CONFERENCE 2019
Quality Assurance, Qualifications and Recognition: Fostering Trust in a Globalised World

Hosted by University Grants Commission, Sri Lanka, from 25 to 28 March
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FOREWORD

We are happy to welcome you back at the INQAAHE Global Enhancement Platform 2019 under the theme: Quality Assurance, Qualifications, and Recognition: Fostering Trust in a Globalised World - evolving around the concept all of us in education sphere are struggling to instill, build on and enhance. How is trust built in this increasingly globalized context? What makes trust such a powerful asset? How to measure it accurately and how to demonstrate the true value it brings? How to develop a suite of powerful, flexible analytical tools and services that help tertiary education institutions best manage their trust capital among the stakeholders, shareholders and public at large. These are the leading questions, which the INQAAHE Global Enhancement Platform (GEP) opens up for further pursuit of solutions.

The issue of trust and, therefore, recognition of tertiary education outcomes and outputs, is one of the hot topics nowadays. Concerns linked to its continuous decline are raised and gradually increasing. Establishing and building on trust in tertiary education was one of the major triggers in launching the INQAAHE and throughout years it has managed to establish a Global Enhancement Platform for the QA experts to present and share their achievements, findings and approaches with their international peers.

In the pursuit of coming up with the solutions that will equip the systems in facing the current challenges nobly, the paper and poster contributions for GEP 2019, empirically explore prospects for building and promoting trust through such solutions stakeholder engagement and benchmarking; departure from merely input-based towards input, process and outcome-based measurements with an emphasis measuring achievement of intended learning outcomes. The contributions also highlight the current challenges related to recognition of qualifications as well as offer potential solutions which can become the basis for further promotion at the national and global levels. The proposed solutions offer a solid basis on the diversity of methods a quality assurance system can offer to promote trust and enhancing potentials for mutual recognition in a globalised world. Recognition of accreditation decisions beyond the borders and systems is yet another major development discussed through the paper contributions. Last, but not the least means promoting trust, as highlighted in a series of papers, is the use of enhancement-led and capacity building initiatives, so crucial for ensuring the buy-in of the key stakeholders.

The red line across all the contributions and therefore regions worldwide is the importance of consideration of the cultural and contextual peculiarities in the practices and developments leading to formation and molding of the culture of quality that best fits the given environments.

We hope you got equipped with new ideas, solutions and prospects as well as motivation to further explore opportunities for building trust in tertiary education in the ever-changing global environment.

Susanna Karakhanyan

Investment in quality higher education is one of the most valued investments for a country aiming for global excellence. Little island nation Sri Lanka stand out for introducing a policy of universal free schools and university education to all her children seven decades ago, a policy that has seen excellent outcomes. In her pursuit to achieve a sustainable quality culture and Accreditation System in higher education, Sri Lanka is privileged and honoured to be elected to host the main conference for 2019 of the globally acclaimed International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE).

In the context of higher education in Sri Lanka, the University Grants Commission (UGC), established in 1978, functions as the apex body of the State university System. Maintenance of the quality and standards of the academic programmes in state universities is one of the key responsibilities of UGC which is managed through the Quality Assurance Council of the Commission.

Sri Lanka, one of the major tourist attractions in the world, eagerly hosted you, the respected delegates, for an academic feast in quality settings and hopefully made your visit together with your family to our green and pleasant land a most memorable one.

Mohan de Silva
Quality assurance in graduate health and medical (GHM) training initiative in programs supervised by the Saudi Commission for Health Specialties (SCFHS)

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ABSTRACT

Objective: Few countries have taken the initiative to pursue Quality measurement in Graduate Health Medical (GHM) training programs. Saudi Arabia, through the Saudi Commission for health specialities (SCFHS), will be among the few who have developed a system that measures process and outcome quality in GHM training. The objective of this initiative is to establish a framework for quality assurance/improvement that utilizes Key performance indicators (KPIs) for process and outcome in various GHM training programs supervised by the SCFHS.

Methods: This paper is a Qualitative and Quantitative study that included focus groups and online surveys which targeted GHM training directors and supervisors. The focus group, which included training leadership, quality, and knowledge management directors at the SCFHS, as well as external medical education consultants, reviewed and analyzed the relevant literature and agreed on the initial draft of the GHM training KPI list that was based on the Kirkpatrick model. The model was used to measure the effectiveness of the various training programs regulated by the SCFHS. A questionnaire was circulated to all GHM training directors and supervisors to rate each KPIs based on specific criteria that included measurability, usability, reliability, simplicity, availability, and robustness of the information included in the surveys.

Results: The focus group agreed on 24 GHM training quality KPIs to use as the first wave. We are currently collecting the data for measuring the defined 24 KPIs for the year 2018. We will release the first KPI report during the 1st quarter of 2019.

Conclusion: Since there is no uniform system for quality assurance/improvement that can be adopted globally, regulatory agencies for GHM training need to develop systems and frameworks that address their local need. The SCFHS is addressing this need by establishing a unique quality assurance framework for GHM training programs it supervises. By the end of the first quarter of 2019, the first report will be published.

Introduction

As the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is undergoing a significant transformation guided by the ambitious 2030 Vision, the mandate for reforming the health care system is now front and center. More specifically, this vision has a stated an objective to “improve healthcare professional performance in the Kingdom to meet international
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standards.” Realizing this and that no reform in healthcare can be complete without health care workforce training; the SCFHS has recently developed a far-reaching strategy with plans to (1) Increase the training capacity of its graduate and medical programs to meet the increasing demands posed by the healthcare workforce gap, (2) Ensure that with this capacity increase training quality will not be negatively impacted, and, (3) Advance the standards of training to meet international standards and benchmarks.

The Saudi Commission for Health Specialties (SCFHS) is the country’s regulatory body for certification of all GHM. Since its establishment in 1992, the SCFHS developed over a hundred Residency, Fellowship, and Diploma training programs. Training for these programs is currently conducted in over a thousand sponsoring institutions across Saudi Arabia and the Gulf Region. This growth of training programs and activities over the years, coupled with the anticipated significant expansion necessitates an ambitious plan for ensuring the quality of these training programs. To achieve this, the SCFHS has launched its Training Quality Assurance Initiative, which aims to develop, implement, and advance a system for setting quality standards, benchmarks, measures, and improvement guidelines for its postgraduate training programs. The Graduate Health and Medical (GHM) Training Quality Initiative provides a national framework for continuous quality improvement and its associated quality indicators for GHM training supervised by the SCFHS.

Literature review

Twenty-four hundred articles in the topic of quality indicators in postgraduate medical & surgical training were retrospectively reviewed. Articles that dealt with the terms such as training, outcomes, quality indicators, competency-based education, quality and training, training effectiveness, residents and training, trainers and training and related nomenclatures were reviewed based on the inclusion criteria of English only research, free full texts, subject relevancy, all other studies that did not meet the three mentioned criteria were excluded. In this initial literature review, 21 articles matched the inclusion criteria.

The common conclusion between all their articles is that there is an urgent need to create a competency-based postgraduate training program. Yet very few of these articles indicated specifically what indicators could be used to measure the quality of these training programs or training settings, it also lacked criterion for quality indicators used for Trainers and candidate selection or specifically selecting candidates through their actual matching capabilities rather than matching based on resident preference.

The high cost associated with postgraduate training, elevated the importance to look deeply in training criteria and measure the efficiency and efficacy of these programs in various training settings for two main reasons: first, to ensure that the quality of graduate health medical training that is provided to residents meets the highest international standards in training. Secondly, to ensure the development of the healthcare workforce is systematically handled effectively to meet the current need of the healthcare market. This outcome-based approach is essential to “ensure that the right skills are acquired at the right time, right place, and in the most effective mode.”

1 (Vision2030, 2017)
2 (AlAmoudi, 2019)
3 Nolte, Fry, Winpenny, & Brereton, 2011, pp. 9,10,11)
Quality of GHM training according to the RAND’s working paper has gained a high priority within the OECD’s works, “with current efforts aimed at improving the evidence base on skills acquired in higher education.” Yet all of the literature that was reviewed in this working paper “were unable to document evidence of the progress of this effort.” The study also mentioned that the efforts to develop measurements to evaluate the quality of delivering education and training currently is nonexistent.

With the increasing demand to increase the size of the healthcare workforce globally, Saudi Arabia like other countries has refocused its efforts to look into quality standards for GHM training and education. The high importance of this matter has become one of the country’s 2020 vision “to increase training and development both locally and internationally.”

Saudi Commission for health specialties recognized that ensuring the quality of training outcomes in postgraduate surgical training is in not only governmental required accreditation of individual programs or institutional accreditation criteria or common board examination, but it also requires a comprehensive system that encompasses quality matrix throughout the process.

Developing a competency-based medical training program (CBMT), without measuring, the actual learning outcome gives us inadequate information on how these acquired competencies based clinical education affects the quality of patient outcomes. Therefore, developing a system that measures KPIs throughout the postgraduate training process becomes necessary. To reach this point, one would have to understand the perspectives of both residents and Trainers, to narrow down a rather long list of areas to focus on and measure. According to the Journal of medical education “Competency-based medical education can be characterized as having two distinct features: a focus on specific domains of competence, and relative independence of time in training, making it an individualized approach that is practically applicable in workplace training.”

In recent years, the outcome measurement of training programs has become a hot topic, ever since Flexner’s 1910 report, that shaped the landscape of GHM training. His report advocated increasing the number of standards in (GHME), “the role of the PGME shifted towards instilling and evaluating a number of competencies that doctors should demonstrate at the end of their training.”

Unlike major advancements in competency-based education (CBE), fewer efforts were made to capture the impact of learning on outcomes and the overall quality matrix. Although different methodologies in the studies that addressed the effects of the GHM training on patient outcomes as a way to assess the quality of training they received. Most of these studies assume a linear relationship between GHM training and its ultimate effect on patients.

It could be argued that numerous studies focus on the evaluation of clinical teaching, but minimal research has been conducted to investigate the outcomes of these clinical teachings on patient outcomes. Further, it could also be argued that through the literature review most of the articles focused on one area or aspect of a postgraduate training program, rather than taking into consideration the whole training system and bylaws that govern the training process. For example, a systematic review conducted by Van der Leeuw et al, focused on

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4 RAND is a research organization that develops solutions to public policy challenges to help make communities throughout the world safer and more secure, healthier and more prosperous. RAND is nonprofit, nonpartisan, and committed to the public interest (RAND, n.d.).

5 OECD The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development is an intergovernmental economic organization with 36 member countries, founded in 1961 to stimulate economic progress and world trade

6 (Smirnova, 2018)

7 (Vision2030, 2017)


9 (Flexner, 2002)

10 (Leeuw, et al., 2012)
particular competencies that the trainers must possess to improve the quality of GHM training. Donabedian 2005, to our knowledge, was the first, who attempted to develop some type of GHM training matrices within three categories, structure, process and outcomes. The outcome measure identified in Donabedian 11 includes Morbidity and Mortality, complications, readmission rates and length of stay.

Bhatti et al. 2015 in their study “Identifying Quality indicators of surgical training: a national survey” were able to identify some quality matrix indicators based on surveys that were conducted with the focus group of program directors and residents in mind. These indicators included the volume of patients, logbooks, simulation and ability to transform knowledge to practical skills. One could argue that these indicators are based on subjective views of residents and program directors without having actual outcome measurement of the training process.

Context & committee formation

Few countries have actually taken the initiative to pursue Quality measurement in competency-based postgraduate training. Saudi Arabia, through the SCFHS, will be among the few who have developed a system that measures the quality outcome of GHM training.

In June 2017, the first quality indicators committee was formed in SCFHS to create the postgraduate quality indicators.

Collaborative efforts between two main divisions in SCFHS (Academic Affairs; Planning, Quality & Accreditation), with a committed team consisted of: Chief Academic Affairs, Chief Planning, Quality & Accreditation, Executive Director of Training and Assistant, Executive Director of Assessment and Assistant, Director General of Quality Department, Director of Knowledge Management. This committee had the following main objectives:

• To improve the quality of GHM training;
• To provide a means for objective assessment of residency programs and training centers;
• To guide Training programs and training centers; and
• To assist Program Directors in reviewing the conduct and educational quality of their programs.

The approach:

Kirkpatrick model to evaluate the effectiveness of training was used with modifications. This model provides a handy reference guide that provides a practical and proven model for increasing training effectiveness through evaluation, by outlining four-level approach for evaluating training programs.

The four level training model that was created in 1959, represents a sequence of ways to evaluate training programs. As you move from one level, to the next the process becomes more difficult and time consuming, but it also provides information that is more valuable. The decision to evaluate training is mainly conducted to:

Decide whether to continue or discontinue training programs;
To gain information how to improve future training programs;
To justify the existence of training by showing how it contributes to the overall objectives and goals of the national healthcare system.

The four stages:

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11 (Donabedian, 2005)
12 (Bhatti, et al., 2015)
Stage 1: Reaction: Measures how the trainees reacted to the training through measuring the following:

- Were the participants pleased with the program.
- Perception if they learned anything.
- Likelihood of applying the content.
- Effectiveness of particular strategy.
- Effectiveness of the packaging of the training program.

Stage 2: Learning: Measures what the trainees have learned by looking to answer the following:

- What exactly did the trainees learn or not learn?
- The extent to which training increase knowledge or increase skill.

Stage 3: Behavior: Measures how the trainees have changed their behavior based on the training they have received, by looking at the following:

- How does training affect performance?
- The extent to which change in behavior occurred.
- Was the learning transferred from the educational setting to the real world?

Stage 4: Results: Measures the results that occurred because of training.

It was evident that we needed to add a fifth stage for Kirkpatrick in order to cover the training governance aspect of the training process. This fifth stage will allow for a comprehensive 360-effectiveness evaluation of the GHM training process and outcomes. All levels of evaluation are essential. In fact, the Kirkpatrick model explains the usefulness of performing training evaluations at each level. Each level provides a diagnostic checkpoint for problems at the succeeding level. Therefore, if participants did not learn (Level 2), participant reactions gathered at Level 1 (Reaction) will reveal the barriers to learning. Now moving up to the next level, if participants did not use the skills once back in the workplace (Level 3), perhaps they did not learn the required skills in the first place (Level 2).

It was evident that the training governance as a fifth level is essential, as it will help in defining best practices in postgraduate training, and act as a blueprint for directors and senior managers in training centers to enhance the value generated from postgraduate training. Further, it will ensure that the setting of the training center, as well as its governance structure, is designed to enhance the learning curve of participants.

The beauty of Kirkpatrick model lies in its flexibility, where you could start measuring at any level you desire, in SCFHS, it was unanimously agreed to measure level one and two as well as level five. The remaining two levels (behavior and results), although fully developed, will be measured at a later stage of this journey to improve the quality of postgraduate training programs.

SCFHS Stage Five: Training Governance:

Measures the training policies that are in place, training strategy, specifications and goals and objectives of the training program settings. This is effectively measured through carefully examining training curricula, rotation schedules, induction processes for trainers, matching process for trainees.

The table below simplifies Kirkpatrick four stages when using different evaluation methods:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation levels</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 1: Reaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 2: Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 3: Behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 4: Results</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**Theme 1. New technologies, innovation and quality assurance: How to consider QA and its key principles in a world of disruptive technology and change in the academy**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>#1 Reaction</th>
<th>#2 Learning</th>
<th>#3 Behavior</th>
<th># 4 Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Surveys</td>
<td>✅</td>
<td></td>
<td>✅</td>
<td>✅</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>✅</td>
<td></td>
<td>✅</td>
<td>✅</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus groups</td>
<td>✅</td>
<td></td>
<td>✅</td>
<td>✅</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge tests</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Skill observation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✅</td>
<td>✅</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation/Teaching</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✅</td>
<td>✅</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KPI's</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✅</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Appendixes**

**Appendix1: GHM KPI’s in the Kirk Patrick Reaction domain**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Domain</th>
<th>KPI ID</th>
<th>KPI ID</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>REACTION</td>
<td>GMHQI 1.1.0</td>
<td>% residents satisfaction by discipline</td>
<td>The aim is to estimate the satisfaction of residents by discipline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GMHQI 1.2.0</td>
<td>% trainer satisfaction by discipline</td>
<td>The aim is to estimate the satisfaction of trainers by disciplines.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GMHQI 1.3.0</td>
<td>% PDs satisfaction with center</td>
<td>The aim is to estimate the satisfaction of trainers by disciplines.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GMHQI 1.4.0</td>
<td>% residents burnout by discipline</td>
<td>The aim is to estimate the resident burnout rate by discipline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GMHQI 1.5.0</td>
<td>% PDs satisfaction with SCFHS</td>
<td>The aim is to estimate the satisfaction of PD with SCFHS services.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Quality Assurance in Graduate Health and Medical (GHM) Training Initiative in Programs Supervised by the Saudi Commission for Health Specialties (SCFHS)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Domain</th>
<th>KPI ID</th>
<th>KPI</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LEARNING</td>
<td>GMHQI 2.1.0</td>
<td>% Program Directors (PD) who attended PD Training Course offered by the SCFHS</td>
<td>The aim is to estimate the number of program directors who attended the SCFHS PD training course in a given year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GMHQI 2.2.0</td>
<td>Number of Trainers in PGMT programs who successfully completed SCFHS Training certification</td>
<td>The aim is to estimate the number of PGMT trainers who completed the SCFHS training Certification course in a given year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GMHQI 2.3.0</td>
<td>% surveyors who’ve successfully completed SCFHS’s Accreditation Training</td>
<td>The aim is to estimate the number of surveyors who successfully completed SCFHS Accreditation training course in a given year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GMHQI 2.4.0</td>
<td>% compliance to minimal procedure, case exposure policies, required competency index</td>
<td>The aim is to estimate the number of programs that complied with minimal case exposure policies required competency index in a given year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GMHQI 2.5.0</td>
<td>% residents who have received Residents Evaluation by program in a specific period</td>
<td>The aim is to estimate the number of residents who received their evaluation forms on time in a specific period.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GMHQI 2.6.0</td>
<td>% compliance with scholarly related project inclusion in</td>
<td>The aim is to estimate the number of research projects that residents participated based on their curricula in a given year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GMHQI 2.7.0</td>
<td>% burnout policy implementation</td>
<td>The aim is to estimate the number of burnouts by discipline in a given year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GMHQI 2.8.0</td>
<td>% compliance with implementing incorporated e-log system in each program</td>
<td>The aim is to estimate the compliance rate with implementing incorporated e-log system in each program in a given year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GMHQI 2.9.0</td>
<td>% residents who fulfilled their promotion criteria</td>
<td>The aim is to estimate the number of residents who fulfilled their promotion requirement criteria in a given year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GMHQI 2.10.0</td>
<td>% residents who passed the board exam</td>
<td>The aim is to estimate the number of residents who passed their board exam in a given year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GMHQI 2.11.0</td>
<td>% Disciplines who incorporated simulation in their curricula</td>
<td>The aim is to estimate the number of disciplines who incorporated simulation training in their curricula in a given year.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Quality Assurance, Qualifications and Recognition: Fostering Trust in a Globalised World

Theme 1. New technologies, innovation and quality assurance: How to consider QA and its key principles in a world of disruptive technology and change in the academy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Domain</th>
<th>KPI ID</th>
<th>KPI</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GMHQI 2.12.0</td>
<td>% Residents who have received an annual master rotation plan</td>
<td>The aim is to estimate the number of residents who have received their annual rotation plan on time in a given year.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GMHQI 2.13.0</td>
<td>% Adherence to the annual Master plan</td>
<td>The aim is to estimate the number of residents who complied with their annual master plan in a given year.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendix 2: GMH KPI’s in the Kirk Patrick Learning domain

Appendix 3: GHM KPI’s in the Kirk Patrick Training Governance domain

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Domain</th>
<th>KPI ID</th>
<th>KPI</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GMHQI 3.1.0</td>
<td>% centers with complete goals and objectives for residency program</td>
<td>The aim is to estimate the number of training centers with complete goals and objectives for their residency programs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GMHQI 3.2.0</td>
<td>% Completed trainer evaluation per program</td>
<td>The aim is to estimate the compliance of residents in filling out the trainer evaluation forms per rotation annually.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GMHQI 3.3.0</td>
<td>% adherence to accreditation requirements</td>
<td>The aim is to estimate the adherence rate of training institutions to accreditation requirements in a given year</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GMHQI 3.4.0</td>
<td>% PDs who turnover rate</td>
<td>The aim is to estimate the number of PD who did not complete their full term in a given year.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GMHQI 3.5.0</td>
<td>% accreditation compliance score</td>
<td>The aim is to estimate the compliance of training centers with the accreditation standards in a given year</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GMHQI 3.6.0</td>
<td># violations with the matching regulations</td>
<td>The aim is to estimate the number of violations in the matching process in a given year</td>
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Quality Assurance in Graduate Health and Medical (GHM) Training Initiative in Programs Supervised by the Saudi Commission for Health Specialties (SCFHS)
Quality Assurance, Qualifications and Recognition: Fostering Trust in a Globalised World

Theme 1. New technologies, innovation and quality assurance: How to consider QA and its key principles in a world of disruptive technology and change in the academy

- Bibliography


The new student management system and quality assurance at Pacific Adventist University: trials and triumphs
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ABSTRACT
Technology has a significant impact in all facets of higher education. It brings new opportunities and means for enhancing business processes and the quality of higher education. This paper shares the experiences of Pacific Adventist University (PAU) in Papua New Guinea (PNG), which recently shifted from the manual administration of student-related activities to online. The new student management system, University10, and the revised curriculum were rolled out to the first year students enrolling into the 2018 academic year. The effects of sustaining and disruptive technology impacted on the rollout of these two important academic developments. The principles of quality assurance such as communication, mutual agreement, responsibility and accountability were vital in ensuring all affected parties trust the new system and become familiar with the new procedures to realise the benefits of University10 and its importance in enhancing quality in student management.

KEYWORDS: Technology, Disruptive Technology, University10, Student Management System, Principles of Quality Assurance

INTRODUCTION
The University10 (Uni10) software will transform the way Pacific Adventist University (PAU) manages and administers its student-related activities. This paper will provide the background and present the implementation of University10 and its benefit and challenges. While the discussions may seem nothing new to tertiary education institutions (TEIs) in developed countries with advanced technology and quality assurance systems, this is a milestone achievement for a privately-run university in a developing country and in a sector where the national government has since 2010 pushed the agenda of quality. Key principles applied to realise the importance of quality assurance in implementing the new software will conclude this paper.

BACKGROUND
Pacific Adventist University saw four major academic developments in 2017. The five year cyclical re-accreditation and review of its academic program eventuated and the university was granted approval to continue operating and aligned its courses to the second edition of the Papua New Guinea National Qualifications Framework (PNG NQF). The University signed an agreement with PCG Academia (PCGA), a Polish company, to implement the University10 program. PAU also established its new quality assurance office and employed its first incumbent to the position of the Academic Quality Assurance Manager (AQAM) who works with the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (DVC) in developing the academic quality assurance system of the university.

The revised curriculum and University10 were implemented at the Semester 1 2018 registration of the first year students. A debrief was conducted after the registration week, resulting in the appointment of a project coordinator to ensure that Uni10 meet’s PAU’s business processes and that policies and procedures are integrated accordingly. The AQAM was appointed as the project coordinator. This lays the context for the discussions that will follow.
IMPLEMENTATION OF UNIVERSITY10

The implementation process has greatly improved since the establishment of the project coordination team. Front-end users lead the development of their respective modules. This enables them to review their current processes and apply new ideas of improvement and then mutually decide on the particulars of the system. This puts them in a responsible and accountable position on how they will conduct their business using the new system and understand the relationships of their business with the others in the system. Modules were then tested with feedback provided to the programmers. These are the modules for these front-end users:

- Dean’s Office – this is the main client server which is used by the Registrar and the Student Finance Officers
- Lecturer’s Portal – this is a web application that contains the lecturer details and the subjects they teach, and is where lecturers will enter marks.
- Dormitory10 – this is a web application for the residential deans to manage student accommodation, the workline and community service programs.
- Enrolment – this is a web application for use by the registration team
- Student Portal – this is the web application for students; it houses all personal, course, and financial information.

The front-end users are undergoing training and providing feedback to have a robust module.

BENEFITS OF USING UNIVERSITY10

The University10 student management system (MIS) has enhanced business processes at PAU. The appointment of the AQAM as the project coordinator of University10 was strategic as the officer was active in the curriculum review processes and is well versed with the academic systems and processes, thus ensuring academic and student management requirements are applied into the system.

University10 allows all student-related activities to be conducted online and in real time, resulting in a number of benefits for PAU. Also, the new system now houses the revised curriculum that is aligned to the PNG NQF. Furthermore, in implementing Uni10 concurrently with the revised curriculum, policy gaps were identified, resulting in prompt decisions taken to fill the gaps and address unforeseen issues. Revised or new policies developed were benchmarked for comparability, consistency and credibility and factored into Uni10. Existing software used in the different departments are integrated with Uni10 so that work is not duplicated and each system maintains a source of truth which is then shared with the other system. Fortunately for PAU, the Uni10 developer is the same company that is working with the Department of Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology (DHEST) to implement the new Grade 12 National Online Application and Selection Systems (NOASS). Selections for the Grade 12 school leavers at the national level into PAU’s revised undergraduate courses is linked directly into University10. This has greatly improved the selection processes and addresses many quality concerns. These are some of the benefits of implementing University10.

CHALLENGES OF IMPLEMENTING UNIVERSITY10

Many lessons were learnt from this first cycle of implementation. The decision to implement University10 for the first year students and the rollout of the revised curriculum was a strategic but very ambitious move. The implementation of the curriculum and the academic activities for the semester progressed simultaneously with PCG Academia having to keep up with the academic activities by quickly building the system, having the front-end users testing it and providing feedback for improvement in the test environment and then quickly switching to the live environment to conduct the required business processes. Concurrently, PAU had to catch up with PCG by developing new or revised policies and procedures to be captured in the new system. At most times both clashed and met in the middle with good and bad turnouts. University10 became a disruptive technology leaving PAU to use the existing systems for some of its business processes to ensure continued workflows.
There have been instances where quality was overlooked or paid less attention as the academic events needed to progress.

While the course coordinators were still getting used to the new curriculum, the initial implementation of some Uni10 modules were restricted to certain users. This limits the course coordinators and school deans to have access into the new system to check students’ records for course advice. This resulted in some students enrolling into wrong major/minor combinations, students not well aware of their subject sequencing and delays in getting their semester grades at the end of Semester 1.

A major challenge will be to ensure there is consistent Internet service to run University10. Also, communication and training amongst the relevant stakeholders will be the approach in going forward until the system is fully implemented.

CONCLUSION

The key principles of communication, responsibility, accountability, mutual agreements and internal reviews are necessary in effectively rolling out new academic developments. University10 will transform the way PAU conducts its business processes but taking into account also the purposes of accountability and enhancement will create trust in PAU’s performance in implementing the new system and the revised curriculum. These can collectively contribute to quality assurance and enhancement at PAU.

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Framework for quality assurance of e-assessment

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ABSTRACT
This paper presents a framework for quality assurance of e-assessment developed under the scope of the TeSLA project. The importance of assuring the quality of e-assessment is paramount for public confidence in technology-enhanced higher education provision.

The purpose of the framework is to increase the transparency in any form of e-assessment applied in measuring learners’ learning and to assist higher education and other providers, as well as, quality assurance agencies and governments in implementing and evaluating e-assessment. It includes eight standards in alignment with the ESG. The usefulness of this framework has been proved for the enhancement of quality assurance in HEIs that implement e-assessment as well as for quality assurance agencies.

KEYWORDS: IQA, UoB, Experts training, Quality Assurance in Higher Education, Language barriers, Cross-border

INTRODUCTION TO E-ASSESSMENT
Teaching and learning process is complex and includes the definition of different components: intended learning outcomes, learning activities, assessment, etc. The Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (the “ESG”) [1], applicable to all higher education offered in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), links assessment to the student-centred learning concept, as assessment allows students to demonstrate the extent to which the intended learning outcomes have been achieved. Therefore, assessment is a crucial element for the learners’ progression.

The use of information and communication technology (ICT) in assessment brings another level of complexity. It not only refers to different teaching and learning approaches or different technologies but also to a common understanding of academic integrity or cheating.

Nowadays there is a lack of a framework for quality assurance of e-assessment (FQAeA) in Europe. The importance of assuring the quality of e-assessment is paramount for public confidence in technology-enhanced higher education provision. The TeSLA project (“An Adaptive Trust-based e-assessment System for Learning”) puts a special emphasis on e-assessment and the quality criteria in order to improve the quality of the learning and teaching process and it intends to fill this gap [2].

FRAMEWORK FOR QA OF E-ASSESSMENT
The FQAeA is designed to assist higher education and other providers, as well as, quality assurance (QA) agencies and governments in implementing and evaluating e-assessment in the EHEA and other regional contexts. The main purpose of the FQAeA is to increase the transparency in any form of e-assessment applied in measuring learners’ learning.
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The key element of this framework is to assure that assessment processes are student-centred, relevant, reliable and trustworthy. Thus, digital assessment does not promote plagiarism and other forms of academic malpractice. On the contrary, it makes them more visible and, as a result, allows them to be addressed.

The FQAeA includes eight standards which are aligned with the ESG (2015) [1] and with the recent report by ENQA’s working group on QA and e-learning (2015-2018) [3]:

1. Policies, structures and processes for quality assurance of e-assessment
2. Assessment of learning
3. Authenticity and authorship
4. Infrastructure and resources
5. Learner support
6. Teaching staff
7. Learning analytics
8. Public information

RESULTS OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE FRAMEWORK FOR QA OF E-ASSESSMENT

This framework has been checked in the TeSLA project [2]. Seven European universities (see http://tesla-project.eu) with different backgrounds testing the TeSLA system received a panel of peer-review experts which focused on evaluating e-assessment practices. This paper focuses on the standards which are more relevant from the e-assessment point of view, which are:

• Policies, structures and processes for quality assurance of e-assessment

Good practices prove that all HEIs have adequate general policies, structures and processes for QA and an alignment of assessment with their pedagogical models. Focusing specifically on e-assessment, off-campus universities comply with most of the requirements and need fewer efforts to improve their processes. On the contrary, recommendations for on-campus universities were related to the development of internal and external policies and regulations to properly adjust to e-learning and e-assessment applications. Besides, new ethical and legal issues (e.g. new EU GDPR), as well as national and European regulations, need to be revised and kept up-to-date.

• Assessment of learning

Good practices in the assessment of learning identify that all universities apply a diversity of assessment methods taking into account a student-centred pedagogical approach, including learners with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND learners). It is also observed that chosen assessment methods are aligned with learning outcomes in all HEIs. Recommendations encourage all HEIs to enhance the learning experience by introducing even more diverse e-assessment methods taking advantage of the new authentication and authorship tools.

• Authenticity and authorship

All HEIs address academic integrity (especially plagiarism). Besides, there is an awareness of technical and security implications. In general, when HEIs introduce authentication and authorship technologies, it is suggested to implement a full register of external attacks and technical problems.

• Learner support

All HEIs have well-established and readily support mechanisms to meet all learners’ needs, including administrative, technical and pedagogical support. SEND learners are provided with a wider range of support services and adapted learning resources. Recommendations relate to the analysis of learners’ feedback on the learners’ support services. Moreover, learners should be always provided with technical guidance.
Teaching staff

On the basis that HEIs should guarantee the development of teaching staff competencies, training on the innovation of the pedagogical practices, including e-assessment, should be in place. Other elements that should be accessible to teaching staff are: updated technical information, academic integrity guidelines and support services.

Each university received a set of recommendations that were analysed from two perspectives: i) the efforts needed to implement the recommendation; ii) and usefulness. Figure 1 presents the aggregated results corresponding to the areas of improvement in the abovementioned standards. In general, results illustrate that most of the recommendations were considered to be easily applicable and useful. This would lead to an enhancement of the e-assessment process in a short term period. Nonetheless, there are some recommendations that due to the complexity of the implementation would require a mid-long term period. Especially, those related to policies, structures and processes.

![Figures inside the bubbles represent the number of recommendations with same values.](image)

**Figure 1.** Classification of recommendations in order to meet the expectations included in the FQAeA
Finally, it could be said that fully online universities comply with most of the elements included in the FQAeA, while traditional universities offering distance education should take into consideration the elements included in the framework in order to adapt to this new scenario (i.e. pedagogical model, VLE, teacher’s support, etc.).

CONCLUSIONS

The FQAeA has been proven to be useful for the enhancement of QA in HEIs that implement e-assessment. Although this study reflects the current state of HEIs and QA processes towards the implementation of e-assessment, it is undoubtedly that further development is needed from HEIs.

E-assessment should be perceived from a holistic approach. As it is a not a stand-alone process, review procedures should analyse how each HEI integrates e-assessment within its teaching and learning process and organizational culture.

Finally, it can be concluded that the FQAeA is also a valuable instrument for QA agencies.

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Quality assurance of online higher education in Australia

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ABSTRACT

In November 2018 the Tertiary Education and Quality Assurance Agency (TEQSA) held a national forum on the quality assurance of online learning. The results of the discussions at this forum combined with the work TEQSA has already completed in the development of the APEC Quality Assurance of Online Learning Toolkit in 2017, have informed the sector on future policy development with regards to the growing online learning environment.

INTRODUCTION

There is an increasing tendency for Australian higher education providers to deliver courses and individual units online. Through the research TEQSA conducted in the development of the APEC Quality of Online Learning discussion paper and toolkit (APEC, 2017), and associated consultations in various countries, it became apparent that this is a pattern reported in various local and international reports on quality assurance frameworks for online or technology enabled learning.

Some providers are enrolling students in wholly online courses of study and these students may be international and may also be located offshore. In some cases applicants for registration and accreditation of courses who signal an intention to teach online often do not appear to have any significant experience in online delivery or course development for this mode of teaching. Some seem to believe that if a subject is taught using the capabilities of an electronic Learning Management System that it is being taught online, whereas current online learning requires an understanding of the learning process and a different set of skills. In order to deliver a quality teaching product, providers need to understand the instructional design principles inherent in online learning and teachers and support staff require special skills to maximise the benefits of teaching in this mode. This paper will consider future approaches to the quality assurance of online learning in Australia.

AUSTRALIAN QUALITY ASSURANCE THE HIGHER EDUCATION STANDARDS FRAMEWORK

At present, TEQSA’s quality assurance framework uses the same standards criteria for online study as it uses for face to face study. The focus for online learning is commonly on the mode of teaching and delivery used, but quality issues related to the student experience may relate to online course or subject design or the level of support provided to students if student performance and satisfaction are lower than for internal enrolments. The following Higher Education Standards (Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2015) specifically refer to online learning:

- Learning Environment Standard 2.1.3– the learning environment, whether physical, virtual or blended, and associated learning activities support academic interactions among students outside of formal teaching
- Course Design Standard 3.1.4– Each course of study is designed to enable achievement of expected learning outcomes regardless of a student’s place of study or the mode of delivery
- Staffing Standard 3.2.3b – Staff with responsibilities for academic oversight and those with teaching and supervisory roles in courses or units of study are equipped for their roles, including having skills in contemporary teaching, learning and assessment principles relevant to the discipline, their role, modes of delivery and the needs of particular student cohorts
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- Learning Resources and Educational Support Standard 3.3.3 – Access to learning resources does not present unexpected barriers, costs or technology requirements for students, including for students with special needs and those who study off-campus
- Monitoring, Review and Improvement Standard 5.3.2 – a comprehensive review includes the design and content of each course of study, the expected learning outcomes, the methods of assessment of those outcomes, and also takes account of emerging developments in the field of education, modes of delivery, the changing needs of students and identified risks to the quality of the course of study.

A recent issue has emerged regarding how the quality assurance framework used by TEQSA can deal with micro-credentialing or study undertaken through MOOCs which may later be submitted for credit in a degree program.

FORUM

The Quality Assurance of Online Learning Forum was convened in Melbourne in November 2018 as an opportunity for higher education providers and TEQSA to examine the quality assurance landscape and emerging trends associated with online learning and its delivery in the Australian higher education sector. It was also an opportunity to discuss the role of TEQSA in supporting the quality assurance and enhancement of online courses.

Presentations from TEQSA Commissioner Dr Lin Martin, Professor Gregor Kennedy from The University of Melbourne, Dr Grant Klinkum from the New Zealand Qualifications Authority, Professor Michael Sankey from Griffith University and Dr Margot O’Neill from the International College of Management, Sydney all explored features of online learning such as the recent increase in demand, the current frameworks and opportunities available for quality assurance and experiences with quality assuring micro-credentials. The presentations were followed by a student panel discussion moderated by Professor Beverly Oliver from Deakin University, focusing on the opportunities and challenges experienced by students studying online.

