, provide for, allow for and exert some control over higher education and HEIs. Setting up national quality

agencies is part of this national activity, and almost all agencies have been created, whether by governments or institutions, with responsibility and authority within one country. However, there are few aspects of higher education that are specific to one country. Rather (Woodhouse, 2004b)

- there are many aspects that arise independently in so many different countries that they are effectively global; and
- there are aspects that occur at the supra-national or international level, so that international systems and structures are needed to address them satisfactorily.

(These two categories are inter-related, of course, because individual people and nations generate and then are involved with the supra-national issues, but the distinction is helpful.)

Some of the issues related to higher education that concern many national governments are:

1. The meaning and purpose of higher education: is 'mass HE' an oxymoron? Does anyone know the boundary between HE and technical education?
2. Funding, including sources of increased funds; accountability for the funds; value-for-money (whoever is paying).
3. National development - economic and social – and the role of teaching and research.
4. Credit transfer, including student mobility and recognition, both during and after study.
5. Standards and ranking of institutions and programs. (Woodhouse, 2006):

Issues in the second category are multi-nationally-oriented and/or multi-nationally determined, and include:

1. Import of education: Is imported foreign HE culturally or academically appropriate for our society? If it is electronic, do we even know it is coming, unbidden and unmonitored, into our country?
2. Export of education: What considerations are relevant to the sale of higher education abroad? Education as trade: what are the implications of the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS)?
3. Borderless or transnational education: Who is responsible for education that crosses national borders – provider, receiver, both, neither?
4. Cross-border recognition of qualifications for work and study: Mobility before or after graduation; for study or employment.
5. Bogus institutions and agencies (degree / accreditation mills) and trivial programs: how can we police and deal with these to protect people from being deceived?

A few organisations or structures have been deliberately established to carry out a QA function internationally. These include the management audits of the European Universities Association (EUA), the Internationalisation Quality Reviews developed by the OECD, the European system for accreditation of management and business administration (EQUIS), the former Global Alliance for Transnational Education, and CCA (the Central American accreditation council which accredits QA agencies in the region).

However, as almost all EQAs have been created for national operation and with national authority, and there is resistance to the notion of having **only** a single global EQA, multi-national QA networks are one mechanism for enabling the national EQA agency to operate

effectively in the international sphere, and to have some international authority. In a word, **networks** provide the best of the two worlds – national EQAs acting jointly.

There is a chicken and egg effect, with agencies' growing awareness of international imperatives leading to recognition of the benefits of networking; and with networks raising agencies' awareness of international imperatives.

2. The Global Village

2.1 Co-operation and exchange across countries

When Mark Twain, the nineteenth century American author, was informed that the newly invented telegraph system would now allow Texas to talk to Maine (ie to leap the whole south to north extent of the USA), he is reputed to have asked “but does Texas have anything worthwhile to say to Maine?” Whatever the answer to that question, the ability to communicate provoked communication, and eventually a reliance on that communication. In our generation, the mobile phone is having a similar effect. Suddenly, people who got on very well between the (often frequent) times that they met face to face, cannot resist interacting at a distance almost every minute of the day and night.

Until the nineteenth century, information could not travel faster or further than the speed and ability of the human or animal that carried it (with some small exceptions, like smoke signals). Nations in distant parts of the world were accustomed to waiting months to receive a response to a message. They therefore lived lives that did not depend on, and could not take advantage of, rapid and frequent interaction with other nations for advice and guidance. Working with an information flow that might take months before a response was received to a message was not wholly negative, of course, as it could also result in less external intrusion.

In our generation, we have seen long-distance communication become increasingly reliable, and widely used, and the speed of even written communication increase manifold with the advent of the fax and email. Just as the ability of Texas to talk to Maine was itself an incentive for such communication, so in our generation, the possibility of rapid communication world-wide (one facet of the phenomenon currently called ‘globalisation’) gives people in widely separate places the desire to communicate, whether to learn, to inform, to help, to influence – or even to threaten.

Such communication has become the norm, to the extent that we comment on countries that participate little in such international interaction. In the sphere of higher education, these new possibilities of distant communication are taken up in various ways, including networks/associations of higher education institutions; distance/on-line learning via the Internet and other cross-border education; international research collaborations; and international benchmarking.

