



# INQAAHE

*International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education*

## Program Themes for the INQAAHE members Forum Namibia, 2010

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### Rationale

This proposal tries to integrate the original document submitted by the Namibian colleagues and the ideas discussed at the meeting held in Abu Dhabi.

The link between QA and development can be cast in terms of responsiveness in order to make the topic more inclusive for members who see development from a different perspective and allow for broader participation.

HEIs are expected to be responsive to:

- the economic needs of local societies by producing graduates with skills, knowledge and competences including capacity to change and learn. In this regard HEIs are expected to help both local development and participation in the global economy.
- the social needs of society as in the production of solutions for human problems, from disease to climate change, from poverty to xenophobia.
- the political needs of societies in ensuring the education of citizens, the sustainability of democracy, etc.

Given that this is a forum and not a conference the lens to look at the topics has to be focused on the how to and the inputs have to reflect concrete experiences of agencies. These are some questions that can help to focus the issues we want to discuss:

- To what extent quality assurance agencies incorporate these issues into the different methodologies they use? How do they do this?
- What implications does this have for the training of evaluators/auditors; for the implementation of audits, accreditation, etc.?
- How do these issues enter quality assurance regimes focused on improvement and enhancement?
- How do quality assurance agencies measure the impact of their systems in these areas?

Based on this are the following subtopics:

- **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**



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## **Theme: Responsiveness of EQAs**

The issue of the responsiveness of HE to the needs of society in general has been going on for several decades. As the debate progresses it becomes more difficult to neatly separate its many layers and components.

- For organisational clarity we cluster under economic responsiveness issues such as the appropriateness of student graduate skills to employers needs, but also more broadly countries' aspirations in terms of development and competitiveness.
- Under social needs we refer fundamentally to the manner in which higher education qualifications prepare students to exercise their responsibilities as citizens in a country (or in the world), but also refers to the extent to which HEIs facilitate access (and success) of previously disadvantaged groups, minorities, etc to HE as a way of extending democracy.

A possible translation of this as an issue for EQA follows below.

### **QA methodologies and HE economic responsiveness**

Quality assurance agencies are required to adapt to the changes that take place in higher education and modify their practices in order to assure governments, students, employers and society at large have from higher education institutions.

Among the debates that are influencing the practices of quality assurance agencies is that about the role of higher education institutions in responding to the economic and social needs of the countries, regions within which they operate.

In relation to higher education this debate has at least two main streams. One focuses mainly on HE responsiveness to economic needs. One of its concerns revolves around HEIs' ability to produce sufficient number of graduates with the appropriate the skills, knowledge and competences required in the local and in the global economies. How do quality assurance agencies include these stakeholder's concerns in their approaches to audits and accreditation?

How do QA approaches to accreditation and/or audits balance and take into account academics' concern about their disciplines, the need to improve teaching and learning, students' expectations about employment, and governments' demands for accountability in terms of public investment in HE?

How do EQA measure their impact in this regard?

### **QA agencies between the global and the local**

Among the issues confronting HE institutions is that of the tension between a demand for qualifications portability regionally and internationally, and the need to respond to what might be particular conditions or requirements. This which is particularly obvious in the LICs, has specific manifestations in industrialised economies. How do EQAs situated in these different local contexts deal with this.

- What are the experiences of different agencies in dealing with this?
- How do the evaluation criteria/methodologies balance the global and the local?
- What methodologies do agencies/networks use to accredit/audit HEIs operating off shore?
- What analyses have been done to assess the effect of these arrangements in terms of responsiveness?

### **QA and HE Social Responsiveness**

Increased access to HE, particularly in relation to previously disadvantaged groups and the ability/capacity of HEIs to instil through their academic programmes etc a sense of responsible/active citizenship are two aspects of the elements included in the notion of the social responsiveness of HE.



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- Can EQA deal with these issues in its evaluations? How is this done?
- Are there effective measures/techniques to measure citizenship?
- Is it appropriate for EQA to enter into this area?
- How do agencies deal with the call for greater diversity and inclusivity in HEIs?
- What are the agencies experiences (positive and negative) of trying to include these issues into their frameworks, criteria, etc.?
- QA of work-integrated learning, community service, community engagement, etc.?

## **Political constraints on EQA**

Most agencies operate within national or regional contexts and are subject to different forms of political governance and ideological preferences which have considerable influence in the area of education. The degree of independence that agencies have from both national government and individual providers seem to be a pre-condition for the work of quality agencies to take place and be effective.

- What are the agencies experiences of the context within which they operate?
- How do these relations affect the agency's ability to carry out their specified tasks?
- Are there any indicators/measurements of how agencies perform in this area?
- Are there guidelines in this regard?
- What is meant by independence?

## **QA and the transnational**

Dealing with the QA of exported qualifications or with international providers located in national contexts raised the issue of responsiveness and the internationalisation of curriculum. Is transnational education a benefit or a hindrance? How can the inevitable globalisation be accommodated and turned to advantage?

- How is the quality of transnational education assured and by whom?
- Balance between culturally appropriate adaptation and opportunistic dilution?
- Instances of integration of national and transnational offerings
- Instances of contribution of transnational education to national priorities
- Role of QA agencies