GROWTH IN ELEARNING IN THE AUSTRALIAN HIGHER EDUCATION SECTOR

Online learning is a relatively recent offering in the delivery of education and there is little concrete data available for the Australian system on online enrolment patterns – a situation which needs to be remedied to understand whether the assumptions made about the increased prevalence of online learning are correct. One of the issues is that the higher education student data collection is basic in relation to mode of study. In order to explore quality assurance issues for online learning, a clearer picture needs to be obtained of which segments of the sector are involved in online learning and the characteristics of those providers. Some of the statistics gathered by TEQSA and presented at the forum confirmed expectations, such as the growth of online and blended learning which represented 12.2% of all EFTSL enrolments in 2016 and that the majority of online enrolments are in bachelor degree courses. (Martin 2018) Recent statistics indicate that while online learning suffers from higher attrition rates than face to face learning, students undertaking blended learning have lower attrition rates than students studying in face to face only environments. (Martin 2018) Student satisfaction with online delivery has been rising for several years and is now at similar levels of satisfaction with online learning. (Martin 2018).

COMPARISONS WITH INTERNATIONAL QUALITY ASSURANCE FRAMEWORKS

There are a range of frameworks which have been developed which could be used in the quality assurance of online learning. Some of these issues are discussed in detail in reports and surveys produced internationally and include:

• ACODE report (universities only) – Benchmarks for Technology Enhanced Learning and Teaching (Sankey 2013)
• APEC project (TEQSA) – Quality Assurance and Online Learning – Discussion Paper and Toolkit (2017)
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• eMM report – e-Learning Maturity Model – an assessment of e-learning capability across institutions (Marshall, Mitchell and Beames 2009)

• International report (ICDE) – Quality models in online and open education around the globe: state of the art and recommendations (Ossiannilsson, Williams, Camilleri, Brown, May 2015)

• Opportunity through online learning: Improving student access and participation through online learning (Stone, 2017)

The ICDE report provides a global overview of quality models in online learning, and addresses new needs such as the quality of online resources and open education resources (OER). The report concludes that there is no need for new quality schemes, as existing schemes are adequate and it identifies gaps in capacity building and coordination among stakeholders. The report includes 11 recommendations based on a useful set of principles which include the mainstreaming of e-learning quality processes into traditional institutional quality assurance. (Ossiannilsson, Williams, Camilleri, Brown 2015)

The ACODE report identifies eight benchmarks for technology enhanced learning and is a self-assessment tool for providers. The benchmarks cover similar areas to the domains of the Higher Education Standards Framework. Each benchmark identifies the scope of the benchmark; includes examples of good practice performance indicators and encourages identification of areas for improvement. (Sankey 2013) This collection of data has been undertaken and has had good participation by universities providing online learning. An analysis of findings of these self-assessments including identified areas of good practice would be a good contribution to the proposed forum.

The ACODE eMM project provides a high level overview of e-learning capability which allows external assessment of the preparedness of providers to offer e-learning options. (Marshall, Mitchell and Beames 2009) The tools used were offered to member institutions of ACODE and a comparison between the eMM and the ACODE benchmarks was undertaken. It would be useful if it were possible to identify the characteristics of providers which demonstrate a maturity and preparedness to provide high quality online learning based on the work done in the eMM project.

The Online Report Card, the annual survey of online learning by the Babson Survey Research Group, (Allen, Seaman, Poulin, Straut 2016) in the US provides a comprehensive data set for online learning in the institutions participating in the Babson surveys and explores fully online enrolments as well as multi-modal in public and private higher education institutions.

Further discussions with our experts have highlighted the need to consider the preparedness of an institution to operate in an online environment and the ability to consider the development of online approaches to learning across all components of the student life cycle. This includes:

• building digital literacy skills amongst staff and students

• considering course design and learning which support a digital or online environment

• thinking about what the future looks like and how the secondary students of today, will demand greater and more sophisticated learning preferences from future learning technologies.

The challenge as a regulator is to consider the adoption of an existing standard or the development of a new standard. Primarily, it is important that, with the emergence of a range of non-traditional providers moving into the online learning space, that providers are utilising one of the many global and or local frameworks in considering their online profiles and strategies, ensuring that courses delivered online are given the appropriate leadership and resources at development stage and that the appropriate professional development for staff and support services for students are in place.

Forum participants generally agreed that a new set of standards is not required, that (in the Australian context in particular) there is general consensus that new guidelines are not needed and that online and face to face learning share enough commonality so that existing frameworks can be used, with some modifications, to meet
the quality assurance needs of online learning. Participants further agreed that mechanisms to quality assure these new modes of learning already exist and can be deployed with minimum modifications.

ONLINE STUDENT PROFILE

Interesting statistics are beginning to emerge regarding the profile of an online learner in Australia. They represent a broad section of the community, residing in every Australian state and territory with 67% identified as female, 5% identified as having a disability and 7% identify as being more than 50 years of age. Whilst students appreciated the low barriers to learning that online offerings provide, particularly for students living in remote areas, dissatisfaction persists with the ability to adequately interact with teachers and the lack of student support. (Oliver 2018) These findings were reflected in the student discussion at the forum, which highlighted the challenges and opportunities of online learning. Overall students agreed that they were happy with the flexibility the technology provides, but felt that providers devote fewer resources to their online offerings than they do to face to face learning and that the current design of online teaching lacks the strong student teacher relationships that face to face learning is able to achieve, a deficit which can hamper the development of written communication skills. Despite these shortcomings, students believed that the challenges, while not insurmountable were still significant and that providers needed to fully embrace and resource their online offerings and this included academics understanding this teaching mode and fully utilising the technology, ensuring that online learning is as interactive as face to face learning. Further, students believed that the student voice in online learning needs a greater consideration by providers with many institutions not fully engaging with online student cohorts and their needs and utilising the student feedback in the design and delivery of online learning to improve the quality of the offerings. (Oliver 2018)

The forum allowed TEQSA as the regulator of higher education in Australia to validate current thinking about online learning and quality assurance. Historically, and globally we know that statistical collection around the provision online learning is problematic and does not capture the effort of online learning. Second, we know that in Australia and globally there are a range of standards which have been developed to frame the delivery of online learning (ACCODE, ICODE, Quality Matters), and that providers are utilising these frameworks in the delivery of online offerings. (Sankey 2018, O’Neill 2018)

What role does the regulator then play in the quality assurance of online learning? Overall, the regulator can consider strengthening activities in the online space, such as providing opportunities to encourage providers to adopt good practice. These can be activities such as benchmarking and networking events and the development of good practice notes for the sector.

The current review of the Australian Qualifications Framework and the rise of micro credentials also needs to be mentioned at this point in the discussion. The challenge is that the online learnings associated with micro-credentials are offered by institutions outside the currently quality assured tertiary education organisations. There is discussion as to where future micro credentials should be positioned in the Qualification Framework and how they should be recognised at a course level and whether the education system can be flexible enough to incorporate new offerings and new providers that don’t quite fit into existing frameworks. (Klinkum 2018)

Finally, the student voice needs to be given stronger consideration in both the design of online course offerings. There is a general recognition that many providers now have substantive cohorts of online students. (Oliver 2018) What efforts are being made to ensure that the voice of the online student is actively being sought by providers and their off campus needs are being facilitated?

CONCLUSION

Higher education in Australia is dynamic, and TEQSA as the regulator has obligations to protect the student experience of every student undertaking an Australian award for higher education. Australia has a long history of offering distance education and it was generally agreed at the forum that Australia currently regulates and offers a robust range of online courses, which now include micro credentials, As TEQSA continues to monitor the quality of online learning offerings, our higher education providers will also need to continue to develop and embed more structure in their quality assurance frameworks to protect the quality assurance of online learning.
TEQSA’s role is to regulate Australian higher education, but also to encourage providers to embrace the teaching and learning challenges that new modes of delivery brings. TEQSA does not want regulation to stifle the growing emergence of online learning and will continue to work with the sector to support innovation and quality in the Australian online learning environment.

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Accreditation for online learning programme

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ABSTRACT

After a year of desktop study and pilot accreditation, the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) launched the new service of accreditation for Online Learning Programme (OLP) in April 2018. The HKCAAVQ’s approach of OLP accreditation has five distinctive features: (i) eligibility requirement for OLP accreditation; (ii) one common set of accreditation standards; (iii) outcome-based approach; (iv) different learning, teaching and assessment of OLP; and (v) different evidence requirements for OLP. We will learn from the coming OLP accreditation exercises to fine-tune and adjust the accreditation process and evidence requirements as appropriate, and to grow with the sector in the age of disruptive technology and constant change.

KEYWORDS: Accreditation, Blended learning, E-learning, Learning management system, Online learning, Quality assurance, Technology-enhanced

INTRODUCTION

Inclusion of online components in learning has become a norm in higher education nowadays when technology advances and popularises. The online components appear in a diverse manner. It may be a virtual “storage” area to keep the teaching and references materials for student download; a video-on-demand server for keeping video records of lectures for viewing and reviewing by students; a discussion forum or platform for exchange of views, ideas, and collaborative work by students; a “venue” for assessments where quizzes and tests be held, and a window for submission of assignments; a private chat room where students can have direct dialog with the instructor, no matter human or robot. The online components may be representing only a small portion of the delivery (if it is just a virtual storage space), or the only platform where learning happens (when all the teaching and learning is conducted online). The degree of online delivery can spread across a wide spectrum depending on the components adopted.

The Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) is the only statutory accreditation authority for qualifications seeking recognition under the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF). We conduct various accreditation exercises for different purposes, such as Learning Programme Accreditation (LPA) for programmes leading to local awards, or accreditation for Non-local Learning Programme (NLP), a special type of LPA with granting bodies outside HK, for HKQF recognition. Lately, we have been approached by different local and non-local institutions and organisations, indicating intention to seek accreditation for their online learning programmes for recognition under the HKQF.

In response to the increasing need and requests, HKCAAVQ launched the new service of accreditation for Online Learning Programme (OLP) in April 2018. To prepare for the launch, we conducted a year of desktop study and a pilot accreditation exercise to identify issues as well as solutions. The findings informed the next steps, including formulating the Submission Guide for Accreditation of Online Learning Programmes which provides OLP-specific guidance on the evidence requirements, and supplementing the revised accreditation standards of the Four-stage Quality Assurance Process1 with specific considerations for online delivery.

1 The Four-stage Quality Assurance Process is the accreditation process conducted by HKCAAVQ for institutions and programmes seeking recognition under the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF). The four stages are Initial Evaluation (IE), Learning Programme Accreditation (LPA) and Re-accreditation (Re-LPA), Programme Area Accreditation (PAA), and Periodic Review (PR).
This paper intends to outline the features of HKCAAVQ’s accreditation for OLP, which is concluded from the desktop study and the pilot accreditation exercise.

**DEFINITION OF OLP**

In many countries or regions, online learning is categorised under “distance learning”\(^2\) but carrying different names: e-learning, online learning, technology-enhanced learning, etc. Regardless the name, such learning process is distinguished by what we called “online components”. Inclusion of such components in learning is growing tremendously as technology advances and more and more online resources are available. Unless the programme is totally conducted online, the various degree of inclusion of such components will be termed as “blended” or “mixed” mode of delivery. In a blended or mixed mode of delivery, the various online components are playing different roles in a learning programme. If it is only a virtual storage area for download, it will have a minimal impact on the learning process. On the contrary, if it is the only platform for learning, the learning process and the evidence of the learning outcomes may be totally different from the traditional face-to-face delivered programmes. Therefore, to distinguish the approach of accreditation for OLP from traditional programmes, HKCAAVQ defines OLP as:

*Online delivery is defined as delivery that is enhanced by the use of technology and is delivered through a digital learning platform to provide structured teaching, learning and assessment. Learning programmes with more than 50% of instruction delivered online will be accredited with reference to the additional evidence requirements.*

The definition is not meant to define the nature of OLP, but to highlight the features expected for OLP where the online components play a significant role to impact on the programme design and delivery. Such features include:

(a) **Structured Teaching, Learning and Assessment** – The programme should be a structured learning process. Although “personalisation”\(^3\) is considered as the leading concept in online learning, the flexibility for adjusting own pace of learning or choosing own study path should be carefully considered and directed in the programme design to ensure that the intended learning outcomes can be attained and attested when students complete the programme. Therefore, the design must be structured to guide the students to attain the intended learning outcomes, though it may be more flexible and provide more pathways to do so.

(b) **Delivered through a Digital Learning Platform** – Interactions between students and teachers and among students are important for students to construct their understanding and meaning of the learning. In traditional face-to-face delivery, this happens in the classroom; for OLP, this is expected to happen on a digital learning platform that accommodates one-to-one or even many-to-many interactions. The virtual learning environment should facilitate the interactions similar as the physical classroom, but enhanced with functionality on multimedia exchange and connectivity to the student networks.

(c) **Enhanced by Use of Technology** – The inclusion of online components, or adopting a digital platform for learning, should not simply be a copycat of other institutions or for cutting resources purpose. It should be an institutional strategic move in programme design and delivery, aiming to “enhance” the effectiveness of learning. The enhancement made should be properly measured and evaluated for sustainable development, and the move should be supported by adequate resources and proper training to all levels of users.

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(d) **More than 50% of Instruction Delivered Online** – It is not uncommon that technology is adopted and employed even in the traditional face-to-face delivery, just a matter of proportion. Therefore, for the online components to have a significant impact on the programme design and delivery, online delivery should be the major delivery channel, which accounts for more than 50% of the learning activities delivered. By counting the notional learning time spent on the activities, or the credits carried by different modules/courses, the percentage can be worked out to distinguish an OLP from a traditional face-to-face delivered programme for accreditation purpose.

The distinctive features outlined above informed our understanding as well as expectation on the design and operation of an OLP. Based on the understanding and expectation, HKCAAVQ laid down its approach of the OLP accreditation.

**APPROACH OF OLP ACCREDITATION**

Concluding from the desktop study and the pilot accreditation exercise, HKCAAVQ confirmed its approach of OLP accreditation with the following features.

1. **Eligibility Requirement for OLP Accreditation**

   OLP is a programme with a mix of delivery methods “enhanced” by technologies. Therefore, the institution offering OLP is expected to be experienced in operating learning programmes to identify appropriate technologies to “enhance” the learning.

   In the local context, the institution seeking accreditation for OLP is expected to possess demonstrated competence in operating recognised programmes; therefore, the institution is required to have at least one programme successfully accredited and recognised under the HKQF. For non-local institutions, the competence should be demonstrated through a recognised status in the home country.

2. **One Common Set of Accreditation Standards**

   The desktop study showed that quality assurance organisations or agencies in a number of countries or regions such as Australia⁴ and some selected European countries⁵ adopt the same standards for accreditation of learning programmes regardless of the delivery mode.

   In the review of the accreditation standards of the Four-stage Quality Assurance Process in 2015-2018, one of the research themes was the compatibility of the standards to the new forms of delivery, particularly in the context of online or blended delivery. After the review, HKCAAVQ stipulated explicitly that the accreditation standards are set to ascertain competence of an institution and standard of its programme according to the purpose of the accreditation. The accreditation standards do not restrict nor confine the design or delivery mode of the programmes. This understanding is disseminated through the revised accreditation standards⁶ which were purposefully made neutral in terms of models and modes of delivery of the programmes. For example, for learning, teaching and assessment activities, they must be “effective in delivering the programme content and assessing the attainment of the intended learning outcomes”, rather than the employment of “a range of teaching methods” or “assessment methods and techniques”.

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OLP are required to meet the same accreditation standards as programmes with face-to-face delivery, or whatever delivery modes, for recognition under the HKQF.

3. **Outcome-based Approach**

In assessing the competence of an institution, HKCAAVQ adopts an outcome-based approach, which is to assess the different levels of outcomes and their alignment according to the purpose of the accreditation. There is a hierarchy of outcomes considered in the accreditation⁷:

(a) Learner outcomes – learning outcomes attained by a learner after successful completion of a learning programme. Learner outcomes are reflected by assessments.

(b) Programme outcomes – performance of a learning programme in relation to its programme objectives. Programme outcomes are typically assessed by analysing information such as stakeholder’s feedback and employment data.

(c) Organisational outcomes – performance of an institution in relation to achieving its vision and mission through effective governance and management. Internally, an institution typically develops relevant performance indicators to assess its organisational outcomes. Effectiveness is a commonly used indicator in this regard.

Accreditation does not prescribe programme design but assesses only the appropriateness and effectiveness of its design with respect to the claimed objectives and intended learning outcomes. The alignment and effectiveness of programme design should be reflected on the different levels of outcomes; hence, the outcomes are the focus of accreditation, irrespective of the delivery modes.

OLP is expected to demonstrate alignment and effectiveness of its design through the different levels of outcomes for meeting the accreditation standards.

4. **Different Learning, Teaching and Assessment of OLP**

The key features of OLP outlined in the definition above are basically on its learning, teaching and assessment arrangement:

Structured teaching, learning and assessment

   (a) Delivered through a digital learning platform

   (b) Enhanced by use of technology

   (c) More than 50% of instruction delivered online

In OLP, majority of the instruction is conducted online through a digital learning platform, which aims at enhancing learning by the use of technology, no matter synchronous or asynchronous. Although OLP has different learning, teaching and assessment arrangement, the concerns in accreditation are the same: whether the (online) learning and teaching design and arrangement align with the claimed objectives, and are effective in facilitating students in attaining the learning outcomes; whether adequate support, academic and personal, is given to students during their learning (on the platform); whether staff is trained or properly equipped to manage the teaching and learning and assessment (on the digital platform); and whether the quality assurance mechanism is able to properly and timely monitor the student learning and the performance of the OLP.

In the pilot accreditation exercise, it was noted that support at the institutional and strategic level is crucial for the sustainable development of OLP. The adoption or migration to online learning and teaching implies an investment in the IT infrastructure which encompasses the elements of hardware, software and connectivity; and problem-solving for various issues arising from the new modes of delivery, such as accessibility to the

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online platform, time zone differences when the programme is to be accessible outside the homeland, technical support and timely feedback to students, etc.

The concerns in accreditation remain the same, but the issues to be explored in OLP are different due to the change of the delivery modes.

5. Different Evidence Requirements for OLP

Accreditation judgement is evidence based. All the issues explored in accreditation have to be satisfied by the evidence provided by the institution as meeting the accreditation standards. Since the issues to be explored in OLP accreditation are different from traditional face-to-face delivered programmes, a separate list of additional evidence requirements was prepared by HKCAAVQ for OLP accreditation. The evidence listed is not exhaustive, but aims to provide guidance to institutions in the selection and presentation of evidence to demonstrate meeting the accreditation standards, and, where applicable, prompt for the collection of the OLP-specific evidence. OLP-specific evidence may include “curriculum design and individualised contents demonstrating flexibility of allowing students to progress at their own pace”, “IT skills required for undertaking the online learning activities”, “learning management system used for online teaching and learning activities”, “estimated cost related to the maintenance and sustainability of its online programme offerings with respect to facilities and equipment for the next five years”, etc.

As majority of the instruction in OLP is happening on the digital learning platform, it is expected that the platform will be an important source of evidence to provide information on learning progress, student performance, academic advice, and feedback. Experience in the pilot accreditation exercise showed that it is important for a learning platform to support learning analytics to inform progress of student learning for programme monitoring and student support purposes.

The OLP-specific issues should be supported by OLP-specific evidence for demonstration of meeting the accreditation standards.

IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS IN OLP ACCREDITATION

From the perspective of accreditation, HKCAAVQ imposes no extra requirements on OLP, but institutions have to submit additional OLP-specific evidence to substantiate the claim of meeting the standards.

Take an example. The institution is expected have clearly defined and appropriate education objectives in order to meet the standard under the domain of Organisational Governance and Management. As an OLP institution, the development of OLP should be one of the strategic goals supported by top-down policies and procedures, and there should be clear targets and milestones for evaluation of its success. The direction of migrating learning and teaching online should not be a decision on a single programme, nor an ad hoc trial in view of the commitment and resources required. The move should be reflected in the strategic plans, relevant guidelines, associated committee structures and compositions, related key performance indicators (KPIs), etc. with OLP operation properly considered and included.

Under the domain of Learning, Teaching and Assessment, all the activities are expected be effective in delivering the programme content and assessing the attainment of the intended learning outcomes. For assessments to be effective and reliable, authentication of student identity is a crucial concern. Although there is not yet a standard protocol for the authentication of student identity in OLP, the institution should formulate proper policies and procedures to govern the online assessments and student authentication, and employ appropriate technologies, among the various up-to-date options, or means to ensure the reliability of the assessments in reflecting the learning outcomes of individual students.

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Quality Assurance, Qualifications and Recognition: Fostering Trust in a Globalised World

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For the domain of Programme Leadership and Staffing, the institution is expected have adequate programme leader(s), teaching and support staff with the qualities, competence, qualifications and experience necessary for effective programme management. In OLP, qualified teaching staff, other than being experts in their own disciplines, should be well equipped with the pedagogies for online teaching. There should be support staff for the IT infrastructure or digital learning platform for the development and management of the OLP. On top of these, the programme leader should be well versed about the strategic goal for OLP, and the technical requirements, pedagogical changes, concerns and monitoring of OLP on the digital platform. The competence and qualities of all these expertise should be reflected in the staff profiles, staffing plans, and staff development plans with OLP-specific skills and training taken into consideration.

Under the domain of Learning, Teaching and Enabling Resources/Services, the institution is expected to provide the relevant resources/services that are appropriate and sufficient. OLP is a structured learning process with majority of the activities delivered on the digital learning platform, which is also known as the Learning Management System (LMS). The LMS is an important platform for learning, teaching and assessment, and the most important enabling resources required for OLP. To ensure the effectiveness of OLP, sufficient financial resources should be allocated for the procurement, as well as routine maintenance and upgrading of the LMS, which should be reflected in the budget plans for the coming three to five years for the sustainable development and operation of OLP.

The above are only a few examples of the OLP-specific evidence required in response to the accreditation standards. As technologies advances quickly, and there is yet a protocol for the operation of OLP in the industry, HKCAAVQ will not restrict the institutions to stick to a certain technology or platform or model for OLP, but the evidence provided must be adequately addressing the requirement of the standards.

WAY FORWARD

To have a better picture about the OLP development in the local sector, in late July to early August 2018, we conducted a demand survey for the education and training sector of Hong Kong. Among the 80 responded institutions, only 8 (10%) are currently offering online programmes, but 19 (24%) of them, though currently have no online programme on offer, are considering to develop such programmes in the coming two years. The development of OLP is foreseeable to grow significantly in the coming years.

To cope with the growing sector, we have to get all prepared for the OLP accreditation. A briefing session was held in October 2018 and a workshop in January 2019. A facilitating approach is adopted to assist the institutions, especially those new to HKCAAVQ accreditation, in preparing and planning for the accreditation. Meanwhile, we collect the concerns and views from the institutions on the assistance and tools they need to inform our next actions.

Based on the information and views gathered from the demand survey and the briefing session, a collective approach for OLP accreditation exercises is adopted. Programmes of similar natures by different institutions will be accredited in one batch by a common panel for better focus and efficiency. As a start, two collective exercises are arranged according to the programme natures indicated in the demand survey: one on “Business and Management”, and the other on “Humanities and Social Sciences”. The collective exercises provide clear timelines to the interested institutions for their preparation of the accreditation; meanwhile, we can tender timely advice and guidance according to the progress of preparation of the participating institutions. The collective approach is also beneficial to HKCAAVQ. It is an efficient means of generating and sharing knowledge and experience for both internal staff and panel members, particularly on the key areas of OLP, such as authentication of students and arrangement of valid and reliable online assessments.

We continue to explore the possibilities of innovative and efficient arrangements for the OLP accreditation. For example, online meetings may be arranged for the local and non-local panel members to meet with the representatives of the local and/or non-local institutions of the OLP, instead of confining the meetings to a physical site for the “site visit”.

We will learn from the coming OLP accreditation exercises to fine-tune the accreditation process and evidence requirements, and explore for more possibilities. We are fully aware that OLP is being driven by the disruptive
technology and the vibrant industry of online learning. We will keep our mind open and alert about the development of the sector. Innovation is always our core professional value that we are to actively pursue new ideas and practices that enhance quality assurance and improvement, and the capacity of ourselves.

REFERENCES


**Identifying quality in innovation in higher education: A data-driven approach**

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**ABSTRACT**

**Purpose**

Jamaica has seen significant increases in local and overseas providers, varied modalities for teaching and learning, and new innovations for knowledge exchange in higher education. These developments have contributed to its EQAA’s thrust to re-position itself and to extend the impact of its mission in external quality assurance. Defining the specific role of external quality assurance in this technology-centred era of constant change remains a challenge, especially with limited data to support lessons from practice.

**Design/Methodology**

This position paper draws on a review of literature and proposes the need for an adjustment to the traditional deductive model of quality assurance in higher education in which standards and evaluations are based on general rules of good practice. An inductive approach is proposed, designed to support the more deliberate inclusion of data in the development of quality standards in contemporary higher education. These strategies are discussed in terms of their application in the Jamaican context and beyond.

**Findings and Originality**

This position paper posits that there is a need to build on the traditional deductive approach to quality assurance by examining various applications of technology-enhanced and distance learning in higher education. The paper recommends the development of data-driven quality standards through the following strategies:

(i) Conducting an inventory of innovations taking place in the higher education landscape to identify (a) the various strands of contemporary distance education and (b) types of providers, (c) how technology is being used to facilitate quality in teaching and learning and (d) the patterns of adoption of distance learning in higher education in Jamaica and the wider Caribbean;

(ii) Adopting an evidence-based methodology for discovering quality in online learning grounded in the concept of ‘fitness for purpose’, and

(iii) Gathering stakeholder feedback as a means of understanding the challenges and opportunities identified in technology-enhanced learning experiences.

**KEYWORDS:** distance learning, higher education, data, evidence, quality, quality assurance

**REFERENCES**


Theme 1. New technologies, innovation and quality assurance: How to consider QA and its key principles in a world of disruptive technology and change in the academy


Benchmark driven, data based assessment: A case study of innovations in accreditation framework by NAAC

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³) Junior Research Fellow, NAAC, India

ABSTRACT

Emergence of new technology and innovations have become a key trend in the global HE such as MOOCs, OERs. These innovations are bringing the world closer beyond boundaries while adding new and complex challenges for regulatory bodies and accreditation agencies. The remarkable growth of Indian HE with over 50000 HEIs and 36 million enrolments has created new challenges in quality framework for Indian higher education. Recently, NAAC has revised its methodology from Peer based assessment to ICT- data driven method of assessment which is considered as a paradigm shift. The methodology designed comprises blend of database of quantitative metrics and peer judgement on qualitative metrics. The paper summarises the unique key features of revised accreditation framework (RAF) such as Student Satisfaction Survey (SSS), Data Validation and Verification (DVV), Quality Benchmarking etc.

The paper discusses about design of methodology, process of assessment, pilot study analysis, feedback analysis, implementation and results of revised framework. In addition, the paper also tries to highlight the challenges faced while implementing the RAF in transitioning from predominately peer driven assessment to ICT based data driven assessment and accreditation aimed at benchmark led quality improvement process.

KEYWORDS: Revised Accreditation Framework (RAF), Quality Indicator Framework (QIF), Assessment and Accreditation (A & A), Indian HE, Innovative practices etc

INTRODUCTION

Higher education across the globe has witnessed various transformations in the recent years. Emergence of new technology and innovations have become a key trend in the global HE such as Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs,) Open educational resources (OERs). These innovations are bringing the world closer beyond boundaries while adding new and complex challenges for regulatory bodies and accreditation agencies. This change significantly expands the role of technology integration in the accreditation process as well as minimizing through innovative quality assessment tools.

This changing context has emphasised the need for framework that would also promote optimal resource utility, improved services, increased flexibility in operations blended with newer technology in present accreditation process.

QUALITY ASSURANCE IN INDIAN HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

The National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) has been established with the responsibility of Assessment and Accreditation of higher educational institutions in India. Since its inception, NAAC has been continuously engaged in restructuring and designing its methodology and assessment process as per the requirements of the changing phenomenon in HE based on its own field experience, gained knowledge from...
international collaborations with QAAs. Recently, NAAC has revised its methodology from Peer based assessment to ICT- data driven method of assessment which is considered as a paradigm shift in Indian HE since July 2017.

Indian HE is known for its massiveness, stands next to China and United States a third largest HE system in the world with number of HEIs. The system has witnessed an expansion in terms of number of institutions with 903 Universities, 39050 Colleges and 10011 Stand Alone Institutions as per the AISHE report 2017-18. The enrolment in higher education reached 36.6 million during 2017-18. This remarkable growth and emergence of new institutions have created new challenges in quality framework for Indian higher education. The other challenge includes diversity, unique grading system, involvement of stakeholders, limited number of assessors, need for data verification etc.

**INNOVATIVE PRACTICES OF NAAC IN RAF**

The methodology designed by NAAC strongly emphasises on evidence based assessments with accuracy and authenticity.

Development of RAF included the following:

- In depth study of over 7000 HEIs assessed by NAAC in past years.
- Synthesis of 50 core and desirable indicators, over 300 assessment indicators and hundreds of questions which formed part of manual.
- Referencing the key criteria and indicators used by various ranking agencies.
- Learning from best practices in Europe and other regions for features like Student Satisfaction Survey, alumni engagement etc.

The development of new concept of Quality Indicator Framework (QIF) involved a large consultative work of various academic experts, Vice Chancellors, faculty members etc. In continuation, Core Working Group (CWG) and Sectoral Working Group (SWG) were constituted to deliberate the action plan.

**Pilot Study** - In order to get the feedback on the QIF, NAAC conducted Pilot Study over hundreds of HEIs across the country. Response to Pilot questionnaire was considered as critical input to finalise QIF and the same was also posted on NAAC website and invited stakeholders’ for feedback.

The **salient key features** of RAF that makes the process distinguished from the previous methodology are paradigm shift from qualitative peer judgements to data based quantitative indicator evaluation and extensive use of ICT. Some key features are discussed below.

**Introduction of Qualitative and Quantitative metrics**

The present methodology seems to be a unique combination of factors in the quality assurance system covering both peer judgement and quantitative data driven assessment. The framework commonly referred as quality indicator framework (QIF) of NAAC comprises of system generated scores for quantitative metrics (QnM) with a proportion of 70% and qualitative metrics (QlM) with 30% weightage for peer judgement.

**QIF Statistics:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of HEIs</th>
<th>Universities</th>
<th>Autonomous Colleges</th>
<th>Affiliated Colleges</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Criteria</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key Indicators</td>
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<td>34</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualitative Metrics (QlM)</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quantitative Metrics (QnM)</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Metrics (QlM + QnM)</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Quality Assurance, Qualifications and Recognition: Fostering Trust in a Globalised World**

**Theme 1. New technologies, innovation and quality assurance: How to consider QA and its key principles in a world of disruptive technology and change in the academy**

- **Quality Benchmarks**
  
  Benchmarks for each metrics are designed taking the consideration of academic experts' views and field testing. The benchmarks of QIF are designed on 0-4 scale and these benchmarks are tested using pilot study. A series of meetings were conducted for statistical analysis of benchmark values of quality indicator framework.

- **Pre-qualifier for visit**
  
  Introduction of pre qualifier concept which is new in the system, where institution has to secure at least 30% in the quantitative metrics to qualify for peer team visit (PTV)

- **Third party data validation**
  
  In this process data submitted by HEIs is being scrutinised, verified and validated by the third party evaluators commonly referred as Data Verification and Validation (DVV) partners. This is fully system orchestrated process where HEI, NAAC Co-ordinator and DVV partner exchange data and clarifications.

- **Student Satisfaction Survey (SSS)**
  
  Introduction of SSS blending with accreditation process is aimed to capture the student satisfaction about the teaching, learning and evaluation process which will help to upgrade the quality of higher education. The NAAC will send an online link of this 'Student survey' to the email address/mobile number of the student and the student will have to fill the survey before a stipulated date. Analysis of the student survey will be done using customised software which will aggregate the responses and generate the score.

- **100 % ICT based Process**
  
  The entire process of Assessment methodology is ICT based evaluation from preliminary stage of application called IIQA till the result declaration. The stages involved in the process are IIQA, SSR, DVV, Pre-qualifier and PTV. The final outcome is a combination of System Generated Scores (SGS), SSS and Peer team score from peer team visit on Qualitative evaluation of the institute.

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**Process of Assessment and Accreditation**

- **Automatic selection** - The system will automatically allot the HEIs to the concerned NAAC Officers (System choosing and allocation of HEIs), DVV partners for third party evaluation and assessors selection based on the type of HEI (university/ subject specialisation/ offerings, non local etc.)
Quality Assurance, Qualifications and Recognition: Fostering Trust in a Globalised World

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- **QIF for special HEIs** - NAAC has embarked on a mission to address different categories of institutions by designing separate methodology to special category of HEIs through developing separate quantitative and qualitative metrics for variety of specialised HEIs such as Yoga, Sanskrit, Open and distance learning (ODL), Health Sciences etc.

In addition, the RAF has introduced several key indicators such as Innovation Ecosystem, Outcome Based Assessment, Alumni Engagement, Institutional Values and Distinctiveness etc, the details of which are discussed in the paper.

**IMPACT AND WAY FORWARD**

NAAC's new methodology seems to be considered as a right step in the new era of technology driven mode of assessment. NAAC wishes to integrate RAF work with European benchmarking project on selected European and Indian Universities on “Enhancing Quality Assurance Management and Benchmarking strategies in Indian Universities” (EQUAM-BI). This project was recently sanctioned by European Commission to NAAC and University of Barcelona with partners from Europe and India.

The paper also discusses about design of methodology, process of assessment, pilot study analysis, feedback analysis, implementation and results of revised framework. In addition, the paper also tries to highlight the challenges faced in the field while implementing the RAF of NAAC in transitioning from predominately peer driven assessment to ICT based data driven assessment and accreditation aimed at benchmark led quality improvement process.

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

Many of the views expressed in this paper proposal are reflections of the collective work of authorities of the NAAC, Members of Core Working Group (CWG) and Sectoral Working Groups (SWGs) constituted for development of Revised Accreditation Framework and other experts and officials. Their contribution is gratefully acknowledged. The authors have relied on official documents and publications of NAAC, UGC and MHRD for factual details. However, interpretations and suggestions reflect the views of the authors.
Peer reviewers as stakeholders of the external quality assurance system in Ethiopia

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ABSTRACT

Peer review is regarded as an essential component of the external quality assurance scheme employed by quality assurance agencies in their assessment of individual institutions that undergo quality audits. With its focus on ensuring fairness and objectivity through a well-organized system of checks and balances, peer review is considered to be a critical component of quality assurance and enhancement in higher education (Cross & Naidoo, 2011; Loukkola & Zhang, 2010). Despite their invaluable contribution to the success of this scheme and the relatively abundant theoretical discussions on the broader external quality assurance system of higher education, the profile, experience and perception of peer reviewers does not seem to have been widely investigated.

This research was conducted to bridge the aforementioned lacuna and aims at:

• assessing the profile and involvement of peer reviewers in the external quality audits conducted by Ethiopia’s Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency (HERQA);
• gauging the experiences and perception of peer reviewers towards the manner in which the external quality audit is undertaken; and
• exploring their suggestions for further improvement of the existing system.

The study is a sequel to an earlier small scale research conducted on the same subject by the same author (Tamrat 2011) while the national quality assurance agency was at its neophyte phase of development involving a limited number of reviewers (n=18) and institutions (n=14) that underwent quality audit. The first study, among others, established the importance and influence of reviewers who play a critical role in the success of the external review process.

This second study uses documentary evidence, questionnaire and deep interview as major instruments of data collection. The data are drawn from reviewers (N=200) who are involved in the external quality audits that HERQA, the national agency for quality assurance, has undertaken on more than 80 institutions since 2007. The study specifically seeks to investigate and report where the peer reviewers are drawn from, how and on what basis they have been recruited, whether they have passed through an induction process before assuming their formal positions, how they view their role as reviewers, their areas of concern and suggestions for improvements of the external quality assurance system. Comparisons will be made with the findings of the earlier research (Tamrat, 2011) to see if there have been changes and developments over the last seven years. The study finally offers the implication for further action and improvement of the external quality assurance system on the basis of the research outcomes.
Opportunities and challenges for innovative teaching and learning practices introduced through QA process of the higher education (HE) system in Sri Lanka: The students’ perspective

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ABSTRACT

Initiation of quality culture in the Higher Education system of Sri Lanka traces back to the collaborative work undertaken with the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Directors (CVCD) and the University Grants Commission (UGC) in the 2001. Based on the experiences gained during the first cycle of Institutional and subject reviews paved the way for the development of Programme Manual by the Quality Assurance Council (QAC) of the UGC for the review of undergraduate study programmes of Sri Lankan Universities and Higher Education Institutions. The programme review is based on 8 Criteria and 156 Standards. Among the 8 Criteria two are specifically focused on Teaching Learning and Learning Environment, Student Support and Progression. Standards pertaining to those 2 Criteria specifically expect the study programmes to implement innovative teaching learning practices incorporating technology. These practices are Outcome Based Education, Student Centered Learning, Blended Learning and the use of Learning Management Systems. Current study particularly focuses on identifying opportunities and challenges of implementing such practices from the perspectives of students. The finding s of this study will be useful for the policy makers, practitioners and researchers in QA in undergraduate education.