All of these have implications for QA agencies. The agencies themselves communicate for mutual assistance and learning, including recognition networks, consultation on degree mills; sharing reviewers; learning of effective procedures; staff development; etc.

2.2 Learning from Others

When a need is perceived for any new system, some people proceed to “reinvent the wheel”. Often it seems that it will take more time to locate and investigate other systems than to create one’s own. Also, many people find creating more fun than copying. (Computer programmers usually prefer to write new code than to maintain or correct existing code, usually written by someone else.) A third explanation for this tendency is that

most people like to think they are unique, so there cannot possibly be a system that will fit their needs.

Some people, on the other hand, have the opposite reaction to a new need and do see the benefit of building on the work of others. These people seek out examples from which they can learn. Even Isaac Newton acknowledged his debt to others: "I have stood on the shoulders of giants". In the field of QA, some incipient QA systems looked to the USA accreditors because the USA's higher education system is widely admired and because the USA accreditors are by far the longest established QA systems. While useful as a starting point, this attempt to build on long experience was limited in its value, as the US accreditors are owned by the institutions, whereas in most (though not all) other countries the government is owner (or part owner or instigator). Many countries in the British Commonwealth looked as usual to the UK for some ideas and experience. The common use of the English language and wide experience of the British system have encouraged this, but any ideas must be heavily adapted to suit the – often very different – social contexts. Analogous orientations occurred in the Hispanic and Francophone worlds, although the Spanish and French systems themselves were not so highly developed in the 1980s as the burgeoning of EQA systems began.

For most countries however these reference points are some distance away in geography or culture or development or all of these, and a natural alternative (or additional) input is to look to one's neighbours. Maybe they will be similar in some way and have similar problems. Maybe they are further advanced with experience to be drawn on, or at the same stage of development with consequent opportunities for collaboration on system design.

2.3 Regional collaboration

A growth Industry

Several emerging QA systems or governments wanting a national QA system found themselves in geographic regions where international co-operation already existed for other purposes. These include Europe, Latin America, the Caribbean, Central Europe, Central Asia and the Arab countries. INQAAHE conferences and fora are held every year, and the presence of one of these events in a region has demonstrably been a catalyst for QA initiatives in the respective regions. INQAAHE has actively facilitated this by setting aside session times and venues and encouraged participants in the Conference/Forum from the same region to gather to discuss matters of common interest.

Some of the regional networks that have been established are as follows. Some have been through several stages of form or title (Woodhouse, 2006).

- 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 Educacion 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)

APQN

Mission: To enhance the quality of higher education in Asia and the Pacific region through strengthening the work of quality assurance agencies and extending the cooperation between them.

From the 2009 report:

This is a fast-growing region, with an increasing appetite for education, and with increasing mobility of students and providers to meet that need. In turn, this makes it a region of growing and developing quality assurance agencies that need to be able to deal with public and private providers and with education and students that cross national borders. The APQN is already helping to build alliances between agencies, and assisting countries/territories that do not have a quality assurance agency of their own.

Mechanisms include

Internships; cross-regional staff exchange; regional training package; surveys and sharing the results (eg whether educational import and/or export is controlled, and if so, how: survey 2004).

ANQAHE

Mission: To ensure and strengthen the QA of higher education institutions and to enhance the collaboration between similar QA organisations in the Arab states as well as to develop cooperation with other regional and international QA networks.

CEEN

A 2006 report on the network reported that “networking seems to be a central internationalisation strategy of all agencies”, and noted that internationalisation is a necessary prerequisite and factual preparation for mutual recognition. It is also an achievement of the objectives. Agencies tend to be members of several networks Most of the agencies have gained considerable knowledge of how to initiate, how to supervise and how to contribute and learn from inter- or transnational projects. In such projects, agencies collaborate with other agencies, with higher education institutions and Rectors’ Conferences, etc.

CAMES

The African and Madagascar Council for Higher Education (CAMES) was created in 1968 to lead four major programs one of which is the recognition and the equivalence of certificates, degrees and diplomas in higher education. In 2002, CAMES reported that it had organised many sub-regional symposia on the recognition of certificates, degrees and

diplomas, the dividends of which are mutual recognition of hundreds of diplomas especially among French-speaking countries.