INTRODUCTION

As a result of the collaborative work undertaken with the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Directors (CVCD) and the University Grants Commission (UGC) in Sri Lanka, a Quality Assurance handbook had been published in the year 2001 and this was the first milestone towards the development of a quality culture in Higher Education system in Sri Lanka. During the last two decades, increasing concern has been expressed about the quality of university education in Sri Lanka (Gunawardena, 2017). The first cycle of Institutional Review (IR) and the Subject Reviews have been completed from 2004 to 2013. Based on the experiences gained during this first cycle a Programme Manual has been prepared by the Quality Assurance Council (QAC) of the UGC for the review of undergraduate study programmes of Sri Lankan Universities and Higher Education Institutions which was based on 8 Criteria and 156 Standards. Two of the above 8 Criteria are specifically focused on Teaching Learning and Learning support services. Standards pertaining to these two Criteria specifically expect the study programmes to implement innovative teaching learning practices incorporating technology. These practices are Outcome Based Education, Student Centered Learning, Blended Learning and the use of Learning Management Systems. The standards in the PR manual have been used to evaluate the implementation of these innovative practices in the study programmes. These evaluations are based on documentary evidence, classroom observations and other information collected from the lecturers, students and other stakeholders. The evaluations provide objective assessment of the use of different innovative practices in teaching and learning. However, they do not provide sufficient details of the classroom realities and students’ experiences of learning to understand the possibilities, limitations and the challenges of implementation of innovative practices. Therefore the current study particularly focuses on identifying opportunities and challenges of implementing such practices from the perspectives of students.
OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

The main research question that we explore in this study is; how the students view the innovative teaching learning practices introduced by the QA process in the Higher Education system in Sri Lanka.

To address this main question following sub questions has been set:

1) What are the innovative teaching learning practices introduced to the undergraduate education under the QA process in Sri Lanka?
2) What are the student's experiences of learning in relation to the above innovative teaching learning practices in their study programmes?
3) How the students view the effects of innovative teaching learning practices on their learning?
4) What challenges and opportunities emerge in the context in relation to the implementation of the above practices?

METHODOLOGY TO BE USED TO ACHIEVE EACH OF THE OBJECTIVES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Objective</th>
<th>Required data</th>
<th>Research tools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) What are the innovative teaching learning practices introduced to the undergraduate education under the QA process in Sri Lanka?</td>
<td>Innovative teaching learning practices included in the Programme Manual,</td>
<td>Document review, Questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) What are the student's experiences of learning in relation to the above innovative teaching learning practices in their study programmes?</td>
<td>Students experiences of innovative teaching learning practices, Strengths and weaknesses of such practices</td>
<td>Individual and Focus Group Interviews with students/Questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) What are the student's experiences of learning in relation to the above innovative teaching learning practices in their study programmes?</td>
<td>students responses on the effects of innovative teaching learning practices on their learning</td>
<td>Individual and Focus Group Interviews with students /Questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) What challenges and opportunities emerge in the context in relation to the implementation of the above practices?</td>
<td>challenges and opportunities from the perspective of the students</td>
<td>Individual and Focus Group Interviews with students/Questionnaire</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sampling and methods of data collection

The study is conducted in one university covering all seven faculties. A qualitative approach with a combination of data collections methods will be used in the study. A stratified random sample of 65 students has been used for questionnaire administration. For students each from different faculties will also be interviewed and 4 focus group interviews will be conducted with the students.
Quality assurance of elearning in line with the ESG – what key considerations for student-centered learning?

Maria Kelo, Director, European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, ENQA
Esther Huertas Hidalgo, Senior advisor, Catalan University Quality Assurance Agency (AQU Catalunya) and Chair of ENQA elearning working group.

ABSTRACT
This paper presents some of the key outcomes of a recent (2018) ENQA working group report entitled “Considerations for quality assurance of elearning provision”. It firstly outlines the key framework for quality assurance of elearning provision in Europe and the role of the ESG, and then focuses on how two key standards – namely the ESG Standard 1.3 – Student-centered learning, teaching and assessment and ESG Standard 1.6 – learning resources and student support - could be addressed in this context. The key considerations are to support institutions and agencies in reflecting on how to translate the requirements of the ESG for elearning provision, without compromising their spirit.

CONTEXT FOR ELEARNING QUALITY ASSURANCE IN THE EHEA
In the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (the “ESG”) form the basis for both internal and external quality assurance. The ESG are generic standards that apply to all higher education across the 48 EHEA countries, independently of the mode or place of delivery, including thus cross-border provision, distance learning, and all different forms of technologically enhanced learning from full online programmes to blended learning [1].

In order to ensure their applicability in different contexts, and for different forms of teaching and learning, the ESG are by necessity relatively generic. This means that while they set the framework for quality expectations and the ways in which quality should be assured, they need to be “translated” into operational principles in the different contexts, while taking care not to compromise their spirit.

While many European systems have not yet developed a systematic approach to quality assurance of elearning (only 23% of national agencies give specific attention to elearning) [5], some agencies have opted for creating specific criteria, indicators and QA methods to address this form of delivery. Others have chosen the integration of elearning into the overarching framework, which are designed so as to cater equally and appropriately for all forms of delivery [6].

Many argue that the quality principles that underpin successful online teaching and learning are the same as those that boost successful face-to-face provision. While there may be necessarily some differences in the resources and support that are employed, at the end of the day, it is the same judgements of quality that need to be employed [2]. This point is similarly held by the authors of ENQA’s 2010 publication on Quality assurance of elearning which states that the agencies could use the ESG as a backbone and create additional material to help the agencies in monitoring the progress and development of elearning [3].

This statement is aligned with - and taken forward by - the recent report by ENQA working group on QA and elearning (2015-2018) [4]. The group looked into how elearning is being addressed by external quality assurance, what current good practice could be identified, and how the ESG can be used to appropriately address quality assurance of elearning from the internal and external quality assurance point of view. The resulting key considerations are not prescriptive, and thus do not form a parallel set of standards, but are rather a tool to help thinking about how to assess elearning quality.
ADDRESSING STUDENT CENTERED LEARNING AND STUDENT SUPPORT IN ELEARNING

Elearning is expected to support student-centered learning (ESG Standard 1.3.) by enabling more flexible learning paths, addressing the diversity of students and their needs, supporting lifelong learning, equipping students with skills for future labour market, and so on. Elearning is freer from geographical constraints than class-room learning, and often also freer from time constraints, which adds to the flexibility and adaptability to students’ needs. Often heard arguments connect elearning to student-centered learning also by its potential to employ more innovative approaches in the class-room based parts of blended learning programmes, such as flipped classed room approaches, or the use face-to-face hours for discussion rather than delivery of basic information.

According to the ESG Standard 1.3, programmes should be designed so that students take an active role in creating the learning process and that assessment methods reflect the approach. The ENQA report [4] suggests that in order to overcome the lack of direct interaction, students may need to be provided with different tools, as well as specific encouragement, to engage online with each other, and with the teaching staff. This can be done e.g. by forming discussions groups, but remembering that if peer-interactions are essential for the achievement of the expected learning outcomes, such interaction should be monitored and assessed by the institutions. Institutions are also invited to reflect on the pedagogical model most appropriate to ensure that the teaching and learning process supports the achievement of the intended learning outcomes.

Provision of course content, assignments and e-assessment requires teachers to gain a good understanding of the requirements of this mode of delivery. Appropriate training for teaching staff on pedagogy, technology and teaching innovation is thus necessary. Importantly, as elearning provision requires often input from several individuals (including technical staff), good coordination between various contributors becomes particularly important. Assessment methods should be clear to students, appropriate to measure the achievement of learning outcomes, and technologically sounds, including different tools to ensure authenticity and work authorship. Students should be informed adequately of citing and referencing rules, including rules pertaining to plagiarism.

In terms of student support (ESG Standard 1.6.), institutions are required to provide adequate and readily accessible learning resources and student support that should take into consideration the diversity of learners and elearning particularities. The ENQA working group recommends the institutions to be aware of and analyse the learner profiles of their elearning students, and reflect on their needs, in order to develop appropriate and well thought-through support systems. Learning analytics can be an important resources in this context, while at the same time scrupolous data protection is particularly relevant as a wealth of data on the students’ achievementsand study patterns is collected.

CONCLUSIONS

Elearning has become part and parcel of higher education provision throughout Europe. Approaches to quality assurance of elearning vary, and many countries debate currently what are the appropriate quality criteria and methods for evaluation to be used for this form of delivery. This said, the ESG provide a clear framework for all forms of higher education, including elearning. However, particular interpretation of criteria, guidelines and indicators of quality may need to be used to fairly and adequately identify quality in this context. Analysing current good practice in QA can help in identifying practical ways to approach quality assurance in line with the ESG for elearning provision. Such approaches can support institutions and agencies to reap full benefits of elearning without compromising on its quality assurance.

REFERENCES


Quality Assurance, Qualifications and Recognition: Fostering Trust in a Globalised World

Theme 1. New technologies, innovation and quality assurance: How to consider QA and its key principles in a world of disruptive technology and change in the academy


Combined academic and work-based learning: Dual learning assessment in the Basque university system

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Unibasq - Agency for Quality of the Basque University System.

ABSTRACT

In the dual learning (combined academic and work-based learning) model, the distance between classical education and reality disappears and, as a result, highly qualified graduates are trained for the professional world. It is a model that maximizes the relationship with the company/organization. It allows overcoming the existing contradictions between knowledge and competencies or between theory and practice, since this learning model allows students to focus their learning objectives in great detail. At the same time, companies are aware of the type of professional experts they will have in the future. In the framework of the Basque University-Business Strategy, Unibasq mapped the university-business links in all the bachelor degrees -from dual learning approaches to internships- in the Basque University System. In addition, Unibasq developed a methodology to award a specific label on dual learning and the outcomes of the first call are presented.

KEYWORDS: Dual learning, work-based learning, Basque University System, university-business cooperation.

Introduction

Unibasq and the Basque University System

Unibasq – the Agency for the Quality of the Basque University System – is a public entity governed by private law and accountable to the Basque Government department in charge of universities.

Unibasq’s mission is to help improving the Basque University System by promoting quality for the benefit of the various stakeholders involved in higher education. Its purpose is the evaluation, accreditation and certification of quality in the Basque University System, in accordance with Spanish and international standards. It may also carry out evaluation, accreditation and certification activities outside the Basque Autonomous Community based on prior agreements signed with relevant external entities.

To achieve this, Unibasq carries out primarily activities that:

- Contribute to improving the quality of the Basque University System, in the aspects of teaching or learning, research and management;

- Provide information and opinions to public administrations and universities in their decision-making processes;

- Offer information to society on the work and results of the Basque University System.

The Basque Country is among the Spanish autonomous regions with the highest income per capita, thanks to its traditions of entrepreneurship and solid professional training and its highly-diversified economy, based on a strong network of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). As a result, the Basque Education System is very close to the needs of the Basque Country, with strong local roots in industry and society. The Basque University System is built on a well-established tradition of education and training. It comprises three multi-campus higher education institutions (HEIs) which have their main seat in the Basque territory. Each of them features a different kind of ownership:
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- Universidad del País Vasco / Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea (UPV/EHU) is the only public university in the Basque Country; it operates as a single university “system”, with three campuses located in each of the three provinces of the Basque Country: Gipuzkoa, Bizkaia and Araba.
- The Universidad de Deusto (Deusto University) is a private, non-profit HEI of the Society of Jesus (Jesuits). It has two campuses in the Basque Country: in Bilbao and San Sebastian, and a Business School division in Madrid.
- Mondragon Unibertsitatea (Mondragon University) is a private, non-profit HEI that is organised as a cooperatively owned entity created in 1997 by means of the merger of previously existing education and training institutes.

In the following table information regarding the size and scope of the Basque University System is shown.

Table 1. Size of the universities in the Basque University System.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University</th>
<th>Bachelor students</th>
<th>Bachelor programmes</th>
<th>Master students</th>
<th>Master programmes</th>
<th>PhD students</th>
<th>PhD Programmes</th>
<th>Academic staff</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UPV/EHU</td>
<td>35492</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>3325</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>3570</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>5663</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deusto University</td>
<td>8643</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1498</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>347</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>770</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mondragon University</td>
<td>4087</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>577</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>436</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>48222</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>5400</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>4057</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>6869</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Dual learning in the Basque Country

Dual learning (learning system that combines learning at a HEI and at a working environment) is a well-known tool to enhance skills for employability. In Spain, dual learning is regulated at Vocational Education and Training (VET) level, but there is no regulation for dual learning activities at university level. The Basque Country is known for the successful implementation of dual learning at VET level and for its close relationship with industry and businesses. That is why the Basque Government, in collaboration with different stakeholders (HEIs, companies and the Basque Business Confederation – Confebask) and taking into account the priorities set in the Communication from the European Commission on a renewed agenda for higher education (2017)1, approved the I. Basque University-Business strategy 2022 (I. Estrategia Vasca Universidad-Empresa 2022 (EVU-E2022))2. Its main two objectives are to create and to transfer knowledge related to excellent research and to its applicability to businesses and to train human resources with high capabilities and with an applied component adapted to the needs of employers. This is totally in line with what the aforementioned Communication from the European Commission on a renewed agenda for higher education (2017) established “Higher education should also allow students to acquire skills and experiences through activities based around

1https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52017DC0247&from=EN
real-world problems, include work-based learning and, where possible, offer international mobility. Cooperation with employers can allow HEIs to increase the relevance of their curricula and deliver them effectively, and increase opportunities for students to access high quality work-based learning.”

The objectives set in I. Basque University-Business strategy 2022 will be achieved through different actions, some of which are already being developed through the higher education institutions’ strategic plans or through the Basque University plan 2015-2018, and some others which are specifically appointed to Unibasq - the Agency for Quality of the Basque University System:

- Drafting a map of the relationships among study programmes and businesses in the Basque University System.
- Definition of labels regarding University-Business links for Bachelor, Master and Doctorate programmes – Dual learning labels.

Methodology

To start with the appointed tasks, Unibasq reviewed the university-business links in all bachelor degrees - from dual learning approaches to internships with a diversity of intensities. Unibasq technical staff reviewed the available information regarding each bachelor degree offered in the Basque University System (desk-based research) in order to see the intensity of the relationships among universities and companies or organizations.

The summary of the outcomes of this review can be seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Type and intensity of the university-business cooperation in the Basque University System’s study programmes at Bachelor level.

The main features of each category are:

1. Dual learning study programmes.
   - All the students are enrolled in a combined learning system at a HEI and at a working environment.
   - There is an agreement between the university and the company.

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- There is a legal bound between the student and the company.

2. Professional study programmes.
   - Study programmes that allow the graduate to access a regulated profession as lawyers or teachers.
   - The link between the university and the company/organization is established in a specific regulation.

3. Dual learning paths.
   - There is a specific path in the study programme where some of the students are enrolled in a combined learning system at a HEI and at a working environment.

   - There are agreements with the companies for the internships. All the students must do these work placements in order to get their qualification.
   - The company is not involved in the design, planning or review of the study programme.

5. Voluntary internships.
   - There are agreements with some companies giving the option to do some internship. The students do not need to do these work placements in order to get their qualification.

Once this analysis was done, Unibasq developed the methodology for reviewing “Dual learning”, following the models in place in Germany, France and Norway. The evaluation criteria consider, among other issues, the number of ECTS credits gained at the company (related subjects, learning and evaluation methodologies), skills developed at the company, the type of collaboration between the university and the company, student support systems and the profile of the company supervisors (if specific training is provided).

The following table summarizes the review criteria gathered in the procedure for the recognition of dual training for official bachelor and master degrees available in Spanish and Basque at Unibasq’s website.

Table 2. Criteria for evaluation of dual learning.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Aspects to consider</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Description of the study</td>
<td>Complete study programme / path – number of students % ECTS:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>programme</td>
<td>- Bachelor level: 25-50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Master level: 40% or at least 30 ECTS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Final project should be included in this percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Justification of the study</td>
<td>Interest and relevance of the dual methodology for skills achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>programme</td>
<td>Level of involvement of the companies in the study programme (design, delivery,…)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Creation of a university-business commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Learning outcomes</td>
<td>Learning outcomes to be achieved at the university/company (way of achieving them) – coordination of activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Students</td>
<td>Students distribution in the different companies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Eventually, last November 2017 Unibasq opened a call to the Basque universities to award a specific label on dual learning. The target was to evaluate the Bachelor’s and Master’s Degree study programmes' proposals to obtain recognition of “Dual Learning”. The aforesaid recognition may extend throughout the whole study programme, or a part of it (a path or itinerary). All degrees in the Basque University System registered in the Registry for Universities, Centres, and Degrees (RUCT) may apply for this recognition. This is now part of a new initiative included in the new Basque Decree 274/2017 of December 19th, regarding the implementation and closure of official study programmes (Bachelor’s and Masters’ Degrees and Doctoral Studies) where it is established that the Basque official study programmes will be classified in different levels under these categories: 1. Innovative methodologies based training; 2. Internationalisation; and 3. Links with companies, institutions and some other organisations. The methodology for reviewing “Dual learning” is linked to the last of the categories “Links with companies, institutions and some other organisations”.

Regarding the review methodology, it was a desk-based review of the documentation sent by the universities regarding the specific issues established in the criteria for recognition of dual learning. Each application was reviewed first by an academic and a professional expert and then the corresponding evaluation committee (by knowledge field, with a composition of academics, students and professionals) took the final decision.

Outcomes

The reviewers highlighted that this was an innovative model at university level and that the interaction between professional and academic peers enriched the discussions. In addition, they found that there were excellent ideas to align the university degrees to the needs of the companies and thus improving the employability of the graduates. Nevertheless, the experts wanted to make clear that this model should guarantee the rights of the students and that a legal framework should be developed to support the contracts for dual learning.

The degrees that got the “dual learning” recognition in the first call can be found in the following table and the review reports are available on Unibasq’s website (https://www.unibasq.eus/en/degrees-dual/).

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### Table 3. Outcomes of the first call.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>10 Bachelor’s degrees:</th>
<th>5 Master’s degrees:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9 paths:</td>
<td>5 paths:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Mechanical Engineering</td>
<td>• Strategic Product and Service Design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Industrial Design and Product Development Engineering</td>
<td>• Industrial Engineering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Industrial Organisation Engineering</td>
<td>• Embedded Systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Industrial Electronics Engineering</td>
<td>• Energy and Power Electronics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Computer Engineering</td>
<td>• Biomedical Technologies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Energy Engineering</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Eco-technology in Industrial Processes Engineering</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Biomedical Engineering</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Business Administration and Management</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full degree:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Mechatronic Engineering</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4 Bachelor’s degrees:</th>
<th>3 Master’s degrees:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 paths:</td>
<td>1 path:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Business Administration and Management</td>
<td>• Embedded Systems Engineering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Human Resources and Employment Management</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>2 full degrees:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 full degrees:</td>
<td>• Multimedia Journalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Automotive Engineering</td>
<td>• Digital Manufacturing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Innovation Engineering in Processes and Products</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conclusions

After the first call, a clear success case can be seen for the whole system and especially for Mondragon University who achieved 15 labels due to its close link with the professional world and its practical orientation. Nevertheless the three higher education institutions are making a clear bet on the dual learning approach and new study programmes to join this approach are expected for the next years.

The presentation of the outcomes of this initiative in different fora has already fostered international cooperation in this field and a project proposal called “Quality assurance enhancing confidence in work-based learning” is being developed with partners from several countries in Europe. The aim of the project is to define the key elements to enhance confidence in work-based learning (for society, students, world of work, world of education…), focusing on criteria for quality assurance/assessment. Project partners were chosen according to their expertise in the area and taking into account different perspectives: Quality Assurance Agencies (Unibasq, NVAO – the Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders), EU network organisations (ECA - European Consortium for Accreditation, EURASHE - European Association of Institutions in Higher Education), Student associations and Higher Education Institutions from different regions.

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Decreto 274/2017, de 19 de diciembre, de implantación y supresión de las enseñanzas universitarias oficiales conducentes a la obtención de los títulos de Grado, Máster y Doctorado. Boletín del País Vasco. Disposiciones generales.


Quality Assurance, Qualifications and Recognition: Fostering Trust in a Globalised World

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Combined academic and work-based learning: Dual learning assessment in the Basque University System
Recognition of Bahrain’s national qualifications framework in the wider world


ABSTRACT

Purpose: The focus of this research is on the experience of Bahrain’s National Qualifications Framework (NQF) over the last decade and how it has related – and could relate – to the wider world. The three dimensions of this research are: (1) how the application of the framework can best facilitate recognition internationally and locally of the graduates of the kingdom’s universities and training institutions; (2) the key principles, standards and processes that enable such recognition; and (3) how the recognition can be sustained.

Methodology: A qualitative interpretivist case study method has been adopted.

Findings: The research identifies key challenges encountered by higher education and training institutions in implementing the NQF requirements and the impact of the implementation on learning and teaching processes.

Originality/value: The lessons learned in implementing national qualifications frameworks worldwide have been examined and highlighted in the interests of supporting and improving the Bahraini experience.

KEYWORDS: Bahrain, qualifications framework, international recognition

INTRODUCTION

The questions underpinning this research paper have been:

How can the application of Bahrain’s National Qualifications Framework (NQF) best facilitate recognition internationally and locally of the graduates of the kingdom’s universities and training institutions?

What are the key principles, standards and processes that enable such recognition?

How can the recognition be sustained over the coming years?

In addressing the questions, there is reference to the relatively long history of education and training in Bahrain; the recent evolution of the kingdom’s qualifications framework and its underlying principles, standards, and processes; existing international and regional relationships that are of significance; networking initiatives; and impacts of the framework development on teachers and learners. There are concluding thoughts on what is known, what is yet to be known, and what should be.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A qualitative interpretivist case study method was adopted. As indicated by Stake (2010), characteristics of qualitative research are interpretivist in that there is a focus on the meanings of human affairs as seen from
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different perspectives and, as such, the researchers are comfortable with multiple meanings and a respect for intuition. Other characteristics, applicable to the research underlying this paper, are that it is experiential, being empirical and field-oriented, situational, taking account of the uniqueness of the context, and personalistic, being empathetic in its understanding of human perception.

The qualitative data was extracted from documents, observations, interviews, discussion groups, and dialogue with experts. Surveys and group and individual interviews were undertaken to gather the views of university lecturers and other facilitators of learning as well as the perceptions of graduates. Analysis and synthesis of the data was informed by a review of relevant literature and ongoing reflections of the researchers during the initiating and ongoing stages of Bahrain’s NQF development.

BACKGROUND TO EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN BAHRAIN

The kingdom has the oldest public education system in the Gulf region (comprising the countries of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Oman together with Bahrain). The first modern school was established in Bahrain in 1919 – exactly 100 years ago – and the first girls’ school in 1928 (Oxford Business Group, 2017).

Gulf Technical College was established in 1968 as the first tertiary education institution. In 1984 Gulf Technical College was combined with several other institutions to form the University of Bahrain, now the largest higher education institution in the country. It includes Bahrain Teachers College.

Arabian Gulf University opened in 1979, being co-owned by all states of the Gulf region and is accessible to any Gulf national. It has a French Arabian Business School established in 2007 in partnership with the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The Bahrain Training Institute (BTI), with recognition of the need for vocational training and development, was established by the Ministry of Labour in August 1992.

Ahlia University, Gulf University and The Kingdom University opened in Bahrain in 2001 as the first private universities. The University College of Bahrain, which had an early collaboration with McMaster University, Canada, opened in 2002. AMA International University, being a branch of the Philippine-based AMA Computer University, also opened in 2002. Applied Science University opened in 2004. Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland Medical University Bahrain, with faculty predominantly from Ireland and the UK, also opened in 2004. The Royal University for Women was founded in 2005. It is “the first private, purpose-built, international university in the country that is dedicated solely to educating the women of Bahrain” (Royal University for Women, www.ruw.edu.bh). It has academic input from Middlesex University, United Kingdom, and McGill University, Canada. Bahrain Polytechnic – a public institution like the University of Bahrain and Arabian Gulf University – opened in 2008. It was established by a project team from New Zealand in collaboration with Bahrain’s Economic Development Board and has a clear focus on student-centred education together with problem-based learning. British University of Bahrain, 2018, working in partnership with the University of Salford, Manchester, UK, is the newest university to be established.

“This wave of higher education institution (HEI) development, starting at the turn of the 21st century can be linked to the Kingdom’s attempts to transition to a more knowledge-based economy.” (Oxford Business Group, 2017). Also riding the wave have been private training institutes. There were 20 or so at the turn of the century and the number is now approaching 100.

Bahrain is committed to be the preferred education hub for the Gulf region. To do this, the kingdom recognises it must ensure that public and private education has high standards and qualifications that are recognised internationally. The BQA was established in 2008; being part of the National Education Reform Project, encapsulated in Bahrain’s Economic Vision 2030. The main aim of the project is “to fundamentally improve the services provided in education and vocational training in the Kingdom of Bahrain, which will in turn ensure the professional advancement of Bahrain’s human capital” (Education and Training Quality Authority, 2019). BQA is tasked with the responsibility of establishing a quality assurance system with standards that all education institutions in Bahrain are required to achieve. The quality standards are rigorously enforced, leading to significant improvements for most institutions (Hasan & Alhayki, 2018).
Higher education in Bahrain aims, through the National Higher Education Strategy and National Research Strategy, to “strengthen the links between higher education and business and industrial sectors to drive innovation, foster collaboration, create and identify research needs and to close the gap between employment and higher education regarding curriculum and skills” (Higher Education Council, 2018).

There is a clear focus on further as well as higher education: “Vocational training is playing an important role as the Government pushes for greater Bahrainisation of the workforce. While the Government levies a monthly charge on employers for every expatriate worker, which goes to fund training for Bahrainis, greater skills training is required to get Bahrainis ready for jobs currently occupied expats.” (Oxford Business Group, 2017).

**EVOLUTION OF BAHRAIN’S NQF**

The National Qualifications Framework (NQF) was launched in October 2014 by the National Authority of Qualifications and Quality Assurance for Education and Training (now renamed the Education and Training Quality Authority and commonly known as BQA). The developmental stage of the NQF began in 2009 with the assistance of expert advice from the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA). The commitment was to develop a framework that would meet the culture and context of Bahrain, as well as comply with international framework standards.

Country culture and context is a significant factor to consider when developing a qualifications framework. It is inappropriate to import a ‘one model fits all’ approach. There do need to be similarities, but allowance should be given to meet local country needs and to fit within their context. Bahrain has been fully committed to developing an NQF and has provided excellent support in terms of finance and human resources. Consultants were able to suggest various models, methodologies, policies and systems for Bahrain to select or adapt to what was thought best to suit the needs. A major challenge, at the commencement, was that knowledge of qualifications frameworks was understandably limited and decisions were taken which in time may change as stakeholders gain operational experience.

In the initial development of Bahrain’s NQF, several questions warranted in-depth dialogue and decision-making. Among the most-discussed were those that follow.

Should there be one qualifications framework or several? Some countries have separate frameworks for vocational education and training (VET) and higher education. In other countries where there is significant development, decisions are made to enable the various entities to establish their own frameworks, as in Scotland, where the development was essentially independent of the rest of the UK but with input from VET competences developed in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, a single framework is being developed but some of the devolved areas in the country would prefer to establish frameworks separately, which is challenging the current development. It is possible to develop more than one framework in a country, but administrative costs rise as multiple frameworks are developed and the consequential need for referencing can prove a very expensive undertaking. Ideally, one qualifications framework is preferable.

How many levels should the framework have? This varies across countries. Some have eight, some six, some ten, and some other possibilities. Whatever levels are selected, they need to cover the range of qualifications being considered, and whether it includes secondary as well as post-secondary qualifications. Bahrain established a ten-level framework with entrance at the secondary level.

What descriptors should be established for each framework level? This is not an easy process, particularly in terms of covering all qualification levels and different types of qualifications. This is one of the reasons why some countries have developed separate frameworks for VET (e.g. Kenya, Botswana, and Mozambique). It has been found important, too, to understand that descriptors are a guide and not elements of a precise science. Application of the descriptors becomes easier over time as users becomes familiar with the levels. In Bahrain, the descriptors were developed first in English and then in Arabic. Descriptors by their nature will need to be adjusted over time as experience of their use is gained.
What are the common criteria needed to place qualifications on a framework? This typically requires substantial training in how to provide intended learning outcomes (ILOs) for courses/modules and then in how to ensure that criterion-based assessment is used to cover the ILOs developed.

Should the systems and processes of the framework be centralized? In Bahrain it was agreed that this should be the case. As Bahrain is a small country, this was a logical choice. It enables quality alignment in an educational and training system that comprises state and private institutions. Only Bahrain-developed qualifications are being placed on the NQF but Bahrain undertakes quality inspections of all institutions with a presence in the country, many of which offer external qualifications, to ensure that they are fit for purpose. It expects the qualification owner (whomsoever it might be from another country) to conduct verification of the standards of their awards. Ideally, foreign qualifications will in the future be on the respective frameworks of the countries and will be able to be aligned to Bahrain.

What should be the value of a credit of learning? There has been agreement in Bahrain that 10 notional learning hours equate to one credit. Several universities in the country were using different credit systems, such as those prevalent in Europe or America. These institutions were not required to change their own credit system but, when applying for qualification placement on the Bahrain NQF, would convert their course/module credits to the agreed 10:1. However, for convenience, several institutions have now made the change to the credit system of 10:1.

How effective is verification? Once ‘listed’ – i.e. fit for purpose for conducting the educational processes professionally and appropriately – institutions in Bahrain map their qualifications by providing justification for level and credit before sending an application to BQA for verification. This is to ensure that they have followed procedures and provided information correctly. A verification panel (which is a standing committee of BQA) considers all qualification applications. Is the panel overly eager to find fault at this stage of the development of Bahrain’s framework? Reports from applicants suggest there is a tendency for this to happen. Perhaps as more experience is gained, the panel will have more confidence in simply confirming that processes have been correctly followed and will leave the mapping responsibility to the qualification owner.

How is conflict of interest avoided during the validation process? Once an applicant has everything in order, a qualification is validated by an independent panel. Because of the mixed and competitive nature of the Bahrain education and training system, it was considered important to ensure that there is no conflict of interest pertaining to a validation panel. In several other countries, validation is established by the owner of the qualification, an advantage being that it keeps central costs low. Consultants recommended that this be the case in Bahrain and that a member of BQA would have an observer status to ensure that everything was conducted correctly and met recommended procedures. Bahrain believed that it would be best for BQA to manage all procedures, which would ensure a tight control on standards despite being relatively expensive. In many other countries, validation would be conducted before submission to the framework authority. This would put the onus on equivalent peers to ensure that qualifications are fit for purpose and with appropriate levels and credits. Many universities use benchmarking as a method to ensure that their qualifications are meeting equivalent international standards.

What about currency? Validated qualifications are placed on Bahrain’s NQF for an agreed time limit which, once reached, requires the qualification to be reviewed and resubmitted for consideration. The time limit varies depending on the qualification, the length of study time and the changing nature of the subject/knowledge/skill requirements.

**AGREEMENT ON PRINCIPLES, STANDARDS AND PROCESSES**

As has been the case in countries such as Scotland, England, Ireland, Australia and New Zealand, it was agreed that Bahrain’s framework principles should focus on consistency and transparency, security and confidentiality, an appropriate code of conduct to encompass all activities, and capacity building. For example, in relation to the last-mentioned: “The [authority] is devoted to continuously developing its staff and training all experts involved in evaluating applications, ensuring that they are competent and equipped to carry out their roles and responsibilities” (Education and Training Quality Authority, 2017, p. 17).
Importantly, in establishing a network of frameworks with the wider world there is a recognised need for shared referencing principles. For example, those specific to the networking of the Bahrain and Scottish frameworks (Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework and the Education and Training Quality Authority, 2018, p.3), and relevant to such networking in general, with just a change of the names of the frameworks, are:

1. The roles and responsibilities of the relevant bodies and authorities are clear and transparent.
2. Comparison of the NQF and the SCQF demonstrates matching between the levels of the two frameworks.
3. The NQF and SCQF are based on learning outcomes and, where these exist, credit systems and the recognition of credit.
4. The policies and processes for the inclusion of qualifications on the NQF and the SCQF are clear and transparent.
5. Both qualifications frameworks are underpinned by quality assurance and are consistent with international quality assurance principles.

In line with countries such as those mentioned above, standards of Bahrain’s framework relate to: (1) Access, transfer and progression; (2) Qualification development, approval and review; (3) Assessment design and moderation; (4) Certification and authentication; (5) Continuous quality improvement.

Among the key processes are: (1) Institutional listing; (2) Programme mapping, confirmation and placement; (3) Reviews – self and external; (4) Ongoing consultation. A set of policies were agreed and established, and educational institutions were required to meet what was termed “listing”, which was compliance with the NQF policies and standards. Once listing was achieved, an institution was then able to submit their qualifications to the NQF for placement, which occurs if all necessary checks and procedures have been followed.

Qualifications are placed on the framework following the development of a qualification based on intended learning outcomes (ILOs) arranged in modules and applying criterion-based assessment to all the ILOs. Modules are mapped against level descriptors and given an NQF level. An application is sent to the BQA for vetting and then the full qualification is validated independently before being placed on the NQF for an agreed time limit. Review and resubmission to the BQA occurs cyclically.

The processes enable comparison between qualifications placed on the NQF in terms of level and learning “quantity” (i.e. number of credits) in the interests of quality assurance.

Individual foreign qualifications can be aligned to Bahrain’s framework by means of a thorough examination of the qualification content and assessment arrangements. If the qualification meets the criteria necessary, it can be considered as equivalent to an appropriate level on the NQF.

To ensure that the NQF maintains its quality assurance commitments and standards, independent auditing by experts from a country with a mature and reputable framework should take place. There would be a rigorous review of processes and standards. These reviews should be at regular intervals (e.g. every five or so years) to ensure that quality standards are maintained. In this way, reliability and continuous improvement will provide a guarantee of the level and standard of the qualifications on the Framework.

EXISTING INTERNATIONAL AND REGIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Higher education institutions in various parts of the world have been influential in the establishment of universities and schools in Bahrain. Prominent among the countries involved are the United Kingdom, Ireland, Canada, the United States of America, France, the Philippines, Australia, New Zealand, India and Pakistan, as well as the states of the Gulf region. Predominantly these have been ‘big brother’ relationships. There is little evidence of recognition of prior learning or transfer of credit to or from institutions overseas. At best at this time, for example, is that a degree earned at the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland Medical University Bahrain is internationally recognised but there is a likely need for a graduate wishing to practise in another country to sit local licensing exams and meet other specific requirements of that country.
An intention of the National Qualifications Framework is to rectify this. However, the framework as a priority in the government’s reform project “has been developed and designed with certain aims, most of which are futuristic” (Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework and the Education and Training Quality Authority (Bahrain) (October 2018). The goal of achieving international recognition of Bahrain’s framework and contributing to regional and global development of frameworks is partly achieved by alignment, in 2017, with the Scottish framework. Within two or three years, it is intended to have alignment with the Malaysian Qualifications Framework, the New Zealand Qualifications Framework, and the Irish Qualifications Framework – an initial comparison report being produced for the last-mentioned in 2014. Currently, Bahrain is “heavily involved” in a meta-framework for the Gulf region, and also in the Arab Qualifications Framework “which crystallises the efforts of ANQAHE (i.e. the Arab Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, which was established in 2007 with the support of the World Bank, UNESCO and the British Council).

IMPACTS ON FACILITATORS AND LEARNERS

As part of this research, a focus group of higher education lecturers and tutors addressed the questions:

1. In relation to your facilitation and assessment of learning, what do you understand to be the key requirements of Bahrain’s NQF?
2. In what ways has your application of the requirements helped you?
3. In what ways has your application of the requirements created challenges for you?
4. What improvements should be made?

In relation to the first question, it is understood by the tutors that the key requirements are “to design and facilitate constructively aligned courses that have assessable learning outcomes set at the appropriate level, assessment tasks which assess the learning outcomes, and teaching and learning strategies that develop knowledge, skills and attitudes appropriate to the discipline”.

In relation to the second question, application of the requirements were considered helpful in that:

• “It provides clarity to the learner of the knowledge, skills and attitudes that are to be developed and assessed.”
• “It provides a focus for the teacher to design and facilitate teaching and learning strategies that will effectively and efficiently develop the required knowledge, skills and attitudes.”
• “It encourages dialogue, collegiality and consistency as educators are required to work together during the design, mapping and moderation processes.”

In relation to the third question, application of the requirements were considered challenging in that there was “tension between compliance and creativity for the facilitator”, “an increase in administrative paperwork”, “a need for reconceptualization of assessment”, “the added demands of planning and implementing effective strategies for diversity among learners”, “the need for development of a wider range of teaching and learning strategies”, and “some misunderstanding of NQF processes and requirements”.

In relation to the fourth question, suggested improvements were:

• “Share good practices in relation to the NQF within universities.”
• “Encourage dialogue within and between higher education institutions of NQF requirements.”
• “Get constructive feedback from NQF [i.e. from the NQF department of BQA].”
• “Use effective IT solutions to manage NQF requirements.”
• “Have genuine emphases on both quality compliance and improvement. Review the judgement categories that are being used by BQA – i.e. outstanding, good, satisfactory, inadequate – to give a more positive impression. Currently, it is skewed to the negative end of the scale. A rectification would be to place an additional category – ‘very good’ – between outstanding and good.”
Overall, from the learned experience of the researchers of this paper, higher education institutions in Bahrain are proactive in having teaching and administrative staff well versed in the requirements of the NQF. For example, one institution has three training initiatives. First, all academic staff members undertake a certificated teaching and learning programme in the first year of their appointment. This programme includes sessions on the framework, on writing learning outcomes at appropriate levels, and on designing aligned assessment tasks. Second, an academic development directorate offers training in writing programme mapping scorecards and the confirmation process. Third, sessions on NQF issues are offered during the institution’s annual training symposium. The impact of these training initiatives has resulted in successful placement of 20 academic programmes on the NQF register, with only two programmes remaining to be placed (Education and Training Quality Authority, 2019).

However, it is noted that major change is not always easily accepted. Some academics have found adapting to the stringent requirements of the NQF difficult. A comment from a programme manager of a well-established university in the country was typical of academics in other institutions: “In changing courses to learning outcomes and criterion-based assessment, we found that the existing curriculum was in need of change and updating. This proved time-consuming and required expertise to support us as we adapted their curriculum and assessment methods to the new NQF-required format.”

Also, comment has been made by several managers of tertiary institutions that compliance with the NQF requirements for policies on recognition of prior learning and pathways for progression of learners has proved difficult. There have also been challenges in developing acceptable policies on admission, assessment, and special needs.

For learners, the new qualifications have been beneficial in that they are more transparent – it is clear what is needed to be achieved. However, as students now need to achieve all the ILOs of a course or programme, this proves challenging for some who previously would have passed a qualification by only a percentage of the required knowledge, understanding and competence.

Impacts on teaching have been:

- A need for the provision of and a clear focus on intended learning outcomes (ILOs) of courses and programmes;
- A need to align assessments with ILOs as well as alignment with content, resources, and teaching and learning styles;
- An emphasis on learner-centred education and training;
- Meeting the challenges of having courses and programmes that are contextually appropriate;
- An essential requirement to comply with standards;
- The need for acceptance of education and training as iterative, cyclical processes.

Impacts on learning have been:

- A need to focus on the ILOs that have been provided or negotiated for the course or programme;
- The need for acceptance of meaningful learned experience as being deep rather than shallow;
- Acceptance by the learner of devolved responsibility to be central to the learning;
- Critical questioning of the quality of facilitation of learning and assessment;
- Demands for contextual appropriateness of course and programmes content and facilitation;
- Evolving opportunities for learners to have a genuine ‘voice’ in education and training.
CASE STUDY: THE ARABIC ENGLISH TRANSLATOR

Ali, is one successful student who enjoys the opportunity of having a voice. A graduate of the University of Bahrain, he developed aspirations to become an Arabic-English translator while working as an IT technician for a higher education institute in Bahrain.

Thinking back throughout the years and up to the present, what have been the main influences in helping and motivating you to be a successful graduate? “First, as a graduate of the University of Bahrain, I had a passion for languages and cultures. It was also a challenge because my English then was at a basic level. But I accepted it as a challenge. Perhaps seeing an older brother taking the same path of studying English, then working, somehow motivated me and I looked at him as a role model. I have seen him reading a large volume of English books that I couldn’t read! Or watching movies that I couldn’t understand without subtitles! For a graduate of Binghamton University [as a sponsored Fulbright scholar], while working as a translator, I really wanted to go beyond language learning, to develop my translation skills and broaden my cultural perspective to both English and Arabic cultures. I had the great support of an expat mentor and an expat manager, at a Bahrain University where I was accepted as a translator, in pushing me out of my comfort zone and small-box zone. Perhaps I took a risk by resigning from work, but I have never ever regretted that. In fact, though I have no fixed salary, I feel grateful and happy for taking a lovely journey of learning and exploration.”

Currently, what are your thoughts on the education system of Bahrain? What are the strengths? What improvements could or should be made? “The education system is traditional, I believe, in terms of the management of this system, to schools and students. Yes, it is mostly free, and available for everyone. There are real efforts by the leaders of the country to invest in it; however, there has to be root transformation. The mentality relating to this system has to be changed. They should stop thinking about extending school hours, adding more books to the already-heavy schoolbags, and filling students with much information and theory. Improvements? Student-focused learning! Encouraging creativity! Letting students love what they learn rather than feeling forced to do so. There should be new minds involved in the decision-making of this sector and system.”

Looking ahead, in relation to work, what would be your ideal situation? “I love interpreting. I am enjoying it as a freelancer. It pays me ‘good’, but not fixed. Also, I love to motivate and inspire learners especially in the fields of languages, translation, and education. My ideal situation would be working as a permanent interpreter in a leading company where I can interpret, and also have a chance to provide written translation, and use my skills as an instructor on translation, languages, and cultures. I don’t know how that could happen, but I am just thinking what I would enjoy doing!” It is to be noted that Ali does not volunteer Bahrain’s framework as significant for education and training in the country. This is typical of successful graduates who have been interviewed. However, once prompted, they agree that the framework is a positive development. The key influences for Ali – like other high achievers – have been passion to take up challenges and fill gaps in knowledge, a supportive family environment, role models, and, in his specific instance, a United States scholarship.

CASE STUDY: THE ASPIRING FEMALE ASTRONAUT

Jenan is another successful student who is appreciative of the opportunity to have a voice. She dreamed of being an astronaut when she was a teenager, achieving well at high school.

Thinking back throughout the years and up to the present, what have been the main influences in helping and motivating you to be a successful student? “My internal motivation to be extraordinary and do something more than just studying ‘extracurricular activities’. " “Being raised in an educated and achieving family which always provided me with care and attention.” “Going to good schools and being surrounded by an environment and models for success.” “Participating in both local and international events, competitions, conferences, activities, etcetera – which have always been new engines to new successes.”

Currently, what are your thoughts on the education system of Bahrain? What are the strengths? What improvements could or should be made? “Bahraini education is strong in the way it provides multiple curricula with newly updated information. However, some curricula still need improvement in their content and the way of teaching them.” “The extracurricular activities are varied and interesting in the way of improving skills and
abilities in students.” “The assessment process mainly depends on written exams in some subjects. I think it should be more flexible in providing different types of assessment.” “The English language is not as strong as it should be. This is a major problem in college life, especially for students for whom school is their only way of practising the language.” “International exams and diplomas can be added to the system especially in high school – IB, IELTS, SAT, etcetera – because many students can’t get to the ‘uni’ they want without these certificates.”

Looking ahead, in relation to work, what do you aspire to be? “Hopefully, a successful surgeon – neurosurgeon maybe, or practising space medicine.”

Like Ali, Jenan does not refer to the framework without prompting but is aware that it is one of the initiatives in Bahrain. Upon leaving secondary school, she has been accepted by the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland Medical College Bahrain and may well benefit from the networking of frameworks of Bahrain and Ireland.

Typically, in the case studies of Ali, Jenan and others that are being explored by the researchers, learners do not mention Bahrain’s NQF as something that has inspired them to achieve; rather, when they reflect on it once it has been referred to by the researchers, they see it as something they might miss if it was not there. They are all positive, on reflection, about the international opportunities that a network of frameworks would offer.

The framework, to learners, is not necessarily a motivator. In terms of the theory of Herzberg (1959), it is a hygiene factor.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS: WHAT SHOULD BE?

The research indicates that education and training has expanded over the last two decades as a result of government initiatives. There is a need to change to a knowledge-based country, rather than one overly dependent on oil. Encouragement of both public and private education and training that adheres to the principles and processes and meets the standards that apply to the NQF should be continued.

There is an appreciation that the introduction of the NQF with its underlying principles, standards and processes has improved the quality of education and training in Bahrain. There have been lessons learned from the implementation of qualifications frameworks throughout the world that provide strategies for the strengthening of Bahrain’s NQF. The perceived best examples are being used as role models – e.g. Scotland, England, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand. Pitfalls of others are being avoided e.g. certain Asian countries (Bateman & Liang, 2016; Chowdhury, 2017). However, quality management, compliance and improvement should be both contextually appropriate and recognised as world-class in terms that can be understood and owned, as appropriate, by all parties.

Bahrain is making arrangements that will enable international recognition of its qualifications. The NQF is being referenced against the well-established frameworks of other countries. This is a rigorous process ensuring compatibility and quality assurance of the qualifications placed on the respective frameworks. There should be appropriate, coordinated relationships with international agencies and other quality-focused organisations. Networking with other frameworks – few in number at this stage – will facilitate recognition internationally and locally of the graduates of the kingdom’s universities and training institutions.

Also, the importance of having a significant number of graduates earning qualifications that are recognised locally and internationally is acknowledged. There is agreement that the needs of all parties involved should be kept well in mind – the learners, the institutions, industry, the wider community, the country, regional institutions, agencies and organisations throughout the world.

Among academics and increasingly appreciated by learners is the importance of having strong relationships among the various aspects and components of learning and teaching processes – e.g. intended learning outcomes, methods of teaching, assessment, technological resources, and creativity applied to programme and course development.

There is general acceptance that the links should be kept strong between the various stakeholders in education and training – learners, facilitators of learning, industry, government agencies, communities. It is important to
provide opportunities for multiple voices to evaluate and contribute to the developments – especially the voice of learners. Ensure they are listened to, acknowledged, and acted upon as appropriate.

There are many unknowns at this stage. The framework initiative is essentially young and futuristic. Ongoing research will be required to establish the effectiveness of certain aspects.

Will Bahrain become a hub for education and training in the Gulf region, or, at the very least, be a strong member of the evolving networks of qualifications frameworks? Will referencing approval from another country enable significant numbers of students of Bahrain to be given credit for what they have achieved at home to gain credits for modules achieved in the partner country? Will networking of frameworks affect the mobility of workforces – both from and to Bahrain? Will Bahrainisation of the workforce be in conflict with talent mobility or will there be significant positive influences from, for example, Bahrainis studying specialisms overseas and returning to the kingdom to offer their expert services? Will the new learning and teaching processes influence the aspirations and achievements of learners? Will present actions sustain recognition over the coming years?

Other points of significance in supporting and improving the Bahraini experience include:

• Encourage rather than police framework-related participation. Seek out what is being done well by institutions and promote and publicise it; indicate how improvements can be made to aspects that as yet are not being done well.
• Develop a genuine emphasis on both quality compliance and improvement.
• Ensure that significant training and support enables education institutions to adjust and comply with the major reform requirements is offered widely and has continuing provision.
• Be reminded of and take pride in appreciating the relatively long history of formal education and training in Bahrain for both genders.
• Continue Bahrainisation of the workforce but not at the expense of expertise from off-shore that can better achieve national goals.
• Encourage an ongoing quest for ‘pockets of enthusiasm’ within the education and training communities so that they can be widened and deepened (Hasan, 2015). To help sustain the effectiveness of the framework, it should be a matter of finding the pockets of enthusiasm, fostering them as pockets of excellence, and then having them seen and copied as pockets of exemplarism.

Importantly, in sustaining the initiative in dynamic local and global environments, Bahrain’s National Qualifications Framework should not be accepted chiselled in stone. It should be revisited frequently to evolve its appropriateness and to consider how it might be further refined or improved.

Complex educational change takes considerable time and effort. However, with strong leadership and commitment the rewards can be a highly valued and respected qualifications system that is recognised internationally, and that enables increased student recruitment and greater global mobility for qualification holders. Such is the prospect for the graduates of Bahrain.

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Are convergence practices in higher education quality assurance possible in a culturally divergent world?

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ABSTRACT

This Paper situates the concept of qualifications frameworks (QF’s) as a quality assurance ‘tool’ used to determine equivalency and level qualifications in higher education into a ‘utilitarian’ perspective as a stimulus of convergence; and, towards being a facilitator of student’s and qualification’s mobility with emphasis within the Caribbean region. However, supranational trends, such as INQAAHE’S GGPQA, and the Commonwealth of Learning, Transnational Qualifications Framework (TOF) to which many countries globally, are exposed, shall also be taken into consideration. The emergence, development and utilisation of QF’s and the other trends shall be analysed, aiming to answer the main question – is convergence possible? Further, theoretical reflections call into question convergent development of quality assurance systems due to local, regional and international political influences (the Bologna Process, Lisbon Strategy, GATS, the EU, CARICOM etc.), regarding cultural and economic integration. The final part suggests that by acknowledging variety and ongoing change, a solution to this convergence in quality assurance practices and the cultural diversity dichotomy question and how they impact on student and qualification’s mobility.

KEYWORDS: higher education, quality assurance, qualification frameworks, convergence, diversity, student mobility, mobility of qualifications, CARICOM, INQAAHE, Bologna Process.

INTRODUCTION

This Paper shall strive to situate the issue of quality assurance practices and mechanisms in higher education into a comparative perspective. The incidence of quality assurance in higher education outside the United States is seemingly a young initiative. However, following aggressively, is the concept of globalisation and the internationalisation of higher education and training. This is characterised by the mobility of qualifications from one territory to another as well as the mobility of students and by extension graduates as part of the “free movement” of labour. An emerging issue however, is how are these ‘mobile’ qualifications to be assessed to determine equivalence (and relevance) with local qualifications to recognition or non-recognition? The emergence of the phenomenon of Qualifications Frameworks in Higher Education in the late 1980’s in Europe was one of the first mechanisms used to compare and ‘level’ higher education qualifications. This spread rapidly among European countries mainly influenced by the requirements of the Bologna Process (1999), to Commonwealth member countries, to the Caribbean, to Asia, to Africa and so forth. This initiative now exists at national, regional and international levels. In this regard, its uses shall be explored in aiming to answer the main question if convergence is possible. In addition supranational trends, such as the emergence of regional and international quality assurance agencies such as INQAAHE, COL-VUSSC, CANQATE etc., to which local (national) quality assurance and higher education institutions are exposed, shall also form part of the conversation, the emphasis, however, being on the Caribbean region.

THE INCIDENCE OF QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS WORLDWIDE:

This section shall briefly explore the history of QF’s and where they can be found internationally. It shall also explore how QF’s originated and what were the triggers for their development and use. Stimulus such as the Bologna Process, Lisbon Strategy, GATS, and INQAAHE’s GGP among others shall also be explored.
THE CARIBBEAN EXPERIENCE WITH QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS:
This section shall briefly describe the Caribbean involvement with the use of QF’s as a tool to level and reference HE qualifications to facilitate collaboration among CARICOM countries in the sharing of QA practices and supporting CARICOM’s Single Market and Economy Free Movement of Skills initiative. It shall briefly reference the similar situation of the European Union.

ROLE OF QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS IN FURTHERING CONVERGENCE – STUDENT AND QUALIFICATION MOBILITY THROUGH AN EXAMINATION OF:
- Recognition of foreign or transnational institutions and their awards
- Assessment of the equivalence of qualifications
- Evaluation and validation of new programmes
- Development of unified credit-based systems for their higher education sectors

This section shall discuss how the above functions of EQAA’s are achieved and the role QF’s plays in these as they relate to student and talent mobility.
The roles of national quality assurance agencies on development of qualification framework in Asia and the impacts on student mobility - A lesson learned by Taiwan

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INTRODUCTION

Higher Education in Asia has been expanding rapidly since the late 90s. Up to present, the total number of higher education providers in Asia has been increased to 76,387 with more than 340 million student enrollment (INQAAHE, 2018). Furthermore, higher education expenditure was also raised dramatically by more than twice compared to 10 years ago, particularly in Asia and Pacific region (OECD, 2017). Therefore, in order to respond to massification in higher education and to assure the quality of all higher education providers, the establishment of quality assurance system has become a national agenda in most Asian nations.

Since 2000, coupled with the growing economic power of the middle classes, more and more Asian students chose to study aboard in search of an overseas university education. Traditionally, Western English speaking countries, such as US, UK, Australia are the most popular destinations. Yet, with great ambitions to become an education hub, several Asian countries, such as Malaysia, Singapore, China, Japan strategically attracted international students from neighboring countries (Tan, 2013). It was found that more than a half to three quarter of international students on Asian campuses comes from the other neighboring countries (British Council, 2008).

According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) 2007 yearbook, there were 57,000 Korean students studying in China, compared to 23,000 Chinese students in Korea; 80,000 Chinese students in Japan and 23,000 ASEAN students in China (Association of Southeast Asian Nations). With the rapid growth in the number of Asian students pursuing a foreign degree within region, “the need for formal credential evaluation services has emerged” (Tse, 2012, p.5). Since each nation has its indicators to define quality, it is more complicated to measure it in the international context. As Lee (2012) stated, “higher education stakeholders will have their own ideas as to what constitutes quality and how to measure it. The interpretation of the concept of quality itself can even extremely vary in different contexts.” (pp.7-8). As a result, there are two major concerns emerging likely; First, how would quality of cross border of higher education be assured? It seems important to examine whether awarding institution is a legitimate provider, not a bogus or rogue one with an external quality accreditation procedure undertaken by the quality assurance agency. Then, how the qualification of a foreign degree could be recognized at home would be related to whether it is equivalent to one of national qualifications within qualification framework?

QUALITY ASSURANCE AND QUALIFICATION FRAMEWORK IN ASIA

“Quality assurance” is “a process of establishing stakeholder confidence that provision (input, process and outcomes) fulfills expectations or measures up to threshold minimum requirements” (INQAAHE, 2013a). Though “quality assurance” has varying approaches different meanings due to different purposes and contexts, it is often used a policy tool by governments (Van Vught & Westerheijden, 1994; Westerheijden, et.al, 2014; Shin, 2017). “Qualification framework” is defined as an educational system structure, which has a series of instrumental regulatory logics, such as inclusion of all types of higher education providers, developing national standards for all level of education in terms of learning outcomes (Jarvis, 2014). In other words, qualification framework “makes hierarchical distinctions between qualifications and categorize them by level”, in which
learners can earn credits and accumulate all skills and knowledge in different learning periods and paths (Hanf & HIPPACH-SCHNEIDER, 2005, p.9).

As Shin (2017) argued that “states prefer to use quality assurance as a strong driver to reform higher education while universities prefer to maintain their prestige without strong state influences” (p.2). Westerheijden, et.al. (2017) also pointed out that “The adoption of quality assurance schemes becomes a process of copying instruments and policies that exist elsewhere, or to legitimate political action regardless of its actual effect” (p.3). Truly, different political purposes shed more light on the logics underlying QA concept, methods and design (Orsingher, 2006; Shin, 2017). Globally, qualification framework defines the expected learning outcomes at each level of qualification, which emphasizes “the results of learning rather than focusing on inputs such as length of study and supports the transfer of qualifications, including credit transfer and recognition of non-formal and informal learning” (ASEAN, 2017, p. 4). Generally speaking, both QA and QF are regarded as strong policy tools by governments to achieve the specific educational goals in an either direct or an indirect manner. As Hou, et.al stated (2017), it needs to examine closely the relationship between quality assurance and qualification framework in order to facilitate student mobility.

Currently, 33 out 51 states in Asia Pacific have developed national quality assurance agencies. The number of quality assurance agencies, including self-funded is up to 87. Asian quality assurance agencies are considered as a statutory body. Southeast Asian national quality assurance agencies established as governmental agencies are under direct government control. Likewise, East Asian agencies tend to be a buffer body where the government still plays a major role in the agency. They are both usually considered as extended arms of government, because they are primarily funded by the state.

Similarly, 33 nations in Asia have developed national qualification framework. There remain 19 states without the system. In general, all ASEAN countries developed qualification frameworks, including Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Cambodia, etc. In contrast, East Asian nations did not develop qualification framework yet, such as Japan, Taiwan.

CONTEXT AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In order to promote cross-border student mobility, regional Qualification Framework, like EQF, AQRF, develops to accommodate different types of NQFs within region. However, some Asian nations without qualification framework seem likely to rely more on external quality assurance system to ensure the quality of higher education providers and programs. Asian quality assurance agencies are expected to engage the development of national qualification framework due to increased talent mobility across the region, particularly in ASEAN countries.

Taiwan has developed a well-structured quality assurance system since Higher Education Evaluation & Accreditation Council of Taiwan (HEEACT), the national quality assurance agency, was established in 2005. However, it has been more than 10 year, whether Taiwan needs to develop a national qualification framework was still under discussions in Taiwan’s society. After the launch of the New Southbound Policy in 2016, Ministry of Education realizes that it is an urgent necessity that a national qualification framework should be developed if Taiwan would like to attract more international students to study in Taiwan, particularly from ASEAN countries. In the early 2018, MOE commissioned HEEACT to conduct a pilot study on assessing the possibilities, implementation and challenges for the development of national qualification framework in Taiwan.

The main purpose of the study is to explore the roles of Asian quality assurance agencies in qualification framework development and its impact on student mobility. The current development of national qualification framework and the challenges in ASEAN nations will be discussed first. The role of quality assurance agencies played and the challenges encountered in the implementation of qualification framework will be analyzed next. The major concerns and a possible model for Taiwan qualification framework will be presented at the end of the paper. Four research questions are addressed as follows:

What are the roles of Asian quality assurance agencies in qualification framework development?

What are the challenges for qualification framework implementation from Asian quality assurance agencies’ perspectives?
Quality Assurance, Qualifications and Recognition: Fostering Trust in a Globalised World

Theme 2. Thinking and acting globally: the role of QA in qualifications frameworks and student and talent mobility: challenges and opportunities

What would quality assurance and qualification framework affect student mobility in Asia?
What are the major concerns in developing Taiwan national qualification framework?

RESEARCH DESIGN

The study adopted a qualitative approach to collect the relevant data, including an on-line survey, and five focus groups on quality assurance agencies’ heads, universities and international students. An on-line survey targeting Asian national QA agencies was undertaken to discover their roles in the development of qualification frameworks. In addition, around 35 representatives, including quality assurance agencies’ heads, universities, and international students were invited to take part in the focus groups for realizing the challenges and implementation of qualification frameworks.

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Developing partnerships and working together with employers and student alumni for university quality assurance

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² Association of Vietnam Universities and Colleges, National Economics University

ABSTRACT

Higher education accreditation in Vietnam is a kind of state-controlled system where the Ministry of Education and Training manages the accreditation standards and procedures as well as issuing licenses to accrediting agencies. Consequently the five accrediting agencies are four from public universities and only one belongs to a professional association. From the analysis of the accreditation of 117 universities in Vietnam context, using the Ministry Accreditation Standards, this paper aims to focus the discussion on those criteria that require universities to engage different stakeholders, mainly the student body, the alumni and employers in university governance and quality assurance (QA). The main issues to be dealt with are: (1) how Vietnam higher education accreditation system is organised; (2) the reason of the most concerned criteria for a large percentage of accredited universities; (3) What stakeholders said at the interviews conducted by the accreditors.

How Vietnam Higher Education Accreditation System Is Organised

Vietnam higher education system is in the transition from “State controlled system” to “University Autonomy under State monitoring system”. Thus it leads to fundamentally change in university governance and accreditation. Before 2015, according to the rule issued by the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET), two accrediting agencies belong to Vietnam National University Hanoi and Vietnam National University Hochiminh City were permitted to be established and licensed by MOET. In late 2015, the Association of Vietnam Universities and Colleges were permitted by MOET to establish Centre for Education Accreditation (CEA-AVu&C); then in January 2016, CEA-AVu&C is licensed by MOET to run both institutional and program accreditation. By 2017, in Vietnam there are 5 accrediting agencies which are licensed by MOET, among which four belong to four public universities. So it could be said that higher education accreditation in Vietnam is a kind of state-controlled system. The accreditation standards and procedure are issued by MOET.

The Reasons of the Most Concerned Criteria for a Large Percentage of Accredited Universities

From 2016 to June 2018, accrediting agencies in Vietnam used MOET “Ten Accreditation Standards with 61 criteria” to accredit 122 universities, among which 117 universities¹ (15.4% are private) have been awarded “Certification of Institutional Accreditation”; the other 5 universities failed. To be awarded the Certification, the university has to meet the requirements of 49 criteria of the Ten Accreditation Standards. In other words, the university has to receive “Pass” Level for at least 49 criteria, the other 12 criteria could be in “Fail” Level. The Accreditation results show that among 117 universities, only one university has obtained “Pass Level” for 56 criteria and “Fail Level” for 5 criteria; another university has obtained 55 criteria with “Pass Level” and 6 criteria with “Fail Level”. Details of number of universities with number of “Fail Level” criteria² are reported in Figure 1.

¹ Department of Quality Management, Vietnam Ministry of Education and Training
² Vietnam Ministry of Education and Training Statistics in 2017: There are 235 universities among which 170 are public and 65 private
It is seen in Figure 1 that on average universities failed approximately 10 criteria; among which 25 universities (21.4%) have 12 criteria with “Fail Level”; another 26 universities (22.2%) have 11 criteria with “Fail Level”. The range of the criteria that universities failed is varied. The paper only focuses on the criteria that more than 25% of universities failed. These criteria are shown in Figure 2.

The reasons that more percentage of universities failed those criteria in Figure 2 are lecturers’ low academic rank or poor research performance, or high rate of students per lecturer; and the most worrying reasons are their poor involvement of relevant stakeholders in university governance and quality assurance. Therefore, the paper now focuses its discussion on the level of how universities engage various relevant stakeholders in university governance and quality assurance. The six criteria, that require universities to get feedback from student body, graduates, alumni and employers and use the collected information to improve their curriculum, programs, the teaching, assessments, student supports and student career development, are shown in Figure 3.
The performance indicators of the first three criteria (criterion 3.2, criterion 3.4 and criterion 3.6) in Figure 3 require universities to ask professional associations, employers and alumni if universities’ programs meet their needs and if the programs have been improved to their satisfaction. Criterion 4.7 requires universities to survey employers about the graduates’ knowledge and skills and if they meet employers’ expectation. Criterion 4.4 and Criterion 6.9 require universities to get feedback from their students for each subject about the teaching, assessment, library resources as well as involving the students before graduating to give feedback on all areas of universities. The accreditors’ reports (the review team’s report) revealed that universities failed those six criteria because the pool of stakeholders engaging in giving feedback was small or universities did not regularly conduct survey among the relevant stakeholders. Consequently, it could be said that a large number of accredited universities failed to involve relevant stakeholders in university governance and its quality assurance; and the change and improvement within universities may not satisfy or meet the needs of the labour market.

What Stakeholders Said at the Interviews Conducted by the Accreditors

Given the limited access to the accreditors’ reports (the review team reports), the paper analyses 34 reports (hereafter named cases) on what the employers, the alumni and student body, who were invited to meet with accreditors, said at the interviews conducted by accreditors during the accreditation.

As required by the accreditation principles issued by MOET, for each accreditation case, the number of specific stakeholders to be interviewed at the university campus includes 25-30 employers, 35 undergraduate alumni, 30 post-graduate alumni, 35 undergraduate students, 35 post-graduate (Master and PhD) students. Each interview as planned lasts normally about an hour, but in many cases when the interviewees were employers or alumni, the interview last longer to an hour and half. Given the limited interview time, not all interviewees has a chance to speak much, the accreditors gave every interviewee a survey questionnaire with open questions on university programs, teaching, research, students supports, lecturers’ supports, infrastructures and other extra activities.

In all 34 accreditation cases, besides what interviewees orally answered the accreditors, most of them (90%-95%) filled in the survey questionnaire with lots of useful information that helped the accreditors understand more about the university outputs and about what specific stakeholders want from universities and their graduates. Information collected from 34 accredited cases from 5 stakeholders in every case (undergraduate students, post-graduate students, undergraduate alumni, post-graduate alumni and employers) are highlighted below:
Briefly, post-graduate students have more positive feedback about the university teaching, research, students' supports and other activities than undergraduate students'. Employers have more positive feedback about university quality than alumni's. In general, they all shared the same suggestions to university, which is briefly listed under subtheme as follows:

**About Lecturers and Teaching**
- Allocation of more time for practice than for theory teaching; more teaching hours for foreign languages (English, Korean or Chinese)
- Making use of e-learning
- Using case study to inspire students' thoughts
- Instructing students on the use of statistic software
- Teaching/tutoring students on soft-skills
- Having more internship programs at labour market/potential employers for students so as to well prepare them for the labour market.

**About Research**
- Teaching research methodology for students and more guiding on how to conduct research; how to write a research proposal and a research report
- Involving students in doing research with their lecturers
- Creating more research opportunities for students
- Having more seminars on new research achievements for students

**About Students' Supports:**
- Giving more scholarships for students
- Designing more extra activities, including professional clubs, entertainments' clubs, sports ... for students
- Having more opportunities for alumni and undergraduates meetings and sharing experience

**About Infrastructure**
- Regularly enriching library with updated materials including e-materials (e-library)
- Providing free high speed Wi-Fi access within the campus
- Maintaining appropriate equipment for teaching and research

Besides the above suggestions, post-graduate alumni and employers also gave other proposals as follows:

**Post-Graduate Alumni:**
- Having lecturers be updated with new knowledge and skills in their field
- Having more cooperation with university partners for research linkage
- Actively exploring more research opportunities with industry and potential employers
- Identifying projects and research together with foreign partners
- Closed collaborating with employers, industry to enable more opportunities for students doing fieldwork, and research.

**Employers' Emphasis**
- Universities be actively collaborating, linking their teaching and research with employers to help solving market issues;
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- Having employers deliver seminars, lessons to provide students with practical knowledge and skills and more preparation before they enter the labour market
- Having lecturers work at industry, or hospitals, or factories and/or enterprises to update themselves with the needs and practical skills of the labour market
- Students be equipped with updated knowledge and skills to meet the needs of the labour market
- Students research work be focused on what the labour market needs and having more applied research
- Having research forum for students to share ideas with various stakeholders as well as more opportunities for them to meet with employers
- Embedding on students the love and passion for their profession/career

Conclusion

From the analysis of the accrediting results and the pool of interview data above, it can be concluded that stakeholders did provide accreditors and universities with very useful information that would help positively change the universities. The stakeholders including employers, alumni and students are all express themselves to willingly contribute what they could to help improve university outputs and outcomes to meet the expectation of the labour market. Employers, especially, are eager to build and develop sustainable relationship with universities through participating in university seminars and occasionally teaching, providing internship and fieldwork for students, identifying research issues for students and university and receiving lecturers to their workplace for practice etc. The question for universities, in general now, is if they would really concern and turn into practice for what the stakeholders say and if universities would actively engage stakeholders in university activities as what have been expected for by stakeholders.

Furthermore, it is recognised that education accreditation has greatly changed the Vietnam cultural context. In the past, stakeholders, especially employers, students and alumni are hardly found to give feedback to universities, nor did universities ask them for any feedback. Now stakeholders have changed and volunteered to not only giving feedback but also willingly participating in universities’ activities for the best of graduates and university research, because they realise their benefits in their participation.
Study on the attention level of Sri Lankan undergraduates during a 1-hour lecture

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ABSTRACT

It is important for the students to pay attention and concentrate during the lectures, because it enhances their competency to memorize the content for a longer period of time, while broadening the understanding on subject related concepts. It is natural for student attention levels to vary according to motivation, mood, subject areas, perceived relevance of the material, and other factors. A research was carried out to assess the attention level of the Sri Lankan undergraduates during a 1-Hour lecture through a questionnaire survey. It was found that the attention level of students during lectures increases with the level (maturity) of the students. A 30% drop of attention level could be expected among the students if no lecture break was given, and provision of a short break would improve the attention level of students and maintain it within the range of 70% and 85%.

BACKGROUND

As the statement, “No country can really develop unless its citizens are educated” given by Hon. Nelson Mandela, the citizens of a country should be educated in order to develop the country. Education plays a major role in life and the culture of a country. In this context, Sri Lanka has also taken an appreciable step to provide free education after getting the freedom. The constitution of Sri Lanka provides free education for Sri Lankan students as a fundamental right. The structure of education system in Sri Lanka is mainly divided into five, as primary education, junior secondary education, senior secondary education, collegiate education and tertiary education.

In Sri Lanka, there are 15 state universities, which provide tertiary education under the direct administration of the University Grants Commission that controls funding and operation of university system in the country. Apart from the state universities controlled by the University Grants Commission, there are several other universities administrated directly by several government ministries, degree awarding institutions and professional institutions presently running as higher educational institutes in Sri Lanka. As the undergraduate education in state universities is totally free, the university entrance remains extremely competitive. The students are selected to the universities on the basis of ranked order based on their average z-score values obtained at the G.C.E A/L Examination while respecting district base representation. High ranking students from any area of the country get the chance of having tertiary education.

The courses are taught to the students using various teaching methods. But, lecturing is used as the major teaching method in Sri Lankan universities. Lecturing is not simply a matter of standing in front of the students and sharing what the lecturer knows. It is vital to conduct the lectures in such a way that motivates, instigates and inspires the students for creative thinking. Therefore, lecturers should make sure that the students are properly concentrating and understanding what they teach.

Students coming from different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds often have different mind sets and concentration and attitudes of them maintained in learning may differ significantly. Some of the students do not attend the lectures regularly. Most of the students think that they do not need to concentrate on the subject areas during the lectures. They believe that it is possible to learn necessary sections of the subject area and prepare for the examination at the end of the semester. But, the lecturers’ responsibility is to prepare the students for achieving the learning outcomes of the courses, by utilizing effective learning methods and strategies, and assessment methods. Therefore, it is important for the students to pay attention and concentrate...
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during the lectures, because it enhances their competency to memorize the content for a longer period of time, while broadening the understanding on subject related concepts.

If the students do not pay attention during the lectures, they may involve themselves in other activities such as private conversations, dropping pens or pencils, excessive movement of body parts and passing notes to others. According to Lamba et al. (2014), duration of the lectures, methods of teaching, novelty or repetitive nature of the topic, surrounding environment, individual interest, health and emotional status have been identified as the major factors, which can affect the attention and concentration levels of students in the classroom.

Some psychologists claim that the attention span of a typical student may range from 10 to 15 minutes. It is natural for student attention levels to vary according to motivation, mood, subject areas, perceived relevance of the material, and other factors. Sousa, (1998) stated that the peak period for learning within the concept of class activity is the first 10 minutes and as such lecturers are encouraged to use the above time slot for teaching new concepts. Hence, lectures should be delivered within a short life span in order to maintain an acceptable attention level in students. It is equally important to note that, this not only deals with the attention span of students, but also with the overall teaching performance of the lecturer. For example, a lecturer who teaches 6 to 9 hours in a day may not perform excellently across all the lectures and the same remains applicable for the students, who may have to attend 6 to 9 hours of lectures in a day.

Giving breaks or intervals is an effective method to allow the level of attention to recover. Their efficiency can be enhanced by adding some kind of mentally stimulating activity. The simplest form of break is provision of few minutes for students just to relax and have a bit of quiet time or to chat with their classmates.

METHODOLOGY

To assess the students’ attention level during the lectures, a questionnaire survey was carried out amongst 120 undergraduate students of Physical Science stream in Sri Lanka. There were four batches and 30 students from each batch, responded the questionnaires. The designed questionnaire is shown in Table 01 and Table 02.

Table 01: The attention level of the students during a 1-hour lecture without having any break

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time (min)</th>
<th>Attention Level</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It is very interesting. Clearly understand.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0 – 10</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 – 20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 – 30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 – 40</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41 – 50</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51 – 60</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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Table 02: The attention level of the students during a 1-hour lecture, if a break is given at 30 minutes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time (min)</th>
<th>Attention Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>31 – 40</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41 – 50</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51 – 60</td>
<td>80%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>70%</td>
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<td></td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The temporal variation of the attention level of students at intervals of 10 minutes in a 1-hour lecture without any breaks is shown in Figures 1 - 6.

Figure 1: Students attention level in 0-10 minutes
Figure 2: Students attention level in 10-20 minutes

Figure 3: Students attention level in 20-30 minutes

Figure 4: Students attention level in 30-40 minutes

Figure 5: Students attention level in 40-50 minutes
Figure 6: Students attention level in 50-60 minutes

As depicted by the Figure 1 and 2, the attention level of students remains high in the first 0-20 minutes, whereby more than 80% of the students have felt interested in the lectures. After 20 minutes, the students' attention level has started to decrease and it's noteworthy that only 27% of the students have maintained their attention level at 'interested level' till the end of the lecture. It is identified that provision of a short break after first 30 minutes, would be beneficial to maintain a higher attention level of students.

Temporal dynamics in the attention levels of the students during 1-hour lectures without any breaks is shown in Figure 7.

Figure 7: Attention level of the students during a 1-hour lecture

The attention level of the first year students decreases by 30% between 15 minutes and 45 minutes. It approximately dropped up to 30% at the end of the lectures (60 minutes).

A notable decrement of 30% in the second year students’ attention level was observed between 15 and 45 minutes. It dropped down to nearly 40% at the end of the lectures.