AfriQAN

In many countries in Africa, QA agencies are linked to the Ministry of Education. In cases where there is no national agency and no strong regional QA agency, AfriQAN aims to assist. It aims to establish links with regional agencies and different national agencies.

Purposes and Priorities

From their objectives listed in the constitution or statement of purpose, the four most common objectives across the major regional networks and INQAAHE are:

- Information Sharing;
- Research & Policy Development;
- Quality Improvement; and
- Liaising.

In January 2008, INQAAHE asked the other networks about their then current highest priorities. The four highest were:

- Capacity building,
- Showing external QA is effective,
- Dealing with different types of Institutions, and
- The cost and efficiency of EQA,

of which only the first overlaps with the formal objectives.

2.4 Other Rationales for Association

Networks of EQA agencies 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.

Some networks with their relevant characteristics are as follows:

- Global – INQAAHE
- Regional – ENQA, APQN, RIACES, etc (see above)
- Common characteristics – small states - internships
- Professional associations – accreditation – engineering (Washington Accord), architecture (Canberra Accord), IFNA, IRCEP
- Economic – APEC, ASEAN – APEC survey 2006
- Institution – IUA, EUA, AAU (Africa), AUN
- Functional – UMAP, UMIOR – student mobility
- In-country – ASPA, AAAC, CVU, SEEA (do these have an international effect?)

APEC Survey, 2006

APEC (the economic collaboration of 20 countries around the rim of the Pacific Ocean) Education Ministers stated in 2004 that 'economies need transparent, accountable, regulatory, accreditation and quality assurance systems'. In many countries modes of quality assurance are exercised by both the traditional government bodies such as ministries and funding councils, and by a new crop of quality assurance agencies. These

emerging QA systems need to look for practices and successful models elsewhere, and the APQN (which overlaps APEC to a great extent) offers that service. There is evidence of rapport with professional bodies and QA bodies in other countries, learning from the standards and procedures of other QA bodies, using the various international guidelines, and visits to other QA bodies, but very little external formal benchmarking done by the QA bodies.

The experience of others is more likely to be positively regards if the other agency appears to be a 'kindred body' – just as external review recommendations are more likely to be implemented if the are in tune with the spirit of the institution.

3. What has been facilitated through the milieu of the QA networks?

- Being able to refer to 'the network' gives more authority
- The whole is greater than the sum of the parts
- Networks facilitate the collaboration between national EQAs as professionals in QA, regardless of the political divide: are you involved in QA? – then you're in, then you are a colleague – peer support.
- The 'starting point' is different when a group of EQAs meet – collegiality
- Enhancement of professionalism – pride in one's performance among colleagues
- Networks help EQAs and institutions stand up to government. They provide a continuing thread, despite government change at the surface – eg AUQA/TEQSA
- International defence against national opposition or pressure – eg HKCAA
- Agreement on terms – glossaries – so can talk to each other and understand each other
- Peer review role – APQN membership levels – INQAAHE reviews against GGP – checking by a collegial EQA
- Capacity development – mutual agency help
- Proximity leads to mutual learning, mutual understanding, mutual trust – eventually mutual recognition. (ECA, APQN) (Whereas UNESCO recognition conventions date from 1963, the first QA network is only 20 years old – we have made very rapid progress with MR in QA)
- Peer support, internships, mobility
- Importers / exporters – 20 years ago, major divide, suspicion, exploitation, different language. Increasing trust between EQAs has helped to offset some of this. The distinction between exporter and importer is less definite, and more blurred, and so the respective EQAs have more common cause.
- Dissemination of Principles – eg UNESCO/OECD; the Chiba Principles following the Brisbane declaration in APQN.

4. INQAAHE's contribution

INQAAHE operates through project and working groups intended to draw on the services of as many member agencies and their people as possible. The following are some of the current and imminent project areas, almost all of which continue to assist with the internationalisation of QA.

1. QAP - graduate program for QA professionals

Launched in Copenhagen in November 2009; open-source on the INQAAHE website; currently offered on-line by New York University and the University of Melbourne.