It was found that the third year students’ attention level decreased by 25% between 15 and 45 minutes, which eventually dropped down to nearly 55% at the end of the lecture. There was a decrement of 20% in the fourth year students’ attention level between 15 - 45 minutes, while the least attention level was reported as 60% at the end of the lectures.
It was evident that the attention level of students during lectures increased with the level (maturity) of the students (Figure 7). Generally, the students attempt to understand the basic theories of a subject in their first year, while majority of them face difficulties in English language. Most of the students study up to Advanced Level in their native languages. When they enter the universities for their tertiary education, they face difficulties in conducting their studies in the English medium as mandated by the university regulations. Especially, the students who enter the universities from rural areas have poor communication skills in terms of English, which could be the main reason for their poor attention level during the lectures in the first year. In the proceeding years, students develop their knowledge and skills on English, and improve their analytical and design skills, especially in their third year allowing them to understand and critically analyze the contents delivered through lectures. In fourth year level, the students improve their creativity and begin to link the subject content with the practical applications, which retains more attention on the subject.

Overall, the attention level of the students during a 1-hour lecture is shown in Figure 8.

![Figure 8: Attention level of all students during a 1-hour lectures](image)

It was evident that a 30% drop of attention level could be expected among the students if no lecture break was given, while the least attention level of 45% was reported at the end of the lecture. On the other hand, Figure 8 shows that provision of a short break would improve the attention level of students and maintain it within the range of 70% and 85%.

In addition to provision of short lecture breaks, a variety of other tools could be used to improve the attention level of students in lectures. The students can be divided into several groups to solve a problem or raise a question during the lectures. Lectures can be started with an interesting story or a personal anecdote. The lecturer can use real-life examples that are relevant to the subject field and relate those to students' experiences. An open-ended question can be asked to the students to promote brainstorming. Ideas of students can be written on the board and students can be allowed to provide the major conclusions. It is also advisable for the junior lecturers to get some more ideas from well-experienced senior academic staff members in order to improve the attention level of the students during the lectures.

REFERENCES


THEME 3. ENSURING AND PROMOTING TRUST IN A GLOBALIZED CONTEXT

Adopt, adapt and apply a US-based research-supported quality assurance process to promote trust and improve quality for online and blended learning

Yaping Gao, Senior Academic Director, Quality Matters, USA

ABSTRACT

Can a US-based research-supported approach to quality assurance in online and blended learning, adopted by over 1100 academic institutions and organizations for over a decade, be adapted to tertiary educational environments outside of USA? What needs to be taken into consideration, and what adjustments and adaptations are needed in order for the quality standards and process to be applicable to culturally different institutions and schools to promote trust and ensure academic integrity? More importantly, will faculty and teachers welcome and adopt the process to improve their teaching and learning practices?

Based on their experience working with institutions and organizations in international communities, the presenter will share strategies and best practices to promote trust and develop partnerships, with the goal to contribute to the establishment of quality assurance processes for online and blended learning, as well as some examples of adapted versions of quality standards by non-English speaking communities.

INTRODUCTION

Students’ achievement of stated learning outcomes in online, blended, or elearning courses and programs in all tertiary educational environments requires more than motivation and hard work on the student’s part. It needs resources and support from all levels including infrastructure, faculty engagement, and peer interaction etc., the foundation of which is pedagogically sound course design based on standards and universal design principles that facilitate student learning with easy navigation, measurable learning outcomes, effective assessment practices, rich content and resources, active engagement, and just-in-time student support.

The presenter will introduce a research-supported approach to quality assurance and continuous improvement for online and blended learning at course, program and institutional levels to promote trust and ensure academic integrity. This process can be adapted to local cultures, traditions, and pedagogies of any international tertiary educational environment, and implemented accordingly to achieve institutional or organizational goals not only for higher education, publishing industry, but also continuing and professional education as well as corporate elearning.

The primary components of the research-supported quality assurance process includes: 1) Five sets of research-supported standards (or rubrics) to guide course design, 2) Professional development offerings and tracks for administrators, faculty and staff, 3) A peer-review process for course and program reviews resulting in constructive recommendations for continuous improvement, certification of quality and national/international recognition that promote trust, 4) Implementation of a quality assurance process to ensure academic integrity as a pathway on a continuum to program excellence, achievement of institutional goals, and facilitation of accreditation process.
RESEARCH – SUPPORTED QUALITY STANDARDS (RUBRICS)

Although each of the 5 sets of standards is different due to the uniqueness of the each educational sector, they all follow the same 8 categories of general standards with the same focus on helping students achieve the stated learning outcomes in the course. The general standards cover course overview and introduction, learning objectives or competencies, assessments, instructional materials, learning activities and learner interaction, technology, student support, accessibility and universal design.

For the past 15 years, these standards have been adopted and adapted by over 1100 institutions and organizations worldwide to meet their own unique needs not only for designing, developing, reviewing, delivering online and blended courses, but also for improving and redesigning face-to-face traditional classroom teaching with the goal to ensure academic integrity. All 5 rubrics undergo a thorough review periodically and a new edition is released every three or four years by incorporating current research findings, best practices from the field as well as feedback from the community adopting and adapting these standards.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

To support the adoption and implementation of the research-supported quality assurance process for continuous improvement in online and blended learning, different tracks and pathways of professional development have been designed and offered to faculty, administrators and instructional design support staff to meet their individual, departmental, institutional or organization goals.

Over the past decade, more than 70,000 online education professionals have received relevant training and over 5,000 have become certified peer and master reviewers from institutions across the USA and abroad and the trend is only growing stronger.

COURSE REVIEW AND CERTIFICATION

A vigorous peer-review process facilitates the quality assurance at the course level. The review team composed of three certified peer reviewers with at least one subject matter expert, one reviewer external to the institution, and one certified master reviewer who also serves as the review chair. All reviewers are experienced online instructors who have successfully completed a serial of professional development workshops to demonstrate their competencies to serve as peer reviewers.

Courses that achieve a high enough numerical score (85% of the total possible points) and satisfy all the essential standards are regarded as having met quality standards and are immediately issued a certification seal that may be displayed in association with the course. Over the period of more than 10 years, more than 7000 online and blended have been officially reviewed and certified. Courses with this certification mark are trusted and recognized nationally in USA as well as internationally as of high quality in course design.

PROGRAM REVIEW & CERTIFICATION

Built upon the experience, feedback and requests from the general educational community, the research-supported, adaptable, and proven quality assurance process at course level has now been expanded to online programs with the same vigorous peer-review process to ensure the quality at programmatic level. The program certification process consists of four individual certifications that institutions may seek: 1) online program design, 2) online teaching support, 3) online learner support, and more importantly 4) online learner success.

With detailed annotated program certification criteria as guidelines, institutions or programs can choose to pursue any of the above 4 certifications, any combination of them, or 4 all certifications in any order. If an institution achieves any of the 4 certification, they will receive a unique certification seal to display and showcase the quality assurance in their programs. If an institution receives all 4 certifications within a defined timeframe (several years), they will be designated as having “Exemplary Online Programs”.

Adopt, Adapt and Apply a US-Based Research-Supported Quality Assurance Process to Promote Trust and Improve Quality for Online and Blended Learning

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CONTINUUM OF EXCELLENCE FOR INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE AND ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

The presenter will solicit audience for examples and challenges in promoting trust and ensuring quality in design and delivery of online and blended learning, and provide recommendations from a broad and varied community of educators committed to helping students succeed and achieving their program and institutional goals. The presenter will also introduce a quality assurance framework that participants can relate to describe the stage of their current practices along a continuum of excellence in quality assurance.

Based on their experience working with institutions and organizations in international communities, the presenter will share strategies and best practices to promote trust and develop partnerships with the goal to contribute to the establishment of quality assurance processes for online and blended learning. Finally, examples of US-based quality standards and adapted versions by non-English speaking communities will be shared with participants.
Inclusion of international reviewers in institutional reviews to promote trust in external quality assurance

Deepthi C. Bandara 1) and Jianxin Zhang 2)

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ABSTRACT

The Quality Assurance Council (QAC) of the University Grants Commission in Sri Lanka took a creative initiative in their External Quality Assurance mechanism when they decided to include an international reviewer to the reviewer panel of Institutional Reviews, hitherto conducted by a panel comprising totally of local reviewers. The advantages of this move are that the reviews become more transparent and objective offering potential for enhancing the quality of higher education to acceptable international standards. While it provides opportunities for the local reviewers and reviewed Institute to learn from the international reviewers, the latter would be able to practice the fundamentals of QA in new settings which would be a challenge. The additional cost for this initiative could be justified by the benefits which are higher, while preserving the contextual basis of the review. QAC would continue to practice this in future Institutional Reviews also.

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW (IR) IN SRI LANKA

BACKGROUND OF QA SYSTEM IN SRI LANKA:

The QA system operational for the Sri Lankan State Universities under the aegis of the Quality Assurance Council (QAC) of the University Grants Commission (UGC) is with an External Quality Assurance (EQA) system and the Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) system in each University that works in tandem as shown in the figure below.

![Diagram of Internal and External Quality Assurance](image-url)
SUMMARY OF THE FIRST CYCLE OF IR

The Institutional reviews (IR) was initiated in 2006 and the first cycle was completed with reviewer panels comprising totally of local reviewers. There was a guideline manual for the reviewers which evaluated Universities on 8 criteria.

NEW INITIATIVE IN SECOND CYCLE: INCLUSIONS OF INTERNATIONAL REVIEWERS

It is imperative that tertiary education provision and its quality assurance is an essential commodity to be ensured by any country that is aspiring to be in the global arena of higher education.

The UGC- the apex body in providing higher education and maintaining standards through its QAC, created a new dimension to the external quality assurance mechanism in its second cycle of IRs of Universities by the inclusion of an international reviewer to each reviewer panel. The primary objective of this initiative was to promote trust through transparency, enhance credibility and scope of the review and be accountable to all stakeholders in higher education.

While all local reviewers were professors and senior professors in the State University system and had the required credentials and experience to serve in the review panel, the QAC strongly believed that the inclusion of an international reviewer would heighten the trust of stakeholders in the IR which is conducted in a 6-year cycle.

Thus in 2018, two international reviewers successfully participated in 2 review panels of the IR of two of the State Universities together with the local reviewers in the panels.

All reviewers (local and international) were provided with a self-evaluation report submitted by the University to be reviewed written by them according to specific guidelines. All reviewers used the “Manual for Institutional Review of Universities and Higher Education Institutes in Sri Lanka” and submitted an individual desk evaluation report on a template provided by the QAC for this purpose before proceeding to the respective sites. The evaluation was on 10 criteria as specified by the review manual (shown below). The site evaluation was conducted under the guidance of the review panel chairman where the self-evaluation report submitted by the University on which the desk evaluation was done was validated by observing evidence provided by the University. The total site visit lasted six days.
ADVANTAGE OF INCLUSION OF INTERNATIONAL REVIEWERS

1. Since Sri Lanka being a small island nation where the academics serving as reviewers are known to each other well, this initiative was hoped to eliminate even the smallest bias in judgments, and build sustainable stakeholder relationships while developing partnerships and working together in the important endeavor of providing higher education of acceptable international quality to students of diverse backgrounds and varied expectations.

2. Additionally, it was hoped that the expertise and experience of the international reviewers would assist to conduct the review more objectively since they would be reviewing a system which was less known to them but one where they were yet able to practice the fundamental principles of quality assurance.

3. It was also expected that the two reviewers from China and Russia could share their experiences as reviewers from countries where the QA mechanism has advanced to a stage higher than in Sri Lanka.

4. It provided the QAC, local reviewers and reviewed University to gain insight into their views/comments on the types of documents that were expected to be shown – their appropriateness, and potential documents that could be provided for each criterion and the standards therein.

5. The review schedule included meetings with all potential stakeholders of the University and the visiting of University facilities which enabled it to serve as a higher education provider for the State. The international reviewer was able to provide feedback on the adequacy of manner in which the meetings were conducted –in order to obtain the “real picture” of the situation of the myriad of aspects that contribute to a total educational experience of students.

6. The observation of facilities for teaching/learning/assessment also gave them opportunity to express their view on possible interventions that could be made to “modernize” learner and outcome based education with new technology.

7. It would provide the QAC, local reviewers and the reviewed University the opportunity to gain valuable insight regarding QA mechanisms in other countries. Hopefully it provided this opportunity to the administrative hierarchy, academics, support staff, alumni, industry partners and most importantly to students – the primary beneficiaries of QA reviews.

8. It would also have provided exchange of knowledge regarding international benchmarks, qualification frameworks and codes of practices and constructive mechanisms for the function of internal quality assurance units of Universities.

9. Effective communication of the review team members, eventful site-visit program, an impressive list of documents provided by the University and strong internal quality system which is incorporated via IQAUs and IQACs at each faculty of the University were worthwhile attributes noted by the international reviewers which allowed to carry out a profound review and formulate a list of recommendations that will be helpful for the further enhancement of the University and strengthen its reputation locally and abroad.

CHALLENGES OF INTERNATIONAL REVIEWERS

1. Stakeholder engagement like many other aspects of education and quality assurance is context and culture specific. Hence extreme care had to be exercised in the selection of international reviewers who had to be experts in evaluation of Universities/Institutes, appreciated the diversity of students and staff and respected the values and norms of the culture and country at large.

2. Their profile had to be made available to the university to be reviewed in order to maintain transparency and request their acceptance.

3. The cost of having institutional reviewers is significant and has to be justifiable.

From a survey conducted with local reviewers, international reviewers and the reviewed Universities of this review cycle, the following summary was obtained.
BENEFICIAL ASPECTS OF INCLUSION OF INTERNATIONAL REVIEWERS

University education must have universal standards. If the Institutional review (IR) committee comprises only local members no comparison could be done with other universities in the world.

Foreign members invited for the IR review panels are conversant with quality assurance processes of their own country. The feedback for the improvement of quality assurance process itself and best practices are also important for the improvement of the quality.

Future trends in higher education are dynamic and recommendations for new directions for development of programs or orientation of existing programs are important to improve competitiveness of our programs. Therefore, external feedback from foreign expertise is gainful.

Experienced international reviewers help to build the confidence in the evaluation team by the university been evaluated. They lack any personal prejudice and hence they are most welcome by the University being reviewed.

It also blends the international level quality expectation in to local reviews and improves the quality of local reviewers by sharing international expectations with respect to local standards.

Since the international reviewers do not know the local context adequately they would be able to provide input in comparison with good universities overseas.

The views of the visitor may be important to have in a reviewer training also. Hearing views from a couple of international expert reviewers would be useful.

If our standards are good, this will be a good medium of propaganda.

ASPECTS OF CONCERN TO BE CONSIDERED IN FUTURE

When the team comprises 5 local to 1 international the opinions of the visitor is not well heard, especially since a majority of the team experienced persons.

The arrival of the international reviewers very close to the site visit and driven straight to the University under review, gives them minimal time and inadequate information to understand the local context.

There should be discussions between local IR panel and the foreign expert before commencing the site visit process during the desk review time. Otherwise, it makes them depend on what the other reviewers inform them and hence guided by them rather than they be able to guide the locals in situations where their expertise would be important.

The persons should be well aware of the system operative in Sri Lanka and possess adequate experience in relation to international reviews.

However, it is very important to select and appoint experienced and flexible reviewers, who would not try to impose or dominate.

SOLUTIONS AND WAY FORWARD

The QAC would continue to include international reviewers in future IRs too considering the positive responses received from local reviewers and reviewed Universities.

QAC should maintain a database of such reviewers who are willing to and work in Sri Lanka at a reasonable honorarium.

CONCLUSION

In an era where student mobility in higher education is ever increasing and recognition of qualifications and benchmarks have to go global, the QAC sincerely believe that this initiative marked an important milestone in
QA of higher education in Sri Lanka and that it would also be an incentive to other nations who have yet not embarked on internationalizing their external review process so that trust could be ensured and promoted in a globalized context.
INTRODUCTION
The Ontario College Quality Assurance Service (OCQAS) is responsible for stewarding and supporting institutional quality assurance mechanisms for the twenty-four public colleges in the province of Ontario, Canada. We are an organization that works at arms-length from the colleges and the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities.

This presentation showcases four discrete strategies we have implemented to engage distinctive stakeholder groups in performance development activities, which have increased accountability and transparency of our quality assurance processes, indirectly and separately. We will discuss how this set of strategies has heightened trust in the results of the quality assurance processes and our credibility within the system. These strategies have opened the channels of communication with stakeholders and provided valuable feedback across the QA processes. Hence, we have used them to strengthen our processes and stakeholder engagement, moving forward.

STRATEGY #1: SELF-STUDY AUDITOR TRAINING
For the last four years, OCQAS has implemented a convergent participation evaluation model (Nesbit, Belfer, & Vargo, 2002) for auditor training. This approached serves two complimentary purposes:

a) an effective method to support evaluators in developing their knowledge and understanding of the standards/criteria used during an audit, and

b) a process to increase consistency across raters and panels.

This model consists of a two-stage process that requires auditors to converge toward similar descriptions and institutional quality ratings. It also follows a structure, different from other models, which respects individual accountability while ensuring positive interdependence of a panel of evaluators. At the centre of the training model is the owner of the standards/criteria, who ensures that the interpretations are accurate. This approach to training has increased consistency in the assessment of the standards and their accompanying requirements, and provided increased levels of preparation and team building for the audit panel members prior to the QA audit site visit. In turn, OCQAS has strengthened the reliability and validity of the expert-reviewed quality audits results by reducing the subjective biases of the evaluators.
STRATEGY #2: OBSERVATIONS OF AUDIT PANEL WORK
Recently, the OCQAS has encouraged its stakeholders to observe all aspects of the College Quality Assurance Audit Process (CQAAP). This allows the stakeholder to see first-hand the workings of an audit panel. From the beginning of the process – self-study auditor training, preparation for the site-visit, site-visit interviews, all the way to conversations between members during the writing of the report. In the last two years we have had observers from the Ministry, from the colleges, OCQAS Management Board members and potential auditors participating in this process. Observers have found the exercise invaluable to their understanding of the CQAAP, in their respective capacities. The common reflection from observers is that the observations contributes to increased confidence in the work that they have to do for our process, and the work that we do in QA.

STRATEGY #3: PROCESS REVIEW
The OCQAS has been conducting a review of all aspects of the CQAAP. The purpose of this review is to gain insight on the content, process and performance of the QA audits. As part of the review cycle both quantitative and qualitative data are collected through surveys, to gather information on the experiences of both participating colleges, and audit team members. The results of the surveys provide evidence and a framework to discuss process improvements with stakeholders. Themes developed from these data have been used to probe and design solutions through stakeholder consultations. This process supported the development of the proposed improvements to the CQAAP standards and processes. In the spirit of continuous improvements, the revisions to the process will be phased into the next round of institutional quality audits. The openness and data-driven process review exercise has increased confidence and trust in the QA audit process.

STRATEGY #4: SECONDMENTS
Over the last three years, the OCQAS has seconded one person from the College system to work as a member of the organization for one day a week. The individual participates in all the activities of the office by providing training and support to their peers across the 24 Ontario colleges. Secondments are well known for providing career development opportunities to the people that come in by helping them develop certain skills, which will benefit their current position. These opportunities also benefit the QA system.

For OCQAS, secondments have been incredibly useful. Since the seconded individuals are members of the colleges we provide services for, the secondment provides another channel of direct input from stakeholders on the things that work are and are not working. This supports the OCQAS intention to continuously improve. College staff on secondment also recognize that they become more aware and in tune with the role of the OCQAS through interactions with the Ministry and provincial colleagues. This results of them having a deeper understanding of the role of the agency, and supportive of the decisions that are made. Across the system, secondments demonstrate that the OCQAS is working with the colleges, which encourages collaborative spirit toward constructive engagement in the quality assurance process.

SUMMARY
The combine value of these strategies, has allowed us to engage all our stakeholders in activities that are relevant in their potential, future or current work with OCQAS by making the workings of our unit visible and open. This has increased our credibility, but also, it has strengthened our processes. As more people learn about what we do, we receive more input and feedback, and in turn we use that to enhance our processes.

These four processes have generated more involvement of stakeholders in the QA work that we do. This involvement requires the implicit aspects of our processes to be more explicit to others. As the accountability and transparency of our unit increases so does our credibility and effectiveness.
REFERENCES

Implementing quality assurance in universities/HEIs through ensuring and promoting stakeholders' trust

1) Muhammad Aslam Bhutto, 2) Asif A. Shaikh, 1) Muhammad Wasif and 1) Riaz Uddin,
1) Deputy Director, Quality Enhancement Cell (QEC)
2) Director, QEC, NED University of Engineering & Technology, Karachi-Pakistan

ABSTRACT

This paper outlines an exercise carried out for implementing quality assurance (QA) practices in the NED University of Engineering and Technology, Karachi-Pakistan through stakeholders' involvement finally resulting in ensuring and promoting their trust. The internal quality auditing has been used as an effective tool for the quality management, control and assurance of academic and non-academic functions performed by various departments of the university. Seven teams of trained auditors conducted the audit whereas the auditees were Deans of faculties and Chairs/Heads of departments. The improvements, required corrections and non-conformities found out by the auditors were first discussed with and agreed by the auditees. Thereafter, the corrective and mitigation actions were decided and implemented by the auditees and were verified by the auditors. The exercise provided an excellent platform not only for implementing the QA practices but also ensured and promoted the trust of auditees through their involvement throughout the exercise.

KEYWORDS: Quality assurance, higher education, ensuing and promoting trust, quality auditing, corrective and mitigation actions

INTRODUCTION

One of the important prerequisite to understand the quality assurance is to define and under ‘Quality’. It has always remained a challenge for researchers as how to define quality in general and in higher education in particular because a number of definitions and interpretations exist in this regard. The definitions and interpretations in the field of higher education depend upon the views of four major groups of stakeholders that include (i) funding bodies and the community, taxpayers as providers; (ii) students as users of products; (iii) employers as users of outputs; and (iv) academics and administrators as employees of the sector. Students associate quality with the quality of the institution, programs and courses. Similarly, the employers' focus for quality is the final product in terms of qualified employees. It would therefore be sensible to include the perceptions and interpretations of all stakeholders to understand the quality in higher education (Bobby, 2014; Kemenade et al, Schindler et al, 2015).

As a result of carrying out detailed review of available literature, Schindler et al (2015) have concluded that there are two strategies for defining the quality in higher education. The first strategy is to classify the quality to become purposeful, exceptional, transformative and accountable. The second one is identification through specific indicators as outputs of the different institutional processes and include students’ performance, students’ support, instructional and administrative. However, the customer satisfaction and feedback, leadership skills at all levels, engagement and trust building of people, process-based approach and are the major principles to define and assure the quality (International Organization for Standardization –ISO, 2015).

The quality management, control and assurance in the higher education sector of Pakistan started attracting the attention of the Higher Education Commission (HEC) as well as universities and higher education institutions (HEIs) by the start of this century. NED University of Engineering and Technology, Karachi, being one of the oldest institutions for teaching and training engineering graduates, started focusing the quality and became the first in Pakistan to get certification from the International Organization for Standardization for conforming to the ISO 9001:2001 Standards. The quality concept in the higher education sector at the national level was seriously
Quality Assurance, Qualifications and Recognition: Fostering Trust in a Globalised World

Theme 3. Ensuring and promoting trust in a globalized context

Implementing Quality Assurance in Universities/HEIs through Ensuring and Promoting Stakeholders’ Trust

taken into the consideration in 2005 when the HEC-Pakistan established its Quality Assurance Agency (QAA). The QAA introduced and implemented quality assurance mechanisms through the multi-targeted steps such as internal self-assessment of academic programs, external program reviews, institutional performance evaluation (IPE), guidelines and requirements to start new master’s and PhD programs in the universities/HEIs (Batool & Qureshi, 2005).

There are a number of performance models available to implement quality practices in the universities/HEIs. In this regard, Danis et al (2008) has discussed the assessment of quality, performance and credulity issues and presented the five models that include (i) accreditation of programs, (ii) quality auditing, (iii) funding and budgeting performance, (iv) performance reporting and (v) feedback surveys. Several studies have also been carried out to identify the key issues and problems hindering the quality improvement in the education system in Pakistan. Tufail and Sarosh (2006 & 2008) studied the concepts, requirements and matters related prescribed by the International Standards Organization (ISO). They also investigated issues and challenges the universities/HEIs would face in the development and implementation an ISO-based Quality Management System (QMS). They also suggested the measures as to how develop as well as implement and improve the ISO-based QMS in NED University of Engineering and Technology with support of top management and involvement of people across-the-board.

Bhutto et al (2017) investigated to identify key weaknesses and non-conformities of the undergraduate programs of the universities/HEIs with the help root-cause analyses. The self-assessment mechanism prescribed by the HEC's Quality assurance Agency (QAA) was used as the basic tool to analyze and eliminate the weakness of different academic program. The objectives were to (i) analyze the key weaknesses and non-conformities in the programs, (ii) suggest and implement the corrective and mitigating actions and (iii) finally improve the program quality. Since the self-assessment is a program review of the program that provides one-sided information focused on faculty and program administrators, so Bhutto et al (2017) in another study used students’ feedback to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of an academic program with involvement of students without disclosing their identification. Questions about the attributes like the course contents, teaching quality and learning resources were included in the feedbacks which were asked, replied, analyzed and results compiled through an online system. The results showed ‘teaching quality’ as the highest ranking attribute while the ‘course contents’ as the weakest area for attention with sub-areas of lack of proper practical support and not up-to-mark effective lab demonstrations.

METHODOLOGY

PRESENT STUDY

NED University of Engineering and Technology, Karachi has been certified by the Lloyd’s Register Quality Assurance (LRQA) for conforming to requirements of the ISO 9001:2015 Standards for a Quality Management System (QMS). The university has developed a Quality System Procedure (QSP) for Internal Quality Auditing (IQA) as clause 5.2 of the standards (NED/QSP 12/05, 2017). In the present study, the quality auditing system has been used to implement, improve and evaluate the quality assurance practices and procedures in the university through involvement of stakeholders i.e. auditees who are Deans of faculties and Chairs/Heads of departments. The results of 32nd IQA conducted in April 2018 have been used as the basis for initiating and implementing the corrective and mitigation actions and the outcomes of these actions are cross-checked with the results of the 33rd IQA held subsequently in October 2018 in order to see the audit effectiveness in terms of improvements.

IQA PROCEDURE

The Internal Quality Auditing (IQA) procedure is defined in the relevant QSP (NED/QSP 12/05, 2017). It is a university-wide activity carried out twice a year and is applicable to all functions of academic and non-academic departments related to the QMS. The Quality Enhancement Cell (QEC) is responsible for planning, scheduling, execution and reporting on quality audit. The audit is carried out by teams of the trained internal auditors based on their experience and professional skills. The auditors generally faculty members and officers academic and non-academic departments and have undergone ISO certified trainings. In order to ensure transparency and
fairness as well as to avoid the conflict of interest, the auditors are not assigned to audit departments they belong to.

The IQA activity starts with the audit plan mentioning the audit teams, details of audits, days and timings of the audit. The plan is prepared by the QEC, approved by the University leadership and is shared with the auditees at least one week prior to the proposed audit. The plan for 32nd IQA conducted on 24th and 25th April 2018 is shown in Table 1. The audit teams are also provided with the already prepared Audit Check Lists that contain major areas/functions to be audited. The teams go through the records and pay physical visits to the assigned departments with the auditees and find out the non-conformities which are then discussed with and agreed by the auditees before recorded on the Internal Audit Observation Sheets. The discussion with and agreement of the auditees is intended to achieve their trust as well as assistance in deciding, initiating and implementing necessary actions also recorded on the Corrective and Mitigation Action Requests (CMARs). The decided actions are followed-up by the QEC and are closed after verification.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>S#</th>
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<th>Department to be audited</th>
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<tr>
<td>Team 01: Dr. Asif Ahmed Shaikh, Dr. Faraz Akbar, Ms. Saima Kashif (24/04/2018)</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>Examinations Department</td>
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<td>8</td>
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<td>Team 05: Dr. Riaz Uddin, Mr. M. Nasir, Syed Imran Ali (25/04/2018)</td>
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<td>28</td>
<td>Biomedical Engineering</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Directorate of Industrial Liaison</td>
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RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS
Details of the audit observations with definitions and severity score of the 32nd and 33rd IQAs are given in Table 2. One specimen of the CMAR for an action taken in 32nd IQA is placed in Figure 1. Graphical comparisons of the results of 32nd and 33rd IQAs are also shown in Figure 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observation/ Non-Conformity</th>
<th>32nd IQA-April 2018</th>
<th>33rd IQA-October 2018</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scope for Improvement</td>
<td>SFI 00</td>
<td>13 00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Requires Correction</td>
<td>RC 01</td>
<td>15 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minor Non-Conformity</td>
<td>Minor NC 02</td>
<td>02 04</td>
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<tr>
<td>Major Non-Conformity</td>
<td>Major NC 04</td>
<td>00 00</td>
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</tbody>
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|                        | All followed & closed | Total = 19 | All being followed | Total = 11 |

Table 2 Audit Observations with Definitions and Severity Score of 32nd and 33rd IQAs
During the course of 32nd and 33rd IQAs and the results mentioned above, the following important points were particularly observed.

Implementing Quality Assurance in Universities/HEIs through Ensuring and Promoting Stakeholders’ Trust
1. All the observations and non-conformities of the 32nd Internal Quality Audit (IQA) stand closed after carrying out and verifying the required corrective and mitigation actions before conduct of the 33rd IQA in October 2018.

2. The involvement of stakeholders i.e. auditees during the whole audit process and their close coordination with the QEC and auditors not only helped in developing, promoting and ensuring their trust, but also in deciding, initiating and implementing necessary actions over the audit observations and non-conformities.

3. The number of non-conformities (i.e. RCs and Major & Minor NCs) as well as the severity scores in the 33rd IQA has reduced as compared to those of the 32nd IQA.

4. The trust of auditees developed and promoted during course of the 32nd IQA appeared to be a major source of the improvements in the QA practices and can particularly be assessed from the results of the 33rd IQA.

5. No case of the conflict of interest was observed after following the policy of not including the audit team members in the audit of their own academic and non-academic departments; this also helped in ensuring trust of the stakeholders i.e. auditees in the audit exercise.

CONCLUSIONS

The present study describes the details and results of an audit exercise carried out in NED University of Engineering and Technology, Karachi-Pakistan by using the quality auditing system as effective tool to implement and improve the QA practices. The audit exercise has been carried out with involvement of stakeholders i.e. auditees through an Internal Quality Auditing (IQA) mentioned in their Quality System Procedure (QSP). The results of 32nd IQA conducted in April 2018 have been used as the basis for initiating and implementing the corrective and mitigation actions. The effectiveness of these actions in terms of improvements is verified through the results of the 33rd IQA held subsequently in October 2018. The involvement of stakeholders i.e. auditees during the whole audit process and their close coordination with the QEC and auditors helped in developing and promoting their trust. Such involvement also helped in deciding, initiating and implementing the corrective and mitigation actions as well as avoiding the incidents of the conflict of interest finally resulting in achieving and ensuring the stakeholders’ trust in the quality assurance (QA) exercise.

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Building a culture of trust in external quality assurance of higher education in Oman

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ABSTRACT

Trust in the field of higher education quality assurance is not a given: like any other kind of trust, it has to be earned – or, as some commentators claim, “granted”. Given the universal climate of pessimism regarding institutional trust, there are many obstacles to overcome in encouraging all stakeholders to embrace not just systems of quality assurance in higher education, but also to have faith in the agencies designated to implement them. This paper explores some of those challenges and demonstrates the extent to which the obstacles can be overcome through two chief mechanisms, namely wide consultation and extensive benchmarking. The context of developing an external quality assurance system for higher education, through the establishment of institutional standards in Oman, is used as a case study to show that trust is granted if a shared Vision is communicated, a sound Mission is articulated, and systems are derived through wide stakeholder participation and international benchmarking.

Introduction

Education, ladies and gentlemen, should not be governed according to the market logic of profitability and courtesy.¹

It is easy to understand why there is a universal pessimism with regard to institutional trust, given the context of a postmodern, globalised world in which almost all activities are treated as potential commodities that have a commercial value. The general mistrust in institutions that were considered hitherto as above suspicion has set up obstacles for public agencies tasked with carrying out their duties. The attitude to agencies responsible for quality assurance in higher education is a case in point. In today’s world it is not enough, for example, to carry out accreditation activities, such as standards assessment. An agency must first convince stakeholders not only that the standards it applies are bone fide and of value, and that the systems it implements are fit for purpose, but it must also prove that the agency itself is a model of probity whose activities are appropriately motivated. There is a need to prove, in other words, that a desire for quality enhancement, not “profitability and courtesy”, is the driving force of the systems in place.

This is not a nostalgic lament for the era of inscrutable institutional decision-making. On the contrary, modern institutions should welcome being held to higher levels of accountability by the public they serve. It is simply a recognition that part of developing systems of quality assurance in higher education in a modern context is anticipating inherent public mistrust and finding ways of overcoming it. This paper contends that when quality assurance agencies work closely with stakeholders, the outcome is generally a system that is better trusted and thereby better able to deliver on the promise of quality enhancement. The paper refers specifically to the context of Oman, examining the relationship between the Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (OAAA) and the stakeholders of the higher education sector that it serves.

In international terms, the higher education sector in Oman is relatively young: for example, Sultan Qaboos University, the only public university, was established less than thirty-five years ago in 1986. Today there is a wide diversity among the more than 50 public and private higher education institutions operating in Oman. Part of the OAAA Mission is to provide reliable information to the public and other stakeholders on the quality of

¹ Anonymous, Translated from Letter to the Editor in Al Raya Newspaper, Oman, 9 June 2018.
higher education in Oman through the implementation of a transparent and rigorous system of institutional and programme accreditation. For information to be deemed reliable, however, it needs to be seen to be trustworthy.

In the Sultanate of Oman, a fully consultative approach has been adopted since 2006 – the point at which OAAA (formerly the Oman Accreditation Council) came into being. A fully independent agency since 2010 charged with “guiding and supporting the Omani higher education sector to meet international standards,” the OAAA is approaching the end of 12 years of developing and implementing a two-stage institutional accreditation process. This paper looks at the lessons learnt during this period of intense system design and development in terms of each of three areas in which the OAAA has endeavoured to build trust: in the body responsible for establishing the external quality assurance (EQA) system; in the system and processes themselves, and in the implementers of those processes.

As OAAA is about to embark upon programme accreditation, an appropriate moment is afforded to reflect on the ways in which this authority set about winning and maintaining public trust, not just in OAAA as an entity but also in the system and methods of implementation of higher education quality assurance in Oman. In so doing, it is hoped that such reflections will guide in the building of similar sector-wide ownership of programme accreditation. In the context of this paper, it is also hoped that the process of self-reflection will reveal insights as to how each of the various trust-building challenges has been overcome for the benefit of other agencies embarking on the development of quality assurance systems in a similar context.

Towards a definition

Trust: the firm belief in the reliability, truth, or ability of someone or something.3

For quality assurance systems to be effectively embedded in common practice in the higher education sector, trust needs first to be built in the organisation that is charged with developing and implementing those systems. To understand the nature of the relationship between sector and agency, it is instructive to look to the large body of organisational theory that addresses the issue of trust in general, and trust within the context of higher education in particular. The literature expands upon the commonly understood definition of trust as embracing the basic tenets of reliability, truth and competence. Discussions around the concept of institutional trust have been lively for over two decades with Lane (1998) identifying that, among all the diverging nuances surrounding the term, trust can be summarised as sharing three main principles. These principles are paraphrased usefully by Stensaker and Maassen (2015):

First, there is a degree of interdependence between the trustor and the trustee. Second, trust is a way to deal with risk and uncertainty in exchange relationships. Third, there is the assumption that the vulnerability caused by taking a risk in trusting another actor will not be taken advantage of. 4

Writing in relation to the public good, Tierney (2006) elaborates Lane’s definition to produce a nine-frame “grammar of trust”. These are worth summarising here as they translate easily, as Lesley and Currie (2011) helpfully show in their global case studies, into a higher education context.5

References


3 https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/trust


5 Lesley Vidovich and Jan Currie (2011) “Governance and trust in higher education”, Studies in Higher Education, 36:1, 43-56, DOI: 10.1080/03075070903469580, This paper deliberately adopts a similar theoretical strategy here, in relation to Tiemey’s work, as a form of theoretical benchmarking.
Trust as defined by Tierney arises out of “repeated interaction”. It is a “dynamic process”, by which is meant that expectations are defined, and an “end point” productive of increased trust can be anticipated. Trust involves a “reciprocal exchange” over time, extending beyond a single action, and “requiring of faith” that each party will honour its part of the agreement. This in turn implies that “risk-taking is involved”. Tierney further makes the point that trust is “not something innate” – it is learned over time and requires rational choice on behalf of the trusting – but it is “subject to the social and cultural norms” of a specific context.

The theoretical definitions provide a useful context from which to consider the ways in which the trust of the higher education sector is earned by quality assurance agencies. To take each of Tierney’s nine tenets in turn, for example, trust is built by agencies upon repeated interactions and cultivated over time: quality assurance in higher education is seldom about instant solutions but about enduring relationships that rely upon cyclical engagement. Quality assurance agencies need to be built to endure, therefore, and be consistent in their “repeated interactions”. Trust between agency and sector is dynamic in nature as notions of quality education and fitness for purpose develop and adapt over time to meet the needs of national priorities and international norms. If, as Darandari and Cardew (2013) write in reviewing academic accreditation in Saudi Arabia, the best quality assurance systems within higher education institutions are “based on trust, self-reflection and continuous improvement”, then a similar commitment to being a learning organisation that embeds quality as part of routine practice should be the goal of quality assurance agencies too.

Part of the dynamic nature of trust is the defining of expectations and outcomes and through the clear articulation of the overarching purpose of a quality agency’s mandate. This suggests the need for strong statements that articulate the agency’s purpose since, as Bergan (2012) states, “a trustworthy institution needs to define its missions and then make sure these missions are carried out”. Trust is accumulated through the consistent execution of mission – through external quality assurance activities that are not just benchmarked at the point of inception, but, over time, become in themselves trusted benchmarks by which higher education quality is measured.

Building trust is not unilateral; there is a reciprocity at the heart of the exchange that revolves around respecting the competence of each entity: “It is critical for any government”, states Allport (2007), “to respect the independence of universities … universities need to be trusted to do their work and to do it well”. By the same token, we might add, agencies established to ensure that a trusted higher education is delivered also need to be trusted to carry out their work competently. This requires independence from pressures exerted by the sector and from the ministries that give oversight to the sector. By establishing strong protocols regarding conflict of interest, quality assurance agencies can help higher education institutions take the leap of faith necessary when they deliver their fate into the hands of an accreditation authority. Agencies mitigate against the risks involved by taking a collegiate approach towards the sector, helping to guide and steer the quality assurance processes of institutions so that the shared vision of meeting the educational needs of the public and other stakeholders is realised.

Trust, according to Tierney, is not innate. Agencies have to work hard to maintain the trust of those they serve. This means there is no room for complacency. This makes trust, which may take years to build, vulnerable to the vicissitudes of a single moment, or one poor decision. Migliore and DeClouette (2011) help to shape the definition of mistrust as the “negative expectation” of motives, behaviour and competence, showing that when behaviour and outcomes “do not align with the expectations for how another [party] should behave and perform,  

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perceptions of trust decrease." The way in which many quality assurance agencies avoid losing the trust of those they serve is by ensuring high levels of engagement – with higher education institutions, with government agencies and with the public at large. This entails taking a consultative approach both in design and improvement of the mechanisms used to quality assure higher education and this in turn requires a sensitivity not just to international norms, but the local and cultural dimensions that frame the priorities of a higher education system.

In Oman, in the case study that we are highlighting in this paper, the OAAA has worked hard to earn the trust of stakeholders. A relatively young agency, serving a relatively young higher education sector, it has achieved this trust through a series of measures that align with the theoretical principles outlined above. The following section of this paper shows how.

Building trust in the external quality agency

Educational institutions should provide high quality education for students since quantity is useless unless high standards are maintained in order to advance scientific and applicable skills.

Trust is built in the OAAA partly through the nature of the quality assurance processes in place. The institutional accreditation system in Oman consists of two stages: Quality Audit followed by Standards Assessment. Quality Audit results in a public Quality Audit Report (QAR), which contains formal conclusions in the form of Commendations, Affirmations and Recommendations. QARs are published on the OAAA website.

Standards Assessment results in a report for the HEI, and public results in the form of ratings for standards and criteria, and an overall Accreditation Outcome. These Standards Assessment results are published on the OAAA website. When undergoing Institutional Standards Assessment for the first time, HEIs are also expected to include reference to actions taken in response to Quality Audit formal conclusions in their Institutional Standards Assessment Application. While each higher education institution undergoes Quality Audit once only, Standards Assessment is repeated every five years, thereby ensuring that OAAA engages in the “repeated interactions” over time that we have seen are instrumental in the development of institutional trust. OAAA has been set up, in other words, to endure, building trust exponentially as Standards Assessment replaces Quality Audit and is repeated in five-year cycles.

It could be argued that the very act of inscribing standards limits their capacity to be flexible to change. OAAA has sought to avoid the perils of anachronism, however, by defining a set of standards for institutional quality assurance that are generic, not prescriptive, in nature. Specific criteria on employability, graduate attributes and Omanisation (the process of indigenisation of the workforce) allow the agency to reflect national strategic goals, together with priorities for higher education, as these change over time, without compromising the internationally benchmarked status of the standards. This inherent flexibility within the standards reflects “local and cultural norms” and contributes to the “dynamic relationship” that OAAA enjoys with stakeholders, adding to a sense that all parties are working collegiately to contribute to the same outcomes.

If OAAA’s standards are predicated on the requirement for higher education institutions to learn from reflective practice, the authority earns the trust of the sector by being willing to apply the same approach to its own development. OAAA seeks to be a “learning organisation” that routinely measures its performance against internationally established norms. Indeed, OAAA is aiming to achieve INQAAHE recognition through alignment with its Guidelines for Good Practice (GGP) in the knowledge that this hallmark of quality will further promote trust in its activities. The authority invites feedback from both higher education institutions and from external sources.

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11 His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said bin Taimur Al Said: Speech to the Oman Council, 14 November 2006.

12 http://www.oaaa.gov.om/Institution.aspx#Inst_ReviewDwnld

reviewers involved in EQA activities and in so doing identifies not just opportunities for improvement, but also demonstrates alignment with the practices it promotes.

As we have seen, part of the way in which agencies inspire trust among stakeholders is through the “defining of expectations”. The OAAA has a clearly stated Mission that has been widely communicated to stakeholders. This Mission states that the authority:

"guides and supports the Omani higher education sector to meet international standards; maintains the national qualifications framework; and, through a transparent and rigorous system of institutional and programme accreditation, provides reliable information to the public and other stakeholders on the quality of higher education in Oman."

Defined expectations, such as those captured in the Mission above, are of little value if they are not supported by “consistent execution”. OAAA recognises that national trust in accreditation outcomes is paramount and this involves working with government bodies, such as the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE), to ensure that these outcomes are recognised. It also involves, at a practical level, measures that ensure consistency such as the moderation of all reports by external as well as internal reviewers, forums in which review directors share interpretation of standards and criteria, and approval of outcomes by OAAA Board Members. Higher education institutions have the opportunity to give feedback on factual errors in draft reports before they are finalised and OAAA has also developed and implemented a robust appeals process that further supports trustworthiness in its decision-making.

Trust, as we have seen, is best engendered where it is “reciprocal in nature”. In Oman, respect for the independence of higher education institutions and their right to define their own governance and management within broad parameters is matched by a similar independence of the OAAA itself. In fact, the actual and perceived independence of the authority from any of the agencies giving oversight to higher education institutions is paramount in underpinning the authority’s credibility. Established by Royal Decree, the OAAA is overseen by nine Board Members who are appointed by Oman’s Education Council, the entity to which the OAAA reports. OAAA Board Members are not permitted to have any financial interests in a higher education institution in Oman. A policy and protocols are in place to identify any potential conflicts of interest at a number of different levels; Board members holding governance roles in HEIs are not involved in the approval process of the reviews of the HEIs concerned. Funding for overheads is provided by the Omani government and HEIs are charged fees based on cost recovery for EQA activities; the OAAA does not generate profit from these. In summary, then, while OAAA takes a collaborative approach in terms of a shared vision, it keeps rigorously distinct from the sector when it comes to oversight.

If OAAA is prevented through these protocols from bias towards the interests of any one stakeholder, it is granted trust through being seen to work in promoting quality in higher education in Oman on behalf of all stakeholders. An easy statement to make, perhaps, but a harder target to achieve. OAAA works collaboratively with the sector to build knowledge and awareness of quality assurance systems through intensive capacity building. Realised through the dissemination of comprehensive manuals and the organisation of training events, this capacity building targets higher education institutions undergoing an EQA activity and helps to create not just a common understanding of the standards and criteria of assessment but also the purpose of quality assurance in terms of meeting national expectations and supporting graduate mobility in the international labour force. Capacity building is also achieved through the training of local external reviewers (as elaborated upon in a later section of this paper); their deliberate inclusion in OAAA’s activities helps the flow of knowledge become embedded in the processes of Oman’s higher education institutions. The high level of communication, achieved not just through training but also through a national conference and symposia organised by OAAA, has helped to reduce the “perception of risk” involved in institutions applying for accreditation.

Trust is ultimately brought about by a high “level of engagement” between parties and in the case of OAAA and its stakeholders this is accomplished, in addition to all the elements listed above, through a consultative approach. Stakeholder engagement and relationship building across the higher education sector through

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consultation in the design of quality assurance mechanisms has been key to achieving high levels of buy-in by the sector during implementation. In line with the OAAA values of "transparency" and "collaboration", stakeholders have been able to make valuable contributions to system design through their involvement in symposia, through commenting on circulated OAAA draft manuals and in participation in the piloting of quality assurance activities. In return, OAAA has been careful to close the loop on developmental dialogue by giving feedback on the changes made in response to consultation.

As a body, then, OAAA does not hover "above" or "beyond" the sector, it arises from within it, the collaborative fruit of the work of sector professionals, albeit brought to harvest by a dedicated team of OAAA staff, consultants and experts. As agency and stakeholders work together towards the future, specifically through the design and implementation of programme standards, programme assessment and a revised national qualifications framework, OAAA aspires to realise its Vision of providing "efficient, effective and internationally recognised services for accreditation in order to promote quality in higher education in Oman". Through collaboration, OAAA is able to show that, far from sitting in judgement on the higher education institutions that it serves, it shares a collective vision to build a sector of international standing. Indeed, collaboration is a key OAAA value and one of the main strategies used to build trust in the agency. Throughout the many ways in which stakeholder engagement is fostered, the OAAA is present as part of a competent body of peers, not as omniscient standard-bearer.

Building trust in the external quality assurance system

"Trust takes years to build, seconds to break, and forever to repair." [Aphorism]

Collaboration is rightly celebrated in quality assurance, but this should not be mistaken for a relinquishing of responsibility on behalf of higher education institutions. In line with INQAAHE's GGP, the OAAA recognises that the responsibility for the provision of quality in higher education lies primarily with the higher education institutions themselves. As the UK's Dearing Report (1997) on higher education puts it:

_We believe the best progress will be made by … recognising that each institution is responsible for its own standards, but at the same time engaging the whole academic community in sharing a collective responsibility for standards and quality of provision._\(^{15}\)

The OAAA believes that the role of the quality assurance agency is to help higher education institutions achieve their own potential and by trusting that they are the experts in choosing how best to reach that shared goal. The agency's part in this process is achieved by developing processes that are robust, internationally benchmarked, and which respect the local context – providing a "common reference";\(^{16}\) in other words, while at the same time being flexible enough to accommodate the diversity of higher education provision in Oman.\(^{17}\) OAAA's processes and procedures are clearly communicated through the provision of online manuals and documentation, including the OAAA's approach to decision-making, and through extensive training offered to all stakeholders, including external reviewers.

It is always easy for an agency to make claims about the levels of trust invested by the sector in its quality assurance systems, but these claims are harder to prove. Nonetheless, while trust may be difficult to measure _per se_, OAAA has identified certain indicators that illustrate a healthy relationship with the sector. Some of these include the following. Prior to 2010, public higher education institutions volunteered to undergo the first stage of institutional accreditation, despite any mandatory requirements for them to do so; now some vocational institutions are seeking OAAA accreditation although this is not currently part of OAAA's mandate. One of the

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initiatives in Oman’s "National Programme for Diversifying the Economy" is related to enabling OAAA to expand its accreditation activities to include vocational institutions. A similar recommendation is included in the "National Education Strategy 2040", providing further indications of trust in the work of the OAAA. Nearly all higher education institutions in Oman have at least one staff member on OAAA’s Register of External Reviewers and some government institutions allow for secondment of staff to support the authority’s activities. Public faith in the OAAA is reflected in the fact that the local media publishes accreditation results free of charge and publishes articles related to the work of the OAAA. Students, parents, employers and the public at large visit the OAAA website and access OAAA’s reports and the published results of accreditation. Some stakeholders have written articles on the quality of Omani HEIs, based on these accreditation results and have published them in local newspapers.

The MoHE follows up on OAAA Quality Audit Reports for private higher education institutions and monitors implementation of recommendations; institutions that are successfully accredited are rewarded through the provision of a larger number of scholarships and allowed to apply for the licensing of new programmes; higher education institutions on probation, following Standards Assessment, meanwhile, undergo greater scrutiny. The OAAA is seen as a partner by the MoHE and is consulted in the development and review of its quality assurance processes, building a foundation for mutual trust. The Ministry of Finance continues to provide funding to cover the basic overheads of the authority and to provide new financial grades to support recruitment into OAAA. In the international arena, OAAA has signed MoUs with regional and international external quality agencies and OAAA-trained, locally-based reviewers have been invited to participate in reviews for other agencies.

In an era where tweets about ‘fake news’ are prevalent, it is easy to understand how the pessimists have influenced public opinion and how the general mistrust within public life has spilled over into higher education. Within this climate, it would be easy to anticipate that higher education institutions would be reluctant to put their faith in external systems of review. The facts above, however, suggest a different narrative. In the context of Oman, at least, despite initial hesitation, higher education institutions have shown a high level of commitment to external quality assurance resulting in the fact that even large institutions are willing to invest considerable time, energy and resources to meeting the standards set by OAAA. If this is the result of high levels of trust in both the authority of the OAAA and its processes and procedures, it is equally the result of a matched confidence in the implementers. This is the subject of the final part of this paper.

Building trust in the implementers

The trust building potential of external quality assurance procedures depends upon the quality and professionalism of the involved external experts. As shown thus far, trust in the external quality assurance process in Oman has not been won by chance: it has been earned through careful policy decisions that have involved broad sector-wide consultation. An integral part of this has been building trust in the implementers of the EQA processes. The OAAA Register of External Reviewers, established in 2007, has a well-embedded approach to the selection and approval of locally-based and international external reviewers, the majority of whom are experienced academics. Transparent selection criteria are published on the OAAA website, in line with INQAAHE’s GGP which calls for agencies to have “clear specifications on the characteristics and selection of external reviewers”. References are sought for all potential external reviewers before applications are submitted to the OAAA Board for approval. There are currently over 300 approved reviewers whose biographies are posted on the OAAA website. While the inclusion of international reviewers (who comprise around 50% of the register) has provided a channel to communicate an awareness of OAAA’s external quality assurance practices beyond Oman, locally-based

20 http://www.oaaa.gov.om/About.aspx#Reviewer
reviewers have helped disseminate a sectoral understanding of the OAAA’s processes and its underpinning approach. Having locally-based reviewers on EQA panels also promotes a shared understanding of the local higher education context, national priorities and cultural norms. For example, in Oman, expectations regarding research in higher education are set out in the Requirements for Oman’s System of Quality Assurance:\(^{21}\) institutions are classified as universities, university colleges and colleges and the research profile for each differs. Locally-based reviewers are also familiar with the role of supervising ministries and overseas affiliates in providing support for internal quality assurance systems. The importance of this insight within an EQA panel cannot be underestimated.

In terms of capacity-building, the training of locally-based external reviewers clearly has an important part to play in ensuring a competent and consistent implementation of the external quality assurance processes. Not only does this support the development of a national community of practice, it also promotes a shared understanding of OAAA’s processes and expectations. The OAAA invites external experts from beyond the agency to join the teams delivering EQA training; this provides a valuable external perspective and supports the validity of the training in the eyes of the sector. As mentioned earlier, nearly all HEIs in Oman have at least one staff member on the OAAA Register of External Reviewers; while this may provide a valuable resource for the institution, the individual is nonetheless present on an EQA Panel as an independent peer reviewer, as opposed to a representative of their own HEI – an important point stressed during OAAA training workshops. Training workshops provide an opportunity for inexperienced reviewers to simulate working on a panel; during the training, OAAA staff are able to monitor and gauge the performance of potential panel members. There is a risk within a relatively small higher education sector that peer reviewers are involved with other institutions, or they may be regarded as competitors; before an EQA activity begins, therefore, long lists of external reviewers are sent to the OAAA Board and HEIs to identify any potential conflicts of interest.

International reviewers are expected to have had previous experience in external quality assurance; as each EQA context is distinct, however, electronic training materials have been developed for overseas panel members. The OAAA is aware that having a full understanding of its system and processes is paramount to supporting their successful implementation. As stated in INQAAHE’s GGP, the EQAA’s system should ensure that each institution is evaluated in a consistent way, even if the external panels are different. As noted above, consistency and reliability are important factors for the outcomes to be trusted; this is enabled through training, provision of comprehensive manuals, clear guidance from the Review Director, encouragement of the use of a shared analytical approach and monitoring and evaluating reviewer performance. An OAAA staff member usually attends the deliberation day during the institutional accreditation visit to ensure that decision-making processes align with the OAAA’s approach. Consistency is also ensured through the external and internal moderation of draft reports and the submission of all reports to the OAAA Board for approval. Feedback is invited from external reviewers involved in external quality assurance activities and this practice identifies not just opportunities for improvement, but also demonstrates alignment with the practices the OAAA promotes. HEIs are able to give feedback on the EQA process, including the performance of the panel members. These practices support the building of trust in the implementers of OAAA’s system and processes.

**Conclusion**

This paper has explored the approaches to building a culture of trust in external quality assurance in the context of Oman, focusing on three aspects: building trust in the OAAA, building trust in the EQA system and building trust in the implementers of the OAAA’s system and processes. The OAAA has a clear Mission which sets out its overall purpose and underpins the achievement of its mandate. A consultative and collaborative approach to developing the national EQA system has been adopted, involving higher education institutions, government agencies and the public at large, with a view to promoting a shared understanding of the OAAA’s processes and outcomes. The two-stage institutional accreditation process has enabled higher education institutions to prepare to meet internationally-benchmarked standards and criteria, which have been tailored to the diverse higher education sector in Oman. Consistent and reliable implementation of the OAAA’s approach has been

supported through having trained and experienced international and locally-based reviewers serving on EQA panels. Trust may be difficult to measure per se, but there are many indicators that suggest that OAAA is being relied upon to deliver its Mission. These include the voluntary involvement of public higher education institutions in Quality Audit, the engagement with the OAAA’s Register of External Reviewers, and the national recognition of the outcomes of the OAAA’s processes. While the current mood in the sector in Oman regarding external quality assurance would seem to be positive, it remains to be seen how the climate will change once more HEIs undergo accreditation and recognise what is at stake. To continue to build the culture of trust, therefore, OAAA must be ready to adapt to ensure HEIs continue to feel part of the process of development – part of developing the mechanisms by which they agree to be evaluated and compared.

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https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/trust
Quantitative manifesto of institutional accreditation: The building blocks of trust

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ABSTRACT
The Assessment and Accreditation agencies measure the quality of education delivered by Institutions of higher learning largely through the process of peer review. This process is fully based on the judgement of peer team members on data submitted by the institutions followed by onsite visit to those institutions and are assumed to be fair due to expertise and integrity associated with the members. Increasingly this assumption is questioned by stakeholders on various grounds and thereby the credibility of the process is under stress. Based on the feedback received the Government of India advised NAAC, the premier Assessment and Accreditation Agency in India to re-structure the role of Peer Team judgement to minimal and quantify institutional data to measurable quality index so as to promote National and Global trust in the process. The paper analyses in brief the stakeholders reaction for the first set of institutions assessed through process of quantification of data.

KEYWORDS: Institutional Accreditation, Quantification, Automation in Quality Assessment, Stakeholder perception of quality

INTRODUCTION
The changing trends in higher education require different approach towards assessment and accreditation matching global standards. The outcome of accreditation will be accepted if the perception of the stakeholders matches with the recommendations of the assessment agency or it is established beyond doubt that the deviation from the perception is due to valid reasons (published) so as to make the process transparent and acceptable by all stakeholders.

In the context of India, National Assessment and Council (NAAC), is at present the only agency dealing with Institutional Assessment and Accreditation that assess institution as a unit of Higher Educational Institution's (HEI) in India. Till July, 2017 the assessment of higher educational institutions in India was through a 100% evaluation/validation of the institutional data provided (under seven pre-described criteria) through an institutional visit by the peer team. The outcome of the visit is a grade declared on a seven point scale (Refer http://www.naac.gov.in/images/docs/Manuals/University-Manual-24th-October-2018.pdf). Post July, 2017 the framework of NAAC assessment was largely changed to quantitative assessment (and is referred to Revised Accreditation Framework (RAF)). The indicators (questions) under each criterion was converted into Quantitative Matrix (indicators earlier) and Qualitative Matrix in the ratio of approximately 70:30 by weightage (each criterion has a differential weightage based on its perceived importance with the total weightage remaining 1000). The Quantitative Matrix are so designed that its output is a number and these number denote a certain level of achievement of the institution on a four point scale through benchmarking. (Matrix: Eg. Percentage of faculty with Ph.D to the total faculty in the institution? The response can vary from 0 to 100%, and higher the percentage to indicate better quality of education delivered and better score for the matrix on a pre-determined range). The amalgamation of scores obtained under each of the seven criteria for quantitative and qualitative matrix results in an overall score for the institution that is calculated on Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) which is classified under a range and converted into a letter grade (http://www.naac.gov.in/images/docs/Manuals/University-Manual-24th-October-2018.pdf).

Apart from the above changes, mechanism to obtain feedback directly from students on the quality of education provided in the institutions is carried out through a process designed and implemented online which is called as
Students Satisfaction Survey (SSS). Even the submission of the application for assessment namely “Institutional Information for Quality Assessment (IIQA) and submission of the Self-Study Report is permitted only online (through a web portal) and includes online mechanism for verification of data submitted and declaration of results and institutional CGPA with letter Grade. Thereby first level of Automation has been brought into the process which is likely to strengthen the trust in the process.

OBJECTIVES
To understand the stake holder perspective in three dimensions
• To compare the student perception of the institution with the grades obtained (Students Perception)
• To analyse grade obtained in Revised Accreditation Framework (RAF) by institutions and appeal submitted there of (Institutional Self Perception)
• To evaluate the continuous performance of institution across cycles of Accreditation (Public Perception)

METHODOLOGY
The Revised Accreditation Framework (RAF) adopted by NAAC enables quantitative approach towards data that is submitted by the Higher Educational Institutions (HEI) through their Self Study Report (SSR). The overall CGPA value of institutions across cycles and output under sub-section of the SSR (SSS) are compared to see the perception of quality across stakeholders’. For example the Students Satisfactory Survey of the institutions held online by NAAC scales the institution from 0-4 and the same is compared with the actual grade of the institution. The results of this comparison enable us to understand whether the student perception of the institution is in-line with the grades obtained.

The analysis over appeals that NAAC receives after the announcement of grades can reveal the difference of self-perception of institutions with that of the grade granted by NAAC.

The grades obtained by the institution over a period of time (3 to 4 cycles) and the report by the Peer Team about the institution easily available to the public may convert into a strong public perception (Figure. 1, depicts the stakeholders whose perceptions are important to an institutions).

ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS
As on 30 November 2018, 579 institutions have been assessed in the new methodology (RAF) and they are located in 31 States/Union Territories of India. Of this data 255 (44%) institutions have undergone accreditation for more than one cycle of assessment (one cycle is a period of 5 years for which an assessment is valid).
Further analysis of 255 (13 Universities + 242 Colleges) indicates that in case of colleges about 34% of the institutions have no change in their grade and 37% have a fall in grade and the remaining 29% have gained in grade. In case of universities about 84% have gained compared to previous cycle (Source: NAAC, 2019). From the data, the likely impact under different viewpoints are presented in the text that follows:

**Quality Sustenance (Public Perception):** The quality of an institution can be identified from its pursuit of excellence through institutional assessment (Ching G.S., 2016) and one important aspect of this assessment is the correlation of the public perception of the institution with the institutional assessment and its grade or valid convincing inputs to the contrary.

Till-date in India, the public perception to the institutional grade has not found resonance as collective voice, as no direct impact is experienced by them vis-a-vis the career paths of their wards. Recently, the Government of India is partly linking funding to institutional grading for some of its schemes and few employers mulling with the idea of preferential treatment to students from Accredited Institutions. A recent advertisement in ‘Employment News’ (largely covers Government sector employment) indicated that candidates from College accredited with Grade ‘A’ by NAAC only can apply for a position called for. If the shift in employers selection process takes cognisance of Institutional Grades, then the public voice and demand for quality in higher educational institutions may be demanding.

From the above context it can be derived that higher grade achievement in consecutive cycles of institutional assessment speaks about institutional quality sustenance and improvement. Comparison between the consecutive grades of institutions having undergone 3 or more cycles of accreditation was analysed. It is seen that the difference in CGPA are minimal between Cycle 3 and Cycle 4. As on date only 6 institutions figure in the accredited list having completed 4 cycles. It may be difficult to draw any trends at present.

**Student Perception and Institutional Performance:** The grading of the institutions arrived needs to be socially relevant proving its performance against the output to its outcomes (Johnson & Peifer, 2017). An analysis of perception being on par with the performance is crucial factor to prove or disprove the blown-up or under-estimated image of the institution in the society and to bring out subtle factors that cause great impetus in institution’s performance.

Student’s confidence in their institution is closely related to in-situ educational standards of institution. Student’s Satisfaction Survey (SSS) also forms a part of the RAF where in NAAC conducts an online survey of the students through their email address independent of the Institution. The results obtained from 579 institutions were taken for analysis in this section. The final CGPA obtained by the institution was compared with the score obtained in the Students Satisfaction Survey.

The results of Bi-variate Correlation analysis performed indicates that in 94% of the cases the students have higher opinion on the performance of the institution compared to the peer team. Further reflection on the aspect is being envisaged.

**Reaction of the Assessed Institutions:**

The reaction from the assessed institutions is strong in terms of vocal resistance to the new framework but only about 13% of the institutions (of 579) are understood to have made a written request for the review of the process/grades (as per provision available to aggrieved institutions) and are to be reviewed by a committee shortly. But the fact that more than 70% of institutions fall in the category of no change in grade or fall in grade is a cause of concern.

**Limitations of the Research:**

The research was constrained with the following limitations:

- The Students Satisfaction Survey is a survey about Academics and Curriculum delivery only.
- The comparison of grades over different cycles may not clearly account for time lag between assessment and changes in range for grading introduced over short period of time
- The arithmetic limitations of the evaluation scheme
• Rapid technological changes in institutions and its acceptance by the institution, student community and investment patterns

CONCLUSION

The classification of Higher Education Institutions through a Quantitative analysis of data on such a large scale by NAAC is paradigm shift in the assessment process and is possibly the first attempt by any quality assurance agency in the world. The learning from the field experiences from the Indian context will possibly have far reaching implications for all assessment agencies in the world and create a sound ground for enhancing further trust in the process. The quantitative data gathered of institutions during the process will also help in inter institutional and intra institutional analytics and out come from the analysis guide policy decisions of the future. Likely involvements of stakeholders in a proactive manner may further strengthen the quality and accountability in the higher education system.

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Trust in quality management: from compliance to enhancement

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ABSTRACT

Purpose
This paper explores the concept of trust within two different systems of quality management in higher education: Ethiopia and Finland. The focus is on how trust is promoted between higher education institutions, quality assurance agencies and other key stakeholders. The paper aims to identify best practices for fostering trust in a variety of contexts.

Design
A theoretical framework is applied to the two case studies to understand the role of trust within different quality management models, based on data gathered through interviews, focus group discussions, document reviews and feedback from higher education institutions and other stakeholders.

Findings
The findings suggest that a higher education system characterised by normative instruments of trust-building and enhancement-led quality management may offer a more fruitful ground for robust stakeholder engagement and enhancing trusting relationships than a system with rationalist mechanisms of trust-building and an accountability-oriented quality management model. The paper highlights best practices for building trust through the enhancement-led model and makes recommendations for fostering trust in accountability-oriented systems, considering culturally sensitive issues.

Originality
The paper provides fresh insights into the conceptual and theoretical links between trust and different quality management models, and the implications for stakeholder engagement through a comparative empirical analysis of Ethiopia and Finland.

KEYWORDS: Trust, quality management, stakeholder engagement, higher education

Introduction
Trust and accountability have drawn increasing attention in higher education due to the changing landscape of relationship between governments and higher education institutions (HEIs) across the globe. Since the early 1980s, there has been an advent of new forms of managerialism (e.g. Brennan and Shah, 2000; Brocker and De Wit, 2015; Van Vught and De Boer, 2015), decline in public funding to HEIs (e.g. Li and Zumeta, 2015), and trends of decreasing state-regulation while increasing institutional autonomy (e.g. Campbell and Rozsnyai, 2002; Lemaitre, 2002; Veiga et al., 2015). Accordingly, the issues of trust, accountability, quality and efficiency have gained momentum (Brennan and Shah, 2000).

Several authors have identified growing accountability requirements in higher education (e.g. Power, 1997; Gibbs, 1998; Hoech, 2006; Migliore, 2012; Bird, 2013). The shift in the government role from regulative to supervisory has raised requirements for HEIs to demonstrate academic, financial and social accountability. Quality assurance serves as one instrument of accountability. The perceived decline of public trust in HEIs and
the subsequent demand for accountability are among the rationales behind introducing formal quality assurance in higher education. For instance, Harvey (1995, p. 29) notes, “implementation of a quality system carries with it implied criticism of the quality of academics’ work and a lack of trust”. On the other hand, as the case studies demonstrate, quality systems where stakeholder engagement is systematic and meaningful foster trust between institutions, agencies and stakeholders.

Conceptualising trust

The concept of trust is widely discussed across disciplines such as political science, sociology, management, business and organisational studies. Theoretical and empirical analyses have been conducted at individual, organisational and institutional levels. Yet, a review of the literature reveals considerable ambiguity on the concept (e.g. Hardin, 2002; Pope, 2004; Leveille, 2006; Li et al., 2012). There is lack of consensus on the exact meaning of trust, how to measure it and develop it. It is, however, possible to identify some common aspects often used in defining the concept. A relational element between given parties, uncertainty over the intentions and behaviour of the trusted, and willingness to assume perceived risk are recurring themes.

Context

Context-specific conceptions of trust challenge generalised approaches. Understanding trust requires carefully analysing the context. A specific trustor places trust on a specific party in relation to a particular matter (Hardin, 2002). A party may not trust everyone on that same matter nor the same party in relation to other matters.

Furthermore, accountability is a concept often mentioned in connection with trust, although based on the literature, the relationship seems complex. On one hand, trust and accountability can be seen as contradictory notions: accountability measures are not needed where trust exists (Trow, 1996; Zalec, 2013). Where trust is lacking, accountability instruments provide a safeguard and ensure that expectations are fulfilled. On the other hand, some argue that accountability enhances trustworthiness and the development of trustful attitude (e.g. Sztompka, 1999). Trust and quality may be understood as components that form the foundations of accountability. However, accountability is needed to oblige a party that could not be otherwise trusted to behave in a desired manner and provide insurance against untrustworthy activities.

Perspectives on trust in quality assurance

It is widely argued that quality assurance can contribute to the renewal and restoration of public trust in HEIs (Harvey, 1995; Jacobs, 2010; Stensaker and Maassen, 2015). Practicing internal quality assurance and undergoing external quality reviews reassures stakeholders that systematic procedures are in place at HEIs to check whether quality standards are met. Trust is also a crucial aspect for a functioning quality assurance system and process (Yingqiang and Yongjian, 2016).

The theoretical discussion and case studies indicate that different quality management systems foster trust in different ways. To broadly categorise, approaches range between accountability-oriented and enhancement-led. The accountability-oriented model serves to safeguard the interests of stakeholders and ensure that HEIs carry out their fundamental missions in a manner that conforms to stated standards and expectations for societal responsibility (Vroeijenstijn, 1995). Institutions are expected to demonstrate their compliance to the goals, interests and demands of external stakeholders, such as policy makers and fund providers (Lemaitre, 2002). Accountability involves ensuring and informing stakeholders and the public about the standard of educational services (Campbell and Rozsnyai, 2002) and the use of public resources. This model is criticised for its top-down orientation, overemphasis on compliance, bureaucratic regulation and constraining atmosphere.

Enhancement-led quality management, on the other hand, aims to enhance academic quality (including quality of teaching and learning), bring about continuous quality improvements and stimulate overall institutional transformation (e.g. Rippin et al., 1994; Colling and Harvey, 1995; Lomas, 2004; Elassy, 2015; Williams, 2016). The enhancement-led orientation requires the entire community of the HEI to be committed and actively engaged, for a culture of continuous improvement to take root. To simplify, an accountability-oriented model of quality management is consistent with a higher education system where the level of trust between HEIs and external stakeholders is relatively weaker. On the contrary, the nature of an enhancement-led approach is consistent with relatively stable and trusting relations between stakeholders.
Stensaker and Maassen (2015) and Stensaker and Gornitzka (2009) describe two different perspectives on how to build trust in quality assurance: rationalist/instrumentalist and normative/cognitive. In the rationalist/instrumentalist perspective, trust can be built through enforcing compliance to regulations, procedures and standards, with the assistance of control and incentive instruments. In this perspective, legal regulations and certification constitute major trust-building mechanisms. The emphasis on external instruments of validation seems to presuppose relatively weak internal processes on the side of the trusted. The normative/cognitive perspective, on the other hand, postulates that trust-building is based on shared norms, values and patterns of structures or procedures. This perspective places considerable importance on comparable values and norms between the trustor and trusted, suggesting relatively more convenient foundations and conditions for establishing trust.

The rationalist/instrumentalist perspective could be argued to be conceptually relatable to an accountability-oriented model, while the normative/cognitive perspective seems to have a significant conceptual affinity with an enhancement-led model. It is important to note that the quality management models and theoretical perspectives of trust are not mutually exclusive. In practice, a system may embody both accountability and enhancement elements, with a mix of rationalist and normative perspectives of trust. What this study attempts to identify, within the two higher education systems studied as case examples, is the relative dominance of some elements in comparison to others and analyse how they are linked.

Research methodology
This study employs a case study research design to provide a comparative account of trust and quality management in the Ethiopian and Finnish contexts. It utilises both primary and secondary data sources. The empirical analysis on the Ethiopian quality management system is based on data gathered through 25 interviews and two focus group discussions, as well as document reviews (including policy and strategy documents, institutional quality audit reports, institutional quality assurance policies and guidelines, institutional periodic plans and performance reports, minutes of meetings, report on the external review of HERQA and the draft Education Roadmap). The analysis of the Finnish evaluation system is based on feedback gathered from HEIs and other stakeholders. The Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC) has been systematically collecting feedback from each institution that participates in an audit of their quality system, adding to a total of 56 institutional audits between 2010-2017. In addition, the results of FINEEC’s 2018 stakeholder survey were analysed.

The data was analysed qualitatively using the method of thematic analysis. Relevant themes were identified from the discussion on the conceptual and theoretical models.

Ethiopia case study: Trust in an accountability-oriented context
The East African nation of Ethiopia is the second most populous in the continent. The country has a relatively young, but rapidly massifying higher education sector. There are 45 public universities and more than 130 licensed private HEIs operating at a status of university, university college and college in the 2018/2019 academic year. Quality of education is a highly politicised issue in Ethiopia, where various political parties and interest groups strive to influence the direction of public discourse on the development of the national education system.

The expansion of higher education has further intensified concerns over the quality of HEIs, standards of academic functions and quality of graduates. The government responded by introducing external and internal procedures of quality management at national and institutional levels. In 2003, the Higher Education Quality...
and Relevance Agency (HERQA) was established with the mandate of safeguarding and monitoring the quality and relevance of higher education at national level (FDRE, 2003), and in 2009 HEIs became legally responsible to monitor the quality of their operations (FDRE, 2009).

External and internal quality management procedures are predominantly oriented towards ensuring accountability of HEIs and their compliance to minimum standards of operation. The requirements for external quality management procedures differentiate between public and private HEIs. Private institutions are required to go through pre-accreditation, full accreditation and re-accreditation, which in practice serve as a form of regulating operational licenses, while public HEIs are exempted from such requirements. The only quality management procedure that, until recently, used to be implemented equally on both types of HEIs, was the requirement to undergo institutional quality audits once every six years. This double standard seems to arise from the pervasive perception of private HEIs as primarily profit seeking organisations with less regard for the quality of the education.

Absence and imbalance of trust between institutions and the agency

The analysis of the interviews and reviewed documents suggests that there is considerably weak trust between the national quality assurance agency and private HEIs, while public institutions are accorded unreserved trust. All stakeholders covered in the study, including participants from private HEIs, agreed that the intense pressure of the profit-maximising orientation at private institutions gives way to a symbolic implementation of quality management, seeking only to meet conditions necessary for securing accreditation and licensing. Similarly, public universities accord far weaker commitment to a genuine implementation of quality monitoring mechanisms, contrary to their overly positive stated intentions. At the level of rhetoric, the findings indicate a significant convergence of intentions over the purpose, significance and expected outcomes of quality management. There seems to be a shared understanding on the importance of meeting agreed standards and rescuing the deteriorating quality of education. Despite the similarity of stated intentions, the findings show that both public and private institutions are far from properly implementing internal quality management mechanisms, as they substantially lack the necessary competence and capacity. There is a severe shortage of trained, qualified and committed quality assurance staff, and insufficient resources for internal quality management.