2. QAHEC – Clearinghouse of resources for QA agencies

Two years in the making – to be launched in Namibia next month

3. GPQA – data base of good practices for QA agencies

More need to be submitted by INQAAHE members

4. Query Service – rapid answers to precise questions and problems

5. Consultants Database

Joint project of INQAAHE, APQN, ANQAHE

6. Guidelines of Good Practice for QA Agencies

Built on by the ESQ)

INQAAHE carries out reviews against the GGP and lists 'alignment with the GGP' on the website

7. Accreditation Mills

Forthcoming working group; planning to create a white list (cf the UNESCO Portal on degree/diploma mills)

8. Small states

Special needs and special assistance

9. Professional Accreditors

Cutting edge or not?

Increasing role if general accreditors move out of program-level accreditation?

INQAAHE convened meetings in Washington DC in January 2009 and 2010; likely meeting later this year in the Netherlands

10. Mutual recognition

Incipient working group.

Work has been done in this in the APQN and found to be very difficult. Alignment of QA systems might be more realistic.

ECA has done very well

12. Glossary – on website

Maintained by Lee Harvey

INQAAHE also holds an annual event. Every two years it is a big inclusive international conference. The next, in April 2011, is in Madrid, with the topic: "QA: The Foundation for the Future", and one theme "Globalizing forces and national/regional goals"

Every other year, there is a very practical Members Forum, open only to members, at which member agencies grapple with issues that are exercising their minds. This year (next month) the Forum is in Namibia, May 2010, with the themes:

- QA methodologies and HE economic responsiveness
- QA agencies between the global and the local
- QA and HE Social Responsiveness
- Political constraints on EQA
- QA and the transnational

Finally, INQAAHE also supports and works with all other QA networks, and since January 2008 has convened at least one meeting each year. There is a dedicated area on the INQAAHE website, and INQAAHE has signed MoUs with several networks to set out the particular focus of that particular bilateral co-operation. The number of networks continues to grow, with networks emerging within networks – showing either their growing value or a human tendency to create ever more structures ever more specialised to their own needs!

5. Conclusion

After INQAAHE was founded, I was surprised when a European network emerged. I thought we at INQAAHE must be doing something wrong. But now we continue to see the creation of networks, and sub-networks. As agencies have looked for assistance, it has clearly been natural to seek this among a group that shares some commonality, such as language (CAMES), region (APQN), political context (ENQA, AQAN) or congruence (engineering).

Increasingly groups, called 'networks', have established sufficient structure to provide some of the support and advice that the agencies need. Even where that need has essentially been national and internal to a particular country, the fact that the provision is coming from agencies external to that country raises the awareness and understanding of the international actors and climate, and leads to the Internationalisation of QA.

Is this increase in the number and type of QA networks a positive development? We must re-acknowledge that the core activity is education and research, and that QA agencies exist only for the benefit they give to the HE institutions, the HE sector and other HE stakeholders. The QA networks are yet another level, consuming more resources of time and money. Thus, limitless network growth is definitely **not** a good thing. However, experience so far shows that they **are** helping agencies to carry out their work in relation to education and the institutions, and that they are particularly helpful in assisting the agencies to follow their institutions in operating globally.

Networks, like agencies, must be prepared to change to maintain their utility, and even to die if their utility is at an end. The INQAAHE conference in Madrid next year will be INQAAHE's 20th anniversary. We intend to facilitate two debates: 'INQAAHE: The Next 20 Years' – but more importantly 'QA: The Next 20 Years'.

References

- Knight, J. (2003), 'Updating the Definition of Internationalization' International Higher Education, Fall 2003, Center for International Higher Education, Boston College
- Knight, J. & de Wit, H. eds (1999), 'Quality and internationalisation in higher education', OECD, Paris
- van der Wende, M.C. (1999), 'Quality assurance of internationalisation and internationalisation of quality assurance', in Knight, J. & de Wit, H. eds (1999), 'Quality and internationalisation in higher education', OECD, Paris, 225-240
- Woodhouse, D. (2004a), 'The quality of quality assurance agencies', Quality in Higher Education, Vol. 10, No. 2, July, 2004, 77-87
- Woodhouse, D. (2004b), Desarrollo Global del Aseguramiento de la Calidad', Calidad en la Educación, N°21, December 2004, Consejo Superior de Educación, Santiago, Chile
- Woodhouse, D. (2006), 'The Role of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education in the 21st Century', Keynote address to 1st International Conference on Assessing Quality in Higher Education, Lahore, 11-13 December 2006