The national quality assurance agency has deficiency in effectively monitoring and following up HEIs and their compliance with quality management procedures and regulations. Institutions generally struggle with genuine critical self-assessments. The focus group discussion conducted with accreditation and audit experts at the agency revealed an alarming prevalence of engaging in deception, organising orchestrated presentations and staged performances, and striving for impression management at private HEIs, which seek to hide weaknesses and overstate perceived strengths.

Furthermore, the lack of trust between the agency and HEIs is explained by the high risk associated with abandoning external instruments of quality regulations. All stakeholders unequivocally agree that HEIs, particularly private ones, cannot be trusted to properly monitor the quality of their own operations. There is a shared belief that without external quality monitoring the quality of education would deteriorate far worse than its current state. Previous studies have found a climate of mistrust and weak cooperation between HEIs and the national quality assurance agency (Kahsay, 2012; Geda, 2014; Girma, 2014).

On the other hand, the findings show that HEIs recognise the extreme capacity limitations of the agency and question its credibility. They argue that the current organisation, structure and resources of the agency fall markedly short of the magnitude and scope of the duties and responsibilities bestowed on it. In the study, HEIs and other stakeholders pointed out that the agency does not function with full autonomy from the Ministry of Education, which negatively affects its operational credibility and impartiality. Some interviews and off-the-record discussions conducted at the request of respondents point to allegations of corruptions against experts and officials of the national quality agency and some private HEIs. This further complicates trust problems.

The dominance of the accountability-oriented model

The findings of the study suggest that the existing quality management model in Ethiopia is predominantly accountability-oriented. Quality management in Ethiopian higher education tends to be utilised to control and
regulate HEIs, particularly those in the private sector, hold them accountable to national development needs and interests of the public, and ensure their compliance with legislation, formal requirements and quality standards. As the theoretical insights on the rationalist/instrumentalist perspective suggest, the Ethiopian model seeks to establish trust on HEIs through enforcing them to comply with rules and procedures. The weak trust between HEIs and the national quality assurance agency seems to have necessitated a controlling model characterised by a heavy top-down approach. The interviews, discussions and documents point to a paucity of institutional commitment to meaningful and impactful implementation of quality management practices.

In its current form, the system rarely promotes continuous quality improvements and tangible institutional changes. HEIs are yet to utilise quality evaluations and monitoring procedures to systematically improve their operations. The pressure on institutions to demonstrate compliance with regulations may have encouraged them to symbolically, rather than genuinely implement internal quality monitoring and assessment procedures, hindering the utilisation of information to reinforce strengths, improve areas in need of development and share good practices.

The quality management model is at present exclusively composed of accreditation and licensing of private HEIs, as the national quality agency have recently discontinued audits. The interviews and focus group discussions revealed that the agency has recently come under growing pressure from the political machineries of the state, directives of the Ministry of Education and public sentiments to strengthen its regulation of private HEIs and safeguard the public from rogue providers. As a result, the quality management system now entirely rests on accrediting and licensing private HEIs that only account for about 15 % of higher education enrolment, while it neglects public HEIs, which accommodate 85 % of the enrolment (Ministry of Education, 2016).

The study shows that the external and internal quality systems tend to be preoccupied with assessing inputs and processes, and hence place scant attention on monitoring the quality of educational outputs (also argued in Abebe, 2015). The overemphasis on inspecting the quality of educational inputs and processes is consistent with a quality management model that is primarily compliance-oriented in nature. It indicates that quality enhancement components are still at early stages of development.

Lack of systematic stakeholder engagement

In the case of Ethiopia, the external and internal quality procedures lack established and effective platforms for active engagement of key stakeholders in the design, implementation and evaluation of the quality management model. The participation of stakeholders is yet to be systematic and impactful. For instance, there is weak participation of students and external stakeholders (such as employers, regional development and business partners) in quality assessment processes.

The existence of weak trusting relationships between major actors may account for the substantially deterred level of stakeholder empowerment, which may explain their inadequate engagement. There is some experience with organising infrequent, unsystematic and incoherent feedback sessions. Bringing about meaningful improvements require the government and Ministry of Education to take practical measures comparable to the intensity of political and public discourse on the gravity of the quality problem.

The study reveals that external and internal quality management units are perceived as ‘fault-finders’ rather than supportive structures that provide critical and constructive feedback. This may be partly due to the emphasis on control and compliance. Rigid regulatory systems can create an atmosphere that fosters distrust between stakeholders (Mkhize and Cassimjee, 2013). However, the active participation of all actors is necessary for quality evaluations to lead to visible improvements in academic and administrative functions.

A recent good example of engaging stakeholders is the extensive discussion currently taking place at the national level with diverse groups of stakeholders, extending to grassroots level, on the policy recommendations put forward in the draft Education Roadmap. The integration of the feedback from stakeholders is expected to promote impactful engagements in the future.
Finland case study: Trust as a foundation for enhancement-led evaluation

A country of 5.5 million inhabitants, sparsely inhabiting the eighth largest country in Europe, Finland has an extensive network of HEIs which geographically cover the country. Altogether 41 HEIs (15 universities and 26 universities of applied sciences) operate in Finland, most of them public institutions operating under the governance and steering of the Ministry of Education and Culture (MoEC). The universities of applied sciences are limited companies with operating licenses granted by the MoEC. Higher education is largely publicly funded. Finnish HEIs enjoy extensive autonomy, and their operations are built on the principle of freedom of education and research. This means that institutions decide on their internal organisational structure, steering, funding and quality systems (FINEEC, 2016b).

Established in 2014, FINEEC is the national agency responsible for the evaluation of education at all levels of the education system, ranging from early childhood to higher education. The guiding approach used in the agency's evaluations and described in the Government Decree on the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (1317/2013) is enhancement-led evaluation, which "emphasises participation as well as trust between the party implementing the evaluation and evaluation participant, and responsibility of education providers and HEIs (HEIs) in enhancing the quality of their operations" (FINEEC, 2016a, p. 5). Enhancement-led evaluation is not a novel concept to Finland. It was introduced as a guiding principle in the operational plan for one of FINEEC's predecessors, the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (FINHEEC) nearly two decades ago (Pyykkö et al., 2013).

Evaluation based on mutual trust and interaction

As opposed to the rationalist/instrumental perspective, where compliance to regulations plays a significant role, in Finland the law grants HEIs considerable freedom in undertaking evaluations. The Universities Act (558/2009, 87 §) states that “universities must evaluate their education, research and artistic activities as well as the effectiveness thereof. The universities must also regularly participate in external evaluations of their activities and quality assurance systems. The universities must publish the results of the evaluations they have organised”.5 The same applies to universities of applied sciences, according to the Universities of Applied Sciences Act (932/2014).6 HEIs have the freedom of deciding the details of how to meet the legal requirements, and so far, most Finnish HEIs have decided to partake in the quality system audits by FINEEC (and previously FINHEEC). The quality systems of all Finnish HEIs were audited at least once during the two audit rounds, which took place in 2005-2018. As a result, all Finnish HEIs were found to have a functioning quality system, either in the actual audit or the subsequent re-audit. This finding aligns with the normative/cognitive perspective, where trust is built on patterns of structures and procedures, in this case, the functioning quality systems.

According to FINEEC, the process of institutional audits “continues to enjoy the trust of both higher education sectors - universities and universities of applied sciences” (2016b, p. 5). Mutual trust has been extensively recognised as a strong trait of the entire Finnish education system (Sahlberg, 2010, 2014; Räkköläinen, 2011; Aurén and Joshi, 2015). It is not merely an inherent feature of the Finnish education system, but a product of intentional public policies (Sahlberg, 2010).

The method of quality audits is based on “respecting the autonomy of HEIs and having trust in the institutions’ intentions regarding their statutory responsibility for the quality of their operations” (FINEEC, 2016b, p. 55). Enhancement-led evaluation emphasises the autonomy of HEIs and explicitly rejects sanctions or ranking lists resulting from evaluations (Pyykkö et al., 2013). The purpose of the audit is to help HEIs recognise their own strengths, good practices and areas in need of development, not to create ranking lists or punish those who fail to comply with the criteria. Based on the evidence from two rounds of quality audits, it is possible to draw a conclusion that the agency and stakeholders have good reason to trust the HEIs to manage and enhance the quality of their own operations.

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4 Available at: [https://karvi.fi/app/uploads/2016/05/4-Decree-on-FINEEC.pdf](https://karvi.fi/app/uploads/2016/05/4-Decree-on-FINEEC.pdf)
The agency through the eyes of the institutions

Based on the analysis of the feedback collected from HEIs that have participated in the quality system audits, some conclusions can be drawn on how Finnish HEIs experience the relationship with FINEEC. Recurring themes in the feedback from institutions include the following:

1) The audits enhance the operations of the institutions. Audits have accelerated development and renewed the commitment of the staff to development work. The audit process creates shared understanding of and competence in quality work at the institutions.

2) The audits are conducted in a way that fosters trust and interaction.

3) The FINEEC staff and audit teams operate very professionally.

4) The atmosphere in the interviews is constructive, warm, confidential and conversation-like.

These findings strengthen the idea that shared norms and values exist between HEIs and the agency and have fostered trusting relations. On the other hand, HEIs have also raised ideas for development in the feedback. Among other things, HEIs criticise the audit criteria for lack of clarity and the audit process for being lengthy. There is also room for improvement in strengthening the trust of HEIs in the consistency of audit processes and equal treatment of HEIs. Some institutions have felt that international audit experts are more critical in their reviews than Finnish experts.

Furthermore, based on the analysis of the results of the 2018 stakeholder survey, a clear majority of HEIs and stakeholders in the higher education sector find the information produced by FINEEC's evaluations useful. 94% answered positively to the question “Have you used the information from FINEEC’s evaluations in your work/unit/the organisation you represent?” In addition, the results show that the HEIs and stakeholders have a very positive view of the agency's reputation: 41% viewed the reputation as very good, 52% as quite good, 7% as somewhat poor and none as very poor. Likewise, the feedback on the interaction with the agency was overwhelmingly positive. 59% of the HEIs responded that they were very satisfied with the cooperation and 28% were somewhat satisfied. Only 6% were not very satisfied and 7% had not cooperated with FINEEC.

The HEIs and stakeholders were also asked to describe their impression of FINEEC. The main themes that rise from the analysis of the open answers are trust and competence. Words used to describe the trustworthiness of the agency include reliable, independent, impartial, respectable, objective, incorruptible and neutral. Words associated with competence included professional, expert in evaluations, skilled and knowledgeable. The two most frequently used words describing FINEEC were professional and reliable. The study found very few negative associations; criticism included that the agency is seen as too bureaucratic and its methods are somewhat old-fashioned.

Based on the survey answers and audit feedback, it is possible to draw the conclusion that the evaluations are found useful and their effect enhancing by most HEIs and the relationship with FINEEC is marked by trust in the reliability and professional competence of the agency. According to the findings, HEIs are granted high trust by the agency in the enhancement-led approach, as opposed to adopting a more accountability-oriented, sanctions-based approach. Vice versa, the analysis of the feedback from HEIs shows that the institutions grant high trust to the quality assurance agency. As characterised in the normative/cognitive perspective, the Finnish system exhibits common values and norms shared between HEIs and the quality assurance agency on the purpose and significance of quality management practices. Institutions act responsibly for ensuring that academic standards are met, and overall operational quality is continuously and systematically improved. Quality work is integrated within routine academic and administrative operations. HEIs have become the main actors who, at the levels of policy and practice, own quality management processes. FINEEC’s role is to support the development of HEIs.

Some researchers and international experts have criticised the Finnish quality management system as too trusting and overly enhancement-led. There have been even some calls to include more accountability instruments in the system. Interestingly, as a recent study points out, the Finnish higher education funding model applied by the MoEC is heavily performance-based, and therefore accountability also plays a substantial role in Finnish higher education policy, even though it is not the preferred approach in external quality assurance. (Hansen et al., 2019).
Best practices in stakeholder engagement

In the enhancement-led approach applied in Finland, active stakeholder involvement is integrated to all stages and procedures of the national evaluation system: the planning of evaluations and design of new evaluations (e.g. the new audit model for HEIs), carrying out evaluations (e.g. experts in the audit teams and evaluation teams), and the formal decision making at the agency (e.g. the Higher Education Evaluation Committee). The following best practices are drawn from FINEEC’s manuals as well as the self-assessment prepared for the external review of the agency.

The quality audit model and process strongly encourage HEIs to engage internal and external stakeholders in the development of operations. Key internal stakeholders provide inputs and jointly prepare the self-evaluation document of the institution. The audit team then interviews representatives of various internal (management, faculty, students, support staff) and external stakeholders (regional partners, employers, business and research partners) during the site visit. The systematic engagement of stakeholders in the quality work of the HEI was one feature of an advanced quality system in the previous audit model. In the new audit model, the expectation is for staff members, students and external stakeholders to take part in the development of operations at the HEI, and for the HEI to engage in renewal and enhancement-oriented projects with its stakeholders.

As an example of stakeholder involvement by the agency, when FINEEC was preparing the 2016-2019 National Education Evaluation Plan, the agency invited a variety of stakeholders from municipal education departments, education providers across the education sectors, parent associations, student unions, research centres, regional councils, key regional employers and labour unions to a series of events organised around the country. Participants were asked to share ideas that were then analysed and adopted in the National Education Evaluation Plan (FINEEC, 2016b). Another best practice is the stakeholder engagement in the design of the new national audit model for HEIs. Besides staff from FINEEC, the planning group included representatives from university management, teaching staff, quality staff, student unions, and working life. All HEIs were invited to participate in a national seminar, where the draft of the new audit model was presented for discussion and improvement ideas were collected.

The procedures for stakeholder engagement are not occasional and symbolic, but systematic and impactful, hence promoting the consolidation of trusting relationships. The best practices for stakeholder involvement are marked by open interaction in an environment of mutual respect for finding shared values and norms, which according to the normative perspective, helps strengthen trust.

While FINEEC has been recognised externally for its efforts in the engagement of the higher education community, for instance in the development of the new audit model (Loukkola et al., 2017), there is still room for improvement. The external review panel of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) recommended the agency to ensure transparent and systematic dialogue and coordination with key stakeholders at the national level, including labour market organisations and relevant officials at the Ministry of Education and Culture (Loukkola et al., 2017).

Conclusions: Fostering trust in diverse contexts

As shown in the cases of Ethiopia and Finland, the understanding and application of trust may be dictated by cultural contexts. Exploring trust requires a comprehensive understanding of the specific context within which the concept is analysed. The perceptions of what trust is and how it can be built vary significantly across cultures and even within the same cultural context.

A higher education system characterised by normative instruments of trust-building and enhancement-led quality management may be more convenient for robust stakeholder engagement than a system with rationalist mechanisms of trust-building and accountability-oriented quality management. The active engagement of stakeholders in quality management procedures can be a key component for building trust in internal and external relationships.
external practices of quality management. The study identified best practices for active stakeholder involvement at all phases of quality assurance: from the planning and implementation to further improvement of evaluation procedures.

The paper suggests that the legal status of HEIs may have implications for trust relations with stakeholders. Governments may respond to the public-private divide with varying combinations of accountability-oriented and enhancement-led quality management procedures and apply some elements of rationalist and normative trust-building mechanisms (also argued in Stensaker and Maassen, 2015).

The findings seem to indicate that relying predominantly on either accountability-oriented or enhancement-led quality management is risky. As found in several previous studies, excessive emphasis on accountability may constrain the momentum and flexibility in responding to quality improvement demands (e.g. Rippin et al., 1994; Campbell and Roznsnyai, 2002; Newton, 2002) and may pressure HEIs into playing the ‘quality game’, symbolic compliance and impression management (e.g. Frazer, 1997; Harvey, 1998; Barrow, 1999; Newton, 2000, 2002; Genis, 2002; Harvey and Newton, 2004). Such an atmosphere can deter honest and critical self-reflection. On the contrary, over-emphasising improvement may lead to a vacuum where stakeholders start to demand the fulfilment of accountability requirements. It is important to find a balance between accountability and improvement, since solely focusing on either one leaves quality evaluations incomplete and does not fully meet the interests of internal and external stakeholders (Vroeijenstijn, 1995).

Although the balance between accountability and improvement and the overall nature of the relationship between key stakeholders in quality management processes are determined by the specific contexts and characteristics of higher education systems, it is possible to conclude that quality management systems with stronger trust relationships place more emphasis on supporting continuous quality improvements at HEIs, whereas those with weaker trust relationships primarily focus on ensuring accountability and compliance. The tension and balance between such competing, but complementary orientations shape the design and implementation of future quality management systems.

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References

Quality Assurance, Qualifications and Recognition: Fostering Trust in a Globalised World

Theme 3. Ensuring and promoting trust in a globalized context


Promoting trust through student engagement in the process of quality assurance: the case of Taiwan

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ABSTRACT

Trust in tertiary education provisions and its quality assurance has been the basic foundation of a sustainable and quality education. Promoting trustworthy and transparent tertiary education for students with diverse background has always been one of the main goals for quality assurance agencies in the around the world. However, even though students are considered as the center of all education systems, their voices may not necessarily be heard and even sometimes ignored during the quality assurance process, especially in the Asian context. Using the case of Taiwan, this research aims to understand how students can be efficiently engaged in the quality assurance process in the Asian context. This research also aims to explore how trusted tertiary education and its quality assurance are expected among these students and how quality assurance agencies can support this process of student engagement. Two national wide datasets based on students of 85 universities in Taiwan, which was collected by HEEACT during the second cycle of institutional accreditation from 2017 to 2018 are used in this research. Strong and positive correlation between the students' level of engagement the school promote and the level of satisfaction in the learning experience is expected. Please not that this study is a pilot study for the main case study which will be completed by the end of 2019.

KEYWORDS: Student Engagement, Student Expectation, Quality Assurance

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Over the past decade, student voice and student-centered teaching have been the rapidly growing research topics and trends in education (Blair & Valdez Noel, 2014; Elassy, 2013; Ferreira, Vidal, & Vieira, 2014, Harvey & Stensaker, 2008). Student's voice has long been engaged in the process of ensuring the quality of higher education in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) through the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). ESG has been taken into account of the various needs of students in its standards and consider the student as one of the critical stakeholders of quality assurance process of all nations in EHEA (Ferreira, Vidal, & Vieira, 2014). Student engagement (or student involvement in some context) is considered one of the keys of the reformation of the quality assurance system and processes around the world (Elassy, 2013). The growing significance of student's voice also influenced the reformation stage of national qualifications framework which many countries are currently going through, such as the Australian Qualifications Frameworks (PhillipsKPA, 2018). That is, student engagement plays a critical and powerful role in the development of quality higher education.

This research borrows the definition of student engagement from Coates (2005) which:

"... student engagement is concerned with the extent to which students are engaging in a range of educational activities that research has shown as likely to lead to high quality learning. Such activities might include active learning, involvement in enriching educational experiences, seeking guidance from staff or working collaboratively with other students." (Coates, 2005, p.26)

Thus, in this research, the concept of student engagements focuses on the practices of quality assurance which engage students' voice and also the involvement of students' actions in the process of assuring the teaching
and research quality of their higher education providers. For example, inviting student representatives to become part of the review panel of their universities during the institutional accreditation or audit process is a widely adopted method and most direct way of involving the students in the accreditation, audit and review process for higher education quality assurance.

Student engagement, however, has always been a debatable topic when it comes to the role it plays in the process of quality assurance in the higher education sector. Most studies support the positive impact of student engagement. Harvey and Stensaker (2008) suggest that student engagement should be the foundation of the internal quality assurance mechanism of all higher education institutions as students are the main stakeholders and also the centre of education. Harvey and Stensaker (2008) argue that since students are at the center of higher education, it is only reasonable for involving them in the process of assuring the quality of education they received. However, throughout the movement of engaging students in the quality assurance process, concerns were still often raised by other stakeholders of higher education quality assurance, such as the administrators and teachers in the universities (Hou et al., 2018; Okogbaa, 2016). For example, other stakeholders may be worried about that engaging students’ voices in the quality assurance process may be too messy and somehow unprofessional as students were not trained to review their educational system and are not mature enough to provide critical suggestions to the quality assurance process (Hou et al., 2018). These concerns of engaging students in the quality assurance process are, however, debatable.

However, as Okogbaa (2016) suggests in his research that the transformation of higher education, such as changing and shifting from traditional teacher-centered and professional dominance perspectives of quality assurance mindset to a more student-centered perspective, can be frightening and overwhelming for the institutions and those who were the authorities in the traditional system. Thus, this reflection of concerns and worries may arguably be part of the process that one nation needs to face when reforming its quality assurance strategies to a more student based and learning outcome based approach (Okogbaa, 2016). However, Coates (2005) argues that students should be given sufficient information and accurate knowledge of quality assurance before and during their engagement. This is one of the keys to ensuring the best outcome of such engagement (Coates, 2005).

There are many tools and methods of engaging students in the quality assurance process. Student evaluation is one of the most widely adopted methods for schools and quality assurance agencies in fulfilling the goal of engaging students in the quality assurance process (Blair & Valdez, 2014; Okogbaa, 2016). Brennan and Williams (2004) state that there are two main benefits of collecting feedback from students. Firstly, student evaluation could help the higher education providers to enhance the student experience of teaching and their learning. Secondly, it provides school critical information and evident for monitoring its quality and standards of education. Both benefits help the higher education providers in improving their efficiency and effectiveness of their program design and the entire development plan of the institutions (Brennan & Williams, 2004). One of the common tools for student evaluation are questionnaire and survey of the lessons, programs, and projects the students participate in, and also survey which evaluates students’ general learning experience and expectation as a whole (Blair & Valdez, 2014).

The best example of student evaluation through questionnaire is the National Student Survey (NSS) of the UK. Students whom students in the higher education sectors in the UK are highly encouraged to participate in this survey by each higher education provider they belong to and the results of the NSS are widely used as a reference for each higher education provider’s internal quality assurance process (Office for Students, 2018a). The providers use NSS results to reflect on their student experiences of each individual program and adjust the program structure and enhance the teaching quality of such courses according to the experience. The providers also used the NSS result to examine the learning environment they provided for their students, and use the results as one of the important references for the future planning of school development (Office for Students, 2018a). The survey was also used as an important tool for the external quality assurance process done by quality assurance agencies such as QAA and also the governmental higher education organizations, such as Office for Students of England. It is used as one of the key pieces of evidence in examining the performance of each higher education provider (Office for Students, 2018b).
**The Taiwanese Experience**

In most Asian countries, student engagement in the process of higher education quality assurance is somehow still lacking (Shah & Do, 2017). This is possibly due to the given expectation under the influence of Asian culture that students are regarded as passive receivers of education rather than the stakeholders who take initiative in deciding the direction of their education (Li, 2003; Ma & Tandon, 2014), let alone involving in planning and quality assuring their higher education (Chua & Lateef, 2014; Ng., 2009).

However, under the waves of globalization, the existing Asian culture which was once dominated by conservative instruction-based learning is now being challenged by a more student-centered and diverse learning trend. Promoting trusted, quality and student-centered education has gradually been the shifted focus of higher education among Asian countries (Hou et al., 2013). Student engagement in education planning and quality assurance process is one of the keys to realizing this trustworthy education for these Asian countries.

The understanding of student engagement in the quality assurance process of higher education under the Asian context is, however, still scant (Shah & Do, 2017). Thus, this research dedicates in exploring the current state of student engagement in quality assurance of higher education using the case study of student engagement experience in Taiwan higher education and its quality assurance.

HEEACT has been engaging students in the quality assurance process since the first cycle of institutional accreditation in 2011. HEEACT has been responding to the students’ expectations on quality assurance through the student surveys. In 2017, the new cycle of institutional accreditation started. In this second cycle of institutional accreditation, students were again invited to be involved in the process of accreditation by providing their opinions and expectations on how quality assurance should be like. This consistency in engaging students in the process of quality assurance is a unique case in the Asian context and is critical for understanding and developing trusted quality assurance systems for the Asian tertiary education. Thus, through understanding the case of student engagement in Taiwan, it is also possible to reflect on the situations of Asian student engagement. This research fills in the gap of the current literature on the field of student engagement in quality assurance in the Asian context.

**RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The aims of this research are:

- To understand the expectation from the Taiwanese students’ perspective of how a trusted and quality higher education should be provided and assured.
- To examine the current situations of student engagement in the process of university internal and external quality assurance in Taiwan.
- To explore how a national quality assurance agency can help in promoting and encouraging efficient student engagement.

Thus, based on these aims, the research questions are set out as:

- What are the current states of student engagement within the process of quality assurance in Taiwan?
- What are the expectations of quality culture from the students?
- How can quality assurance agency, i.e. HEEACT, provide support to the students for the enhancement of their engagement in the quality assurance process?

**RESEARCH METHODS**

This is an pilot study conducted as part of the case study of student engagement under the future INQAAHE research project in 2019, which will be applied by HEEACT. Quantitative methods are adopted in this research.

- Participants
A total of 85 universities in Taiwan which participated in the Second Cycle of Institutional Accreditation from 2017-2018 are selected. This includes a survey sample size of 3024 students participants. The sample size of student survey participants was selected according to the total population of the universities in order to increase the validity and reliability of the sample. For example, 50 students will be selected if the university is with more than 6,000 students, and only 5 if the university is with less than 100 students. See Table 1. for the full information of student survey sampling method.

Table 1. Sample Size of Student Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Size of School (Number of students)</th>
<th>Number of Student Survey Participation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More than 6000 Students</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 6000 more than 300</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From 300 to 101</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 100</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Data collection methods:

In the full case study, student survey, focus groups and document analysis will be used as data collection methods. But in this pilot study, student survey will be the main data collection method.

Overall, two questionnaires are designed to collect data from students who participate in the quality assurance process. The first questionnaire, Student Survey I, is designed to collect data which response to research question one and two. Questionnaires of Student Survey I are handed out to the students during the on-site visit process from 2017 to 2018. The second survey, Student Survey II, is designed to collect data for research question three. Questionnaires of Student Survey II are handed out to the students after the on-site visit process from 2017 to 2018.

Since this research is still ongoing research which will be conducted during January 2019 to December 2019, in this paper, only analysis results from data of the first half Student Survey II (in total 33 higher education institutions and 218 samples) will be presented. More result of Student Survey I will be present during the INQAAHE annual conference on March 2019 and also in the final report of this research.

For Student Survey II, the questionnaire is designed to understand the students' satisfaction of HEEACT's arrangement of Second Cycle Institution Accreditation and their engagement during the accreditation process. Different numbers of student survey will be given to the university according to the size of the university. A university with more than 6000 students was given 10 questionnaires and 10 students was invited to participate in the survey; 6 questionnaires to the universities which have less than 6000 more than 300 students; 4 questionnaires to the universities which have less than 300 more than 100 students

Overall, 218 students from the 33 universities filled in the questionnaire and the overall percentage of the return rate of the student questionnaire are 94.0%. The response rates of each university are presented in Table 1.
## Table 1. Response Rate of Student Survey II

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of University</th>
<th>Response Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Survey Number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MingDao University</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aletheia University</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOKO University</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kainan University</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Kang Ning</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republic of China Naval Academy</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republic of China Air Force Academy</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republic of China Army Academy</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taiwan University Shoufu</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Quemoy University</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open University of Kaohsiung</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taiwan Baptist Christian Seminary</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Taipei</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dharma Drum Institute of Liberal Arts</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taipei Christian Academy</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CTBC Financial Management College</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Taitung University</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tainan National University of the Arts</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Taiwan University of Sport</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INITIAL FINDINGS

The following sections will present the initial findings of this research, including the descriptive statistic of Student Survey I and the analysis of variance of the three different types of higher education institution and the students’ response to their engagement in the Second Cycle.

- Descriptive statistic of Student Survey I

According to Student Survey II, over 80% of the students agreed that the interview process and schedule were proper for them and only less than 1% disagree that the schedule were suitable for them (See Table 2.).
Table 2. Second Cycle of Institutional Accreditation: Student Interview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Schedule</th>
<th>Way of the Interview (One-to-one)</th>
<th>Interview Length</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>37 (18.8%)</td>
<td>43 (21.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>39 (19.9%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generally Agree</td>
<td>124 (63.0%)</td>
<td>112 (56.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>103 (52.6%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>30 (15.2%)</td>
<td>38 (19.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>46 (23.5%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generally Disagree</td>
<td>1 (0.5%)</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 (1.0%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5 (2.5%)</td>
<td>4 (2.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6 (3.0%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total</td>
<td>197 (100.0%)</td>
<td>197 (100.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>196 (100.0%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Similarly, around 80% of the students agree that one-to-one interview was suitable for them to participate in the Institutional Accreditation process and less than 1% of the students disagree. Over 80% of the students also agreed that 15-20 minutes interview was beneficial for their participation. Only 1% of the students disagree that the length was proper for the interview.

In general, the students suggested that a 15-20 minutes one-to-one interview was beneficial for them to be engaged in the Institutional Accreditation process of their universities. That is, this may suggest that Taiwanese students prefer a short one-to-one interview as one of the ways of participating in the institutional quality assurance process.

As for the awareness of quality assurance process, Student Survey II uses three questions to identify how the students are aware of the Institutional Accreditation process, including “The university did promote more or change their promotion strategy about the Second Cycle of Institutional Accreditation comparing to the First Cycle of Institutional Accreditation”, “The accreditation result” and “Overall satisfaction of the institutional accreditation process.”

Through these survey questions, students’ awareness of the Institutional Awareness before and after the onsite visit was identified. For example, “The university did promote more or change their promotion strategy about the Second Cycle of Institutional Accreditation comparing to the First Cycle of Institutional Accreditation” showed whether the students received information about the Second Cycle of Institutional Accreditation and if they were aware of the differences the institutions made between their promotion of the First Cycle and the Second Cycle. As for “Accreditation Result”, it shows whether the students were aware of the announcement of the result and kept following up the accreditation process after their participation in the onsite visit.

Overall, 58.7% of the students were aware of the changes the university made in promoting the Second Cycle of Institutional Accreditation. (See Table 3)

Table 3. The changes in the promotion of Institutional Accreditation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>%</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>26 (13.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generally Agree</td>
<td>89 (45.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>68 (34.7%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Quality Assurance, Qualifications and Recognition: Fostering Trust in a Globalised World
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As for the accreditation result, over 68.9% of the students are satisfied with the accreditation result of their institution.

Table 4. Students’ Satisfaction with the Accreditation Result

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>%</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very satisfied</td>
<td>31 (15.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfied</td>
<td>104 (53.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither satisfied or unsatisfied</td>
<td>59 (30.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsatisfied</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very unsatisfied</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2 (1.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>196 (100.0%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As for how the students received the accreditation result, over 50% of the students received it from the school announcement through their website, 28% received the information from their teacher or peers, and over 10% received the information from the website of HEEACT. Only around 9% received it through other media and resources.

Table 5 The Resources of Learning the Accreditation Result

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resource</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School announcement</td>
<td>100 (51.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HEEACT homepage</td>
<td>21 (10.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media</td>
<td>5 (2.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers and Peers in the institution</td>
<td>54 (28.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>13 (6.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>193 (100.0%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In general, over 82% of the students agreed that the interview process and schedule of Second Cycle Institutional Accreditation is proper for them during their participation in the Second Cycle (See Table 2). Most
students agreed that the one to one interview was a good method for them to participate in the Institutional Accreditation process. As for the length of the interview, 73% of the student suggested that the length was proper (See Table 2). As for the survey question “The university did promote more or change their promotion strategy about the Second Cycle of Institutional Accreditation comparing to the First Cycle of Institutional Accreditation”, “The accreditation result” and “Overall satisfaction of the institutional accreditation process.”, most of the students were positive about the presentation and result of the Second Cycle of Institutional Accreditation.

**Analysis of variance of different types of universities and the students’ responses according to the survey questions**

In order to explore the differences of students’ responses from three types of higher education institutions: national, private, and other types of higher education institutions (including open universities, religion and theology universities, military universities and police universities). The following presents the three parts of the analysis result.

**A. the variance analysis of “three types of universities” and “students’ responses to the interview during the onsite visit”**

Among the results of the analysis of variance between students’ responses to the interview during the onsite visit, only the “length of the interview” is significant at p<0.05 level. Through multiple comparisons, the result shows that the students from private universities are more likely to agree that the length is proper for their engagement comparing to students from national universities (See Table 6.)

**Table 6. Students’ Responses to Onsite Visit Interview among the Three Types of Universities**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Question</th>
<th>School Type</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Post hoc</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interview Schedule</td>
<td>National</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>2.16</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>1.97</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td>1.44</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Others</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>1.95</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ways of Interview (one-to-one)</td>
<td>National</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>2.13</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>1.92</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>1.66</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Others</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>1.93</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview Length</td>
<td>National</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>2.33</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>1.95</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>3.60*</td>
<td>Private</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Others</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td></td>
<td>National</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p<0.05

Table 6. indicates the F score between 1.44 to3.60 between the three types of Universities and the three survey questions, including “interview schedule”, “one-to-one interview” and “interview length”, and only the interview length was significant and requires multiple comparisons. And the result of the multiple comparisons of the three types of Universities indicates that the mean of the national universities is 2.33 lower than the mean of the private universities, which is at 1.93 (See Table 6.).

**B. the variance analysis of “three types of universities” and “students’ responses to the changes in the promotion of Institutional Accreditation”**

The results of the analysis of variance of students’ responses to the changes in the promotion of Institutional Accreditation is significant at p<0.05 level. After the multiple analysis, students from other universities are more
likely to agree that there are changes in the promotion their institution made for the Second Cycle of Institutional Accreditation (See Table 7.).

Table 7. Students’ Responses to Changes in Accreditation Promotion among the Three Types of Universities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Universities (%)</th>
<th>National</th>
<th>Private</th>
<th>Others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>12.9%</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
<td>18.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generally Agree</td>
<td>31.4%</td>
<td>57.5%</td>
<td>49.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>45.7%</td>
<td>28.8%</td>
<td>30.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generally Disagree</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p<0.05

C. the variance analysis of “three types of universities” and “students’ responses to the accreditation results”

The results of the analysis of variance of students’ responses to the accreditation result are significant at p<0.05 level among the three types of Universities. After the multiple analysis, students from other universities are more likely to be satisfied than the other two types of universities regarding the accreditation result of their institution (See Table 8.).

Table 8. Students’ Responses to Accreditation Results among the Three Types of Universities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Universities (%)</th>
<th>National</th>
<th>National</th>
<th>National</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very satisfied</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfied</td>
<td>32.9%</td>
<td>60.3%</td>
<td>51.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither satisfied or unsatisfied</td>
<td>40.0%</td>
<td>28.8%</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsatisfied</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very unsatisfied</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
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*p<0.05

SHORT CONCLUSION

Overall, to the current state, these initial research findings suggested that the universities students in Taiwan were aware of the external quality assurance process done by HEEACT. And most of the students provide positive feedback to the ways of how HEEACT engaged these students, which is, through the short one-to-one interview. This pilot research also indicates that students from different universities may have a different expectation of how they could engage in the external quality assurance process of their universities. Even
though this research is still at its initial stage, the findings already show potential for deepening the understanding of Taiwanese student’s engagement in the quality assurance process and also help to explore their expectation of quality higher education.

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From the comparative study of Taiwan and Japan to examine stakeholder engagement: The HEEACT experience

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ABSTRACT
Stakeholder engagement has become a widely discussed issue in higher education. To provided diverse perspectives from university and QA agency key persons on quality assurance mechanism, the national QA agencies in Taiwan and Japan, the Higher Education Evaluation and Accreditation Council of Taiwan (HEEACT) and the National Institution for Academic Degrees and Quality Enhancement (NIAD-QE), have conducted the research project “Assessment of Learning Outcomes and Internal Quality Assurance Building in Higher Education In Japan and Taiwan: The Role of External Quality Assurance Agencies and Universities”. According to the analysis and comparison of the research results of Taiwan and Japan, this study aims to examine the views of higher education institutions on QA related issues and to explore possible ways of enhancing stakeholder trust based on the experience of HEEACT in Taiwan.

INTRODUCTION
Stakeholder engagement has become a widely discussed issue in higher education. According to Beerkens and Udam (2017), stakeholder are invited to advise on national policies and supranational initiatives (OECD, 2002), they are expected to serve in university boards and other advisory bodies (Stensaker & Vabø, 2013,), and their input is recommended for curriculum development and quality evaluation (Diamond, 2008). By a classic definition, a stakeholder is “any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization’s objectives” (Freeman, 1984; Beerkens & Udam, 2017), usually categorized as internal (e.g. university leaders, employees, students) and external stakeholders (e.g. employers, various societal actors, media). Academic interest in the topic of how stakeholders interact with the higher education quality assurance system, so a number of recent articles study issues like stakeholder identification, stakeholder management, and stakeholders’ expectations to higher education (Alves, Mainardes, and Raposo, 2010; Beerkens & Udam, 2017).

In Taiwan and Japan, Higher Education Evaluation and Accreditation Council of Taiwan (HEEACT) collaborate with the National Institution for Academic Degrees and Quality Enhancement (NIAD-QE) of Japan received research funding from INQAAHE to conduct the project of “Assessment of Learning Outcomes and Internal Quality Assurance Building in Higher Education In Japan and Taiwan: The Role of External Quality Assurance Agencies and Universities”. This project collected opinions from university representatives and QA agency key persons, which provided diverse perspectives on how higher education institutions in Taiwan and Japan have structured measures of student learning outcomes and build internal QA mechanisms. As one of the stakeholders in higher education, the university representatives’ opinions on the quality assurance of higher education in the research can reflect the confidence level of higher education institutions in QA agency.

Therefore, this study aims to discuss how to enhance the trust of universities in QA agencies or mechanism from the perspective of Taiwan’s experience through the project research results. This study also mentions the challenge of stakeholder engagement in QA to point out the possible direction of future improvement.
THE TAIWAN AND JAPAN RESEARCH PROJECT DESIGN AND RESULTS

The project context

In recent years, Taiwan and Japan have both reformed their higher education systems in response to international economic competition and technology innovation. At the same time, these higher education institutions have faced increasing demands to produce better quality in teaching and research. These demands create a stronger interest in developing meaningful, measurable student learning outcomes. Consistent with the global trends in the area of QA, the national QA agencies in Taiwan and Japan, HEEACT and NIAD-QE, have also emphasized the assessment of learning outcomes and internal QA building in their review activities.

In Taiwan, under heavy public pressure to take stronger steps to ensure higher education quality recently, Taiwan's Ministry of Education (MOE) announced a new policy that would emphasize more on the evidence of educational effectiveness and student learning in the next cycle of program and institutional accreditations. Moreover, with regard to the important stream of government funding, known as “Excellent Teaching Programs,” it stated that all applicants for funding would be reviewed and selected according to a common set of criteria, including teaching quality, student learning effectiveness, and curriculum and program planning. In Taiwan's 2011 institutional accreditation, 81 institutions were requested to identify a set of generally desired attributes and core competencies for graduates and explain how the intended learning outcomes would be achieved through an internal QA mechanism. Furthermore, institutions must establish a reliable assessment system that yields relevant evidence of performance. In the second cycle of program accreditation, student learning outcomes must be embedded in each standard. To respond to global trends and the public demand for greater educational accountability, Taiwan's government has implemented actions designed to establish more student learning–based model of quality assurance in higher education. Taiwan's universities and colleges are also encouraged to develop curriculum maps to help learners select core and elective courses that will enable them to cultivate the personal and professional competencies required in the job market.

In Japan, a proposal released by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) in 2008 became a major driver pushing universities to stress learning outcomes and internal QA. The government indicated the expected learning outcomes or competencies that university graduates should possess. The term “internal quality assurance” made its first appearance in Japanese higher education in this proposal in a reference to the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) of 2005. The document stated clearly that the initial responsibility for assuring quality and improving university education, as well as for ensuring the value of academic degrees, lies with universities themselves. The proposal emphasized the importance of self-evaluation and further indicated that third-party evaluations should include a standard covering whether a university has developed an internal QA system based on effective self-evaluation and the Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA) cycle.

Despite this recent emphasis on learning outcomes and internal QA in the higher education community in both Taiwan and Japan, inadequate research has been conducted on the actual QA conditions at these universities; moreover, no comparative study between Taiwan and Japan on these topics has been attempted. Therefore, NIAD-QE applied the research project for INQAAHE funding. The main purpose of this project is to determine how higher education institutions in Japan and Taiwan have structured measures of learning outcomes and built internal QA mechanisms.

The project design

In order to collect the opinions of universities and QA agencies, the project mainly adopts qualitative research approaches, including document analysis, interview, and focus groups. The project has been analyzed 193 universities’ (69 in Taiwan, 124 in Japan) self-reports that refer to learning outcomes assessment and internal QA to understand what efforts and initiatives universities have demonstrated in terms of assuring their quality and building internal QA. After the document analysis, the project conducted two different types of interviews: 1) interviews with key persons of QA agencies- HEEACT and NIAD-QE and 2) interview with universities. Interview with key persons of HEEACT and NIAD-QE investigated the background, reasons, intentions, and challenges of why/how they have designed and implemented their QA framework and standards in learning.
outcome assessment and building internal QA. Then, the project had 10 universities (5 in Taiwan, 5 in Japan), including faculty members and administrators and examined how they perceive the benefits from QA framework of HEEACT or NIAD-QE and in contrast, they felt challenging in terms of assessing student learning outcomes as well as building internal QA mechanism in the context of accreditation.

The comparative analysis results

Based on the research results of Taiwan and Japan, the comparative analysis conclusions as follows:

1. Definition of learning outcomes

Both Taiwan and Japan mentioned that it is challenging to have learning outcomes at the ‘institutional’ level, rather than at the ‘program’ level. As part of institutional accreditation, NIAD-QE has reviewed outcomes in terms of the whole institution but has recently required an academic program (not only at institution level) to develop and measure its intended learning outcomes. In other words, the assessment of learning outcomes has shifted from institution to program in Japan. HEEACT in Taiwan has implemented a QA system at both institution and program level, though the program evaluation became voluntary in 2012. Unlike in Japan, Taiwan has some experience in program accreditation; therefore, universities feel more comfortable with defining and assessing learning outcomes at the program level.

2. Assessment of learning outcomes

Taiwan and Japan faced similar challenges; QA key persons question whether it is possible to show student performance using numerical values; most universities use numbers and figures such as retention rates, employment rates, license pass rates, and progression rates to show student performance, but some performances are impossible to present with numbers. However, according to university self-evaluation reports of Taiwan, some universities have shown multiple assessment methods such as teaching assessment questionnaires, student core check questionnaires, English proficiency assessments, databases or systems to track student learning and e-portfolios. Moreover, HEEACT key persons suggest that universities analyze opinions of graduates and employers through questionnaires and telephone interviews as a way of improving the management in universities. Another challenge in Taiwan is how to define core competencies which are compatible with course content or curriculum. It is also difficult for HEEACT to explain to universities about inconsistencies and to understand issues from their perspective.

3. Challenges of internal QA building

The idea of internal QA is the university has an initial responsibility to assure and improve its quality. In both Japan and Taiwan, it seems that assessing learning outcomes has become a more common activity in today’s universities; however, it remains a challenge to apply the assessment results to lead to further improvement, which eventually connects to an effective internal QA mechanism. To activate an internal QA system, the motivation has to come from within.

In Taiwan, University focus groups pointed out that unclear definitions of student learning outcomes and assessments and a lack of understanding of the concept of internal QA are common problems among universities. In other words, the link between learning outcomes and internal QA is not clearly recognized. As in Japan, multiple methods and tools in the assessment of learning outcomes have been introduced; however, these activities tend to be seen as independent efforts and it is challenging for all university staff to understand why these initiatives are taken. It also showed that universities are generally passive in developing internal QA and need HEEACT to conduct follow-ups. HEEACT sometimes set up discussion platforms for universities to exchange ideas or ask the staff at universities to share their own experiences regarding the development of quality assurance. It is important that the university staff in both Japan and Taiwan understand and share the purpose of assessing student learning outcomes and implementing institutional research.

4. The role of the QA agency

Both HEEACT and NIAD-QE have developed their QA framework and standards modeled on the U.S. and/or European countries. For accountability and improvement, these QA agencies have emphasized how important it is for each university to define, measure, and assess its expected learning outcomes, eventually promoting its
own internal QA mechanism. Although the idea is commonly understood, it remains a challenge to take action in reality. Amid some confusion, the following questions have emerged at universities: what are learning outcomes? How should we measure them? What does it mean to have an internal QA function? Universities in both Taiwan and Japan shared similar views about the role of the QA agency in terms of assessing learning outcomes as well as building internal QA mechanisms in universities. In Japan, NIAD-QE is described as having ‘drive’ or ‘leverage’ and being an ‘external eye’, while universities in Taiwan perceived HEEACT as an important ‘driver’ or ‘reference guideline’ for universities; therefore, all the QA indicators formulated by HEEACT form the basis for the establishment of an internal QA mechanism that universities ‘imitate’. Without QA agencies, many universities in both countries believe that it would be challenging to carry out the internal change in terms of assessing learning outcomes and implementing internal QA. The study reaffirmed that the accreditation standards and the process of external QA agencies still have an influence on how universities proceed with their own QA. It has been more than ten years since HEEACT and NIAD-QE were established; these external eyes might sometimes run the risk of hindering the autonomy or independence of an institution, but it will take time for a QA culture to be truly embedded in universities. In the meantime, external QA agencies are expected to act as gatekeepers or guides to provide information and resources to support universities when needed.

TRUST BUILDING: HEEACT’S EXPERIENCE

According to the analysis and comparison of the research results of Taiwan and Japan as above, we can understand the views of higher education stakeholders on quality assurance, which is helpful to promote the development of the trust and interaction between quality assurance agencies and stakeholders.

According to the focus group interview with the university staff in Taiwan, one of the presidents of the universities mentioned that some of the most important aspects of HEEACT are its international networks and also its connections with other QA agencies around the world. The university president said:

“HEEACT should always keep being the important information platform for us. HEEACT have a lot of connections with other international agencies. We need to learn the international trends, this is very important for us.”

Another administrator from universities also mentioned:

“HEEACT has an indicative role for the university, and whether the QA mechanism, standards, or related evaluation activities, it is important guidance for the university to plan or implement the QA.”

Based on the interviews results, it can be seen that HEEACT is a reliable and trustworthy role for the university, which can guide the university to have a more appropriate development in QA. In 2017, the Taiwan government announced that it would no longer conduct program accreditation at universities. Under the new QA policy, universities are able to choose one of the following accreditors as an external examiner to accredit programs: HEEACT, recognized local accreditors, and international accreditors. Moreover, universities can also determine by themselves if they would like to either undergo a self-accreditation process or develop its own internal QA mechanism at the program level. At the same time, HEEACT is thus playing an additional role as recognition body to support the universities in the preparation of the self-accreditation recognition process on the program.

In response to the challenges ahead, the HEEACT is expected to change the traditional role so as to maximize its full capacity in this fast-changing and competitive age. Since 2016, HEEACT has been working on the organizational transformation and task adjustment step by step. Based on the analysis on the needs of local providers and compliance with national higher education development, HEEACT has formulated four major directions and strategies for future development: “Quality Gatekeeper”, “Capacity Developer”, “Connector between international and local context”, and “Future Thinker”.

1. Quality Gatekeeper”: Accreditor, Recognition body, and Evaluator

HEEACT would continue to conduct institutional accreditation in compliance with national higher education policy as a national accreditor. In addition, HEEACT would support the new self-accreditation policy as a recognition body to evaluate the QA mechanism and final reports of self-accrediting institutions. In addition, commissioned by the government, HEEACT will act as a recognition body of local and international accreditors.
HEEACT will play the role of an evaluator to monitor the university’s performances and accountability awarded by the MoE projects, such as MoE Monitoring Project for Student Rights and Learning Quality in Universities and Colleges, Higher Education Sprout Project, Planning and Implementation for Teachers’ Education Evaluation.

2. International Connector: international Export and Integration/ Outreach

HEEACT has been a full member of INQAAHE and APON since 2008 and a member of AIR since 2015. In 2016, HEEACT also joined the CHEA International Quality Group (CIGQ) to broaden its international working experience. Currently, HEEACT has 17 alliance partners worldwide and has implemented international cooperation activities such as QA research project and staff exchange program with HEEACT partners. In addition, HEEACT holds the international conference annually, such as “QA 4.0 in Higher Education: Innovation and Transformation” International conference in 2018. It was host all 18 renowned speakers, of whom nine are experts and professionals in charge of different QA agencies in various countries. During the two days, many speakers echoed the overall theme that QA should be more comprehensive at both the national and institutional levels to ensure that the best processes and practices are implemented by education providers. A total of seven sessions explored new and upcoming roles and trends regarding QA systems, national and global perspectives on accreditation and qualification, formal and non-formal education contexts, and new policy formation in Taiwan.

3. Capacity Builder: QA Talent Development and Training

Professionalism is the cornerstone which guarantees that QA mechanisms enjoy public credibility. To promote increased professionalization of evaluation and accreditation of higher education in Taiwan, reviewers must receive specialized training to increase their level of professionalism. Additionally, HEEACT also published the Evaluation Bimonthly journal to provide information and knowledge on higher education QA to the university and the general public. The Evaluation Bimonthly cooperate with the Institute of Engineering Education Taiwan (IEET), and Taiwan Assessment and Evaluation Association (TWAEA) in 2014, IEET took on the role of co-publisher, with TWAEA taking on that of the sponsor. To increase the influence and visibility, The Evaluation Bimonthly has signed an agreement with the internet news media “United Daily News” in 2016, giving Chinese-speakers spanning the globe a chance to read Evaluation Bimonthly articles right on the UDN website (http://udn.com).

4. Future Think Tank: Research and QA policy Think Tank

HEEACT would make great efforts to build its research capacity in order to provide good advice on government’ HE and QA policymaking. In addition, HEEACT would oversee the contemporary issues and global trends in higher education to assist the government to build up the strategies in Taiwan higher education development.

In order to broaden international academic perspectives and knowledge circles, HEEACT established a collaborative relationship with world-renowned Emerald Publishing, to publish an online journal “Higher Education Evaluation and Development” (HEED). HEED is a quality English journal founded by HEEACT and has been jointly published with Asia-Pacific Quality Network (APQN) since 2014, thus becoming APQN’s membership journal. HEED is a scholarly refereed journal that aims to encourage research in higher education evaluation and development, raising the standard of evaluation research and sharing the discoveries worldwide. Original papers, research outcomes, case studies, and reviews are published through this platform. HEED is published 2 issues per annum.

HEEACT as a national QA agency, it is time for the national accredditor to transform itself from a traditional role, a quality regulator, basic quality gatekeeper, or project convener into new multi-roles, quality improvement instigator, capacity developer, and even future thinker, as Wolff (2011) suggests. Therefore, HEEACT began to develop a new partnership with the government and universities and is ready to adopt a new risk-based approach. If quality assurance agencies would like to demonstrate accountability to higher education stakeholders domestically, as well as internationally, ‘it is essential to provide the appropriate education and training program to the reviewers and agency staff who are involved in the review process and results’ (Woodhouse, 2016, p. 3; Hou et al., 2018). Hence, it can be foreseen that professionalism and...
internationalization would be a future manifestation of quality assurance in Taiwan higher education (Hou et al., 2018), and this will be an important way to enhance the trust of stakeholders in QA agency.

CHALLENGES

As mentioned above, the QA agency plays a guiding role for universities in Taiwan and Japan. In particular, HEEACT in Taiwan has been cultivating international cooperation for years, and universities attach great importance to the international platform established by HEEACT. Therefore, HEEACT will continue its efforts in internationalization in the future, so that universities can rely more on HEEACT.

On the other hand, in addition to universities, two stakeholder groups in particular have gained a widely accepted role in various higher education affairs—students and employers in the last two decades (Smeby & Stensaker, 1999). As the most important stakeholders in higher education, student's voice has been the issue of the research topic in recent years. Unlike Europe, student engagement in the process of higher education quality assurance is somehow still lacking in most Asian countries (Shah & Do, 2017). This is possibly due to the given expectation under the influence of Asian culture that students are regarded as passive receivers of education rather than the stakeholders who take initiative in deciding the direction of their education (Li, 2003; Ma & Tandon, 2014), let alone involving in planning and quality assuring their higher education (Chua & Lateef, 2014; Ng, 2009).

However, under the waves of globalization, the existing Asian culture which was once dominated by conservative instruction-based learning is now being challenged by a more student-centered and diverse learning trend. Promoting trusted, quality and student-centered education have gradually been the shifted focus of higher education among Asian countries (Hou et al., 2018). Student engagement in education planning and quality assurance process is one of the keys to realizing this trustworthy education for these Asian countries. Therefore, HEEACT will focus on related issues of student engagement and explore how to make students' voices prominent in the QA process. With more stakeholders engaged, the quality of QA may be more trustworthy.

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Learning outcomes: building the trust for higher education among students

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SUMMARY
“What was I supposed to gain from this?” is a question students often ask after finishing their course unit. Learning outcomes - the “what” students are supposed to achieve from any course unit, are considered to be the starting point of the learning and teaching process which ought to lead to the desired learning outcomes (Biggs & Tang, 2011). Literature shows that learning outcomes serve many purposes in higher education which all aim to help to build trust for students and employers. On one hand, learning outcomes ought to support the implementation of student-centred learning paradigm and help universities to provide more individualized learning paths for diverse groups of students (Adam, 2008). Secondly, learning outcomes ought to provide transparency and address the skills, knowledge and attitudes needed by the labour market (Leuven Communiqué, 2009). Thirdly, learning outcomes are valuable for improving the quality of higher education (Cedefop, 2017).

Although, there is an agreement of the usefulness of learning outcomes among practitioners and politicians, several questions have been posed about how all the aims of learning outcomes are achieved in practice. Research has shown that there is still a considerable difference between what is offered by education and what are the labour market needs (Cedefop, 2017; Sadler, 2016). Little is known about the quality of learning outcomes within courses and the actual state of learning outcomes in higher education (Schoepp, 2017). Moreover, it has been argued that it is not given that a particular design of learning outcomes will add the expected value to students learning (Cedefop, 2017). All these tensions and concerns highlight that the topic of using learning outcomes for various purposes may not be taken with ease. The current study aims at contributing to the understanding of how the design of learning outcomes relates to students’ perceptions of their achievement of the learning outcomes, their motivation and engagement.

The study was conducted in six higher education institutions in Estonia. The sample consisted of 1329 students who gave feedback to the 78 course units using eVALUate student evaluation survey. In addition, detailed data of 380 learning outcomes within these 78 course units was gathered. First, qualitative content analysis was conducted to analyse learning outcomes from each course unit outline based on the levels of cognitive demand according to Bloom’s Taxonomy. Secondly, students’ perceptions of their achievement of the learning outcomes, motivation and engagement were determined quantitatively. Then, the levels of learning outcomes and students’ perceptions were analysed using Pearson Chi square goodness of fit test to determine the association between learning outcomes’ levels (the design) and students’ perceptions of their achievement of
the learning outcomes, motivation and engagement with the course unit. Next, odds ratios were calculated to understand the effect size of the associations to the levels of learning outcomes.

The results of this study revealed that based on the levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy, 85% of learning outcomes in the surveyed course units were designed at the three lowest levels of cognitive demand (Remembering, Understanding, Applying) and surprisingly none at the highest level of cognitive demand (Creating). Accordingly, lower level learning outcomes might be the reason why the majority of students’ perceptions revealed that they achieved the course unit learning outcomes. However, it was concerning to find out that approximately 30% of students were not engaged to make the best use of their learning possibilities, nor did they think about how they could have learned more effectively in the studied course unit. These results are worrying. Especially, since learning outcomes ought to support the development of active and autonomous learners, who have the skills and knowledge that respond to the needs of today’s and future societies (Theobald, Windsor, & Forster, 2018). If students are not engaged to their learning, then the question is, how much trust do they actually have for the outcome-based system?

The findings also demonstrated that the design of the learning outcomes relates to how students perceive their achievement of learning outcomes, motivation and engagement. Students were more likely to be engaged to their studies and motivated to achieve the learning outcomes, which were designed at the higher order of cognitive demand. The role of higher education institutions is to provide something new (Murtonen, Gruber, & Lehtinen, 2017), to prepare students for facing and developing the future society. The results of this study reflect that in order to respond to this role, Estonian higher education needs to upgrade their standards in teaching and learning, where students are guided how to develop and use higher order thinking skills for operating with facts. Higher order thinking skills are crucial for responding to the complex demands of the society (OECD, 2018).

Asking the question of “What was I supposed to gain from this” is a relevant input from students showing that the design of learning outcomes matters in building the trust for higher education among students. Hence, the key in building the trust for higher education lays on the involvement and participation of the stakeholders such as students and employers.

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Responsive quality assurance: Meeting the needs of diverse policy contexts within a single system

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ABSTRACT
This paper will consider how the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) has continued to provide both UK-wide cohesion and responded to increasing divergence on higher education policy and practice between the UK’s four ‘home’ nations: England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The paper will summarise how QAA’s approaches to quality assurance have evolved and provide detail on how a UK-wide approach to quality has been maintained and national needs met. This will be of interest to other agencies internationally as it demonstrates how a single agency can work effectively and responsively across sub-national boundaries in a devolved system.

INTRODUCTION
Over recent decades, the four nations of the United Kingdom have seen increasing divergence in higher education policy and practice. Yet internationally the UK is seen as a single provider of HE and the coherence that the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) brings is important in giving assurance to international agencies, institutions and governments. In the context of these growing differences between the nations, UK-wide coherence includes the UK Quality Code, a framework for quality assurance and agreed sets of baseline requirements. This paper will consider how the QAA has risen to the challenge of meeting the needs of diverse policy and quality assurance contexts, developing new methods of review, new sets of relationships and working on new mechanisms and indicators of quality.

UK CONTEXT: DEVELOPING RESPONSIVE, FLEXIBLE SOLUTIONS TO DIVERSE NEEDS AND CONTEXTS
Higher education in the UK operates within a devolved system, with a central government based in London with responsibility for English issues and UK matters not devolved to other nations. Scotland and Wales have had their own devolved legislatures and governments since 1999 with overall responsibility for education policy matters, while Northern Ireland has its own legislature and executive (established in 1998) although this has been suspended since January 2017. The passing of a new HE act in England has furthered the pace of change and other significant reforms lie ahead as the Welsh Government finalises its proposals to redevelop the whole post-compulsory education landscape. These developments, added to more established divergences, such as in approaches to fees (from no fees for Home and EU students in Scotland to, in England, some of the highest fees in the OECD) prompted QAA to work differently and innovatively, placing far greater stress on responsiveness and context.

While there has been increasing divergence of policies and practices across each UK nation, QAA maintains its UK-wide remit, with offices and staff across the UK in England, Scotland and in Wales. In its work QAA delivers both a UK-wide role and responds creatively to differing needs.

The UK Quality Code is maintained by QAA on behalf of the HE sector and was refreshed in 2018. It is a shared expression of quality and standards for the whole sector and describes the expectations and practices expected

1 A guide to devolution in the UK, BBC: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-35559447
in UK higher education. The process of reviewing and re-thinking how the Code could be represented to capture shared expectations and allow for diversity has not been without its challenges. The work was a strong example of an agency using its experience of involving sector and stakeholder voices to deliver change with a Code that should remain fit for purpose into the 2020s.

There are significant differences in the approaches to quality assurance across the UK. The Office for Students in England has moved its sector towards a more risk-based and outcomes-focused quality assurance system, as part of its role as a market regulator. It aims to ensure that new, potentially innovative, providers can enter the market. QAA, in its new role as the Designated Quality Body in England, has developed a review method to meet these needs. Scotland has maintained its own unique Quality Enhancement Framework, which includes Enhancement Theme projects and other focal points which are not used elsewhere in the UK. Here, Enhancement-led institutional review has evolved with strong partnership working ensuring it continues to deliver benefits to institutions and their students.

Northern Ireland operates a model that preceded the current changes in England although it is looking to move to a more enhancement-led model once political authority is restored and policy decisions can be made. Wales saw a Higher Education Act in 2015, as a result the funding and regulatory body developed a Quality Assessment Framework for Wales and moved from funding QAA to deliver external review to requiring that institutions commissioned external reviews that met its conditions. The HE sector collectively commissioned QAA to develop a new method for Wales and has moved to an enhancement-oriented model.

While there are differences in approach, in policy and in funding in each UK nation, QAA’s external review practices remain consistent in assessing the adherence to the expectations set out in the Quality Code.

QAA navigates the increasingly complex HE policy environment across the UK nations through its effective working relationships internally and with policy makers, higher education practitioners and students across the UK. Within QAA, staff work together in teams across the nations, ensuring that the work QAA does is mindful of the contexts within each nation. QAA staff regularly meet with government ministers and civil servants in each nation to discuss the pressing issues for the sector and share intelligence gained from across the UK. For example, in Scotland and Wales, a senior officer from each government sits on QAA’s Advisory Committees for the two countries, which in turn provide guidance and recommendations to the UK-wide QAA Board.

In maintaining UK oversight QAA has been supported by the UK Standing Committee for Quality Assessment. Its membership includes representatives from universities and the funding councils/ regulators of each nation but is independent of any one interest. The Committee has enabled divergence to develop while keeping firm hold of the enduring characteristics and values that unite all the UK’s HE provision.

Alongside maintaining the Quality Code on behalf of higher education, QAA continues to work on areas of common concern across the UK. A good example of this is QAA’s work related to academic integrity (some of which has received INQAAHE funding).

CONCLUSION

The example of the growing complexity within the UK helps QAA to continue to innovate, to think critically and constructively about the nature of external quality assurance as we head towards the 2020s, as such it may assist other agencies to reflect on approaches to maintain currency and relevance and how quality assurance can effectively balance consistency and different stakeholder interests.

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2 https://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code
3 https://www.qaa.ac.uk/scotland/quality-enhancement-framework
4 https://ukscqa.org.uk/
Quality assurance of joint programmes – a global challenge and possible responses

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ABSTRACT

The paper discusses the globally raising problem of quality assurance of joint programmes. These highly innovative and international educational opportunities need to struggle with a number of quality assurance related problems. The paper presents two initiatives aimed to tackle them and thus contribute to the global cooperation among higher education institutions in joint design and delivery of study programmes – the European Consortium for Accreditation in higher education (ECA) developed the Multilateral Agreement on the Mutual Recognition of Accreditation Results regarding Joint Programmes (MULTRA) and the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes. The former aims to strengthen the trust among quality assurance agencies – signatory of the MULTRA.

The second part of the paper describes the experience of practical use of the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes gained through the ImpEA project.

The paper concludes with the global opportunities for using both tools to boost trust in quality assurance and among higher education institutions.

INTRODUCTION

Joint programmes are set up to enhance the mobility of students and staff, to facilitate mutual learning and cooperation opportunities and to create programmes of excellence. While there has been a political will in many countries, and interest from institutions to create joint programmes, it is well known that they are complicated and laboursome to manage. Not least because of the complexity in satisfying the different (and potentially incompatible) quality assurance requirements in the different countries of the participating institutions. Additionally, the different national quality assurances procedures applying to a single joint programme have tended to look only at the part of the programme delivered in a given country, failing thus to fully embrace and evaluate the entirety of the programmes, i.e. bringing forth the value of its “jointness”. The main aim of this paper is to outline possible trust-based ways forward to strengthen global cooperation among higher education institutions and quality assurance agencies. It includes two recent developments in this area: MULTRA agreement and the European Approach to Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes.

THE JOINT PROGRAMMES LANDSCAPE

The European Commission estimates that there are approximately 4000 joint study programmes offered by the higher education institutions of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). The total global number remains unknown.

These specific, highly advanced study programmes are usually developed in close, joint cooperation among higher education institutions. They are defined as an integrated curriculum coordinated and offered jointly by
different higher education institutions and leading to a double/multiple or joint degree\(^1\). However, a significant number of those programmes are delivered not only by the European higher education institutions, but also by their partners from all over the world. That means that the more internationally diverse programme partnership the more complicated quality assurance becomes.

The programme consortium needs to satisfy multiple, overlapping or even mutually exclusive national accreditation requirements\(^2\). Moreover, due to those differences, the higher education institutions usually were usually not able to have the accreditation decision issued in one country recognised in another.

The European Consortium for Accreditation in higher education (ECA) recognised the problem of quality assurance of joint programmes and worked over the years to develop a solution for it. In 2010 ECA members launched the Multilateral Agreement on the Mutual Recognition of Accreditation Results regarding Joint Programmes (MULTRA\(^3\)). With MULTRA multiple procedures can be replaced by one single procedure. The MULTRA stands for a high level of trust between accreditation agencies. This trust between the partners is based on evidence gained through intense cooperation and observations of procedures amongst the MULTRA agencies.

MULTRA and the following ECA project JOQAR\(^4\) (Joint programmes: Quality Assurance and Recognition of degrees awarded) were one of the key milestones to the newest achievement in the area of accreditation of joint programmes. The European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes (European Approach), approved by the Bologna Follow-Up Group in October 2014 and adopted by the EHEA Ministers in their conference in Yerevan, in May 2015, was set up to address these issues and to provide a common framework for the external quality assurance of such programmes. However, the practical application of the European Approach still needs to face some challenges. Therefore, Polish Accreditation Committee established a very strong consortium and successfully applied for the Erasmus+ project ImpE\(^5\)A (Facilitating Implementation of the European Approach to Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes). In the following paper, the practical use of the European Approach will be pictured through the lenses of the ImpE\(^5\)A project.

The European Consortium for Accreditation for higher education (ECA) and the Multilateral Agreement on the Mutual Recognition of Accreditation Results regarding Joint Programmes (MULTRA)

The European Consortium for Accreditation in higher education (ECA) is an association of recognised accreditation and quality assurance agencies in Europe. The vision of ECA is to act as an internationally acknowledged driver of innovation in accreditation and quality assurance in higher education. With its expertise, networking and services ECA contributes to the implementation of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), promotes internationalisation of higher education and “state of the art” activities of its members. ECA was founded in 2003 with the primary aim of mutual recognition of accreditation and quality assurance decisions.

The objectives of the Association are:

- to achieve mutual recognition of accreditation and quality assurance decisions, to enhance the conditions for such mutual recognition, especially for joint programmes;
- to provide a platform for mutual learning and disseminating experiences with accreditation and accreditation-like practises;

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1. [https://www.eqar.eu/kb/joint-programmes/definitions/](https://www.eqar.eu/kb/joint-programmes/definitions/)
5. [www.impea.online](http://www.impea.online)
o to provide transparent information on quality; and
o to facilitate the internationalisation of institutions and students.

The rationale of the development of different tools to promote mutual recognition of accreditation and quality assurance decisions was that the ratification of the Lisbon recognition convention (1999) did not solve all recognition problems. The reality was, and in some cases still is, that institutions faced case to case decisions, and it was quite clear that mutually validated information about quality might facilitate recognition work. ECA concluded that mutual recognition agreements would simplify accreditation and recognition of joint programmes and mutual recognition initiatives would contribute to international convergence of external quality assurance. In addition, at the Bologna Ministers Conference, (Bergen, 2005) it was stated: “We underline the importance of cooperation between nationally recognised agencies with a view to enhancing the mutual recognition of accreditation or quality assurance decisions”.

With the objective of mutual recognition in mind, ECA started developing different activities and tools (Figure 1) with the purpose to:

- reduce existing barriers in recognition of foreign qualifications;
- enhance academic and professional mobility;
- increase transparency in higher education and
- give an opportunity for quality assurance agencies to learn from experiences and good practices of other agencies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities/Tools</th>
<th>Completion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Surveys of accreditation systems</td>
<td>2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accreditation profiles</td>
<td>2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mutual cooperations/observations</td>
<td>2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code of good practice</td>
<td>2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principles: selection of experts</td>
<td>2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equivalent accreditation frameworks</td>
<td>2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common publication format</td>
<td>2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agreement: no substantial differences</td>
<td>2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accreditation of joint programmes</td>
<td>2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External evaluation of ECA members</td>
<td>2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bilateral projects within ECA</td>
<td>2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint declaration ECA – ENIC/NARICs</td>
<td>2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Tool for Accreditation Decisions</td>
<td>2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal agreements on mutual recognition</td>
<td>2007</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1. ECA’s road map for mutual recognition.

This trust building process delivered a series of documents to increase mutual trust and transparency which would eventually facilitate mutual recognition of accreditation results and decisions:

- Code of Good Practice (2004). The Code of Good Practice lays down a set of standards and good practices regarding the member accreditation organisations of ECA. The Code additionally serves to support the internal quality assurance policies of ECA’s members.

- Principles for the Selection of Experts (2005). The selection of external experts is of key importance for any external quality assurance procedure. ECA members have agreed on a set of principles. These encompass among others the rules and regulations of the member agencies; transparency; authority; independence; confidentiality and objectivity.
Joint Declaration concerning the Automatic Recognition of Qualifications (2005). This Declaration is also called the Vienna Sententia. Members of ECA and the corresponding ENIC-NARICs of their countries signed this document in 2005. In it they lay down the preconditions that have to be met to start recognising each other’s qualifications automatically.

Principles for accreditation procedures regarding joint programmes (2007). In order to increase mutual trust and transparency, the members of ECA have agreed on the following principles regarding accreditation procedures for joint programmes.

Principles regarding learning outcomes in accreditation procedures (2009). The members of ECA agree that learning outcomes have to be taken into account during any assessment procedure in higher education. This contributes to the mutual recognition of accreditation decisions. In order to increase mutual trust and transparency, the members of ECA concur that accreditation procedures should take into account an agreed set of principles.

Recommendations for mutual recognition of institutional evaluations (2009). In June 2009 ECA members agreed on a set of recommendations for agencies with a view to the enhancement of mutual recognition of institutional evaluations (accreditations, audits or assessments).

Based on the previous experiences which were built in mutual trust and transparency, on 14 December 2010 ECA members launched the Multilateral Agreement on the Mutual Recognition of Accreditation Results regarding Joint Programmes (MULTRA). The purpose of the Multilateral Agreement on the Mutual Recognition of Accreditation Results regarding Joint Programmes (MULTRA) is to simplify the accreditation and recognition of joint programmes and degrees awarded and to provide an efficient way to expand mutual recognition to more European Higher Education Area countries. It enables joint programmes to be assessed by one quality assurance/accreditation agency but receive relevant legal outcomes, such as accreditation decisions, in all the relevant higher education systems. Before the launch of MULTRA in December 2010 twelve bilateral mutual recognition agreements between ECA members have been signed during the ECA conference in Barcelona in December 2007.

In order to join the MULTRA, there is an admission and observation procedure which is based on the fundament of mutual trust within ECA (Figure 2).

![Fundament of Mutual Trust ECA](image)

The admission procedure establishes that the interested agency must have a recent (not older than 5 years) external evaluation against the ESG, the ECA Code of Good Practice or against a set of standards that can be considered as equivalent. If this requirement is met, then ECA nominates two observers (who are members of a MULTRA agency) to carry out an on-site-observation. One observer should join a site-visit of a programme accreditation procedure, the other one should get evidence of the accreditation practice through discussions.
with the agency’s representatives. The observers use an observation format and should conclude their report with a recommendation. The observation report covers the following topics:

- Framework of the procedure
  - Structure of the accreditation framework (regulations…)
  - Accreditation standards
  - Additional requirements for the assessment of joint programmes
  - Focus of the accreditation procedure (e.g. input factors, internal quality assurance …)
  - Assessment of achievement of learning outcomes
  - Enhancement strategies for institutions
  - Responsibility for accreditation procedures
  - Steps in the accreditation procedure
  - Assessment rules and decision scale when accreditation is granted (e.g. excellent, insufficient; conditions, …)
  - Decision-making process of the agency (rules and responsibility)
  - Period of accreditation
  - Appeal system
  - Publication policy
  - Average number of procedures per year

- Site visit
  - The expert panel
  - The procedure
  - Learning outcomes
  - Self-documentation/-evaluation by the higher education institution and external review
  - Independence and competence of the external panels
  - Enhancement led reviews
  - Publicity of quality standards and criteria (aligned with international standards)

ECA formally checks the observation report and forwards the report including a decision proposal to the MULTRA members who have to approve the admission. The MULTRA stands for a high level of trust between accreditation agencies. This trust is based on evidence gained through intense cooperation and observations of procedures amongst the MULTRA agencies. The observation is not meant to repeat the external evaluation of an agency, but aims to gain mutual trust through observing accreditation practice. The observation should provide evidence if the accreditation procedures and standards are free of significant differences from those of MULTRA agencies and if the results of accreditation procedures of joint programmes can thus be accepted by MULTRA agencies.

The signing accreditation organisations of the MULTRA agree to regard their accreditation procedures, standards and decisions/results as free of significant differences and confirm that within their competences they accept the decisions/results of the accreditation procedures of the other signing accreditation organisation when accrediting joint programmes; on the condition that the signing agencies continue to exchange information about their accreditation systems on a regular basis. Substantial changes of the accreditation systems should be communicated without delay. The signing accreditation organisations agree to give each other access to all relevant documents relating to the accreditation results. All documents must be treated confidentially until they are published.
The agreement is valid for 3 years. After a re-evaluation of the terms of the agreement it can be extended by consent of all parties. MULTRA was signed by 13 agencies in Austria, Colombia, Costa Rica, Denmark, France, Germany, Netherlands and Flanders, Poland, Slovenia, Spain.

In conclusion, ECA has successfully tested a new methodology to come to mutual recognition agreements. As already mentioned, ECA’s approach is based on systematic trust-building between agencies (step by step process involving co-operations on all levels).

Since 2017 ECA has been working on further development and dissemination of the MULTRA agreement. Methods and tools of ECA might also be useful for other accreditation and quality assurance agencies and the first steps are already been made as the collaboration in the INQAAHE funded project “Comparisons of QA systems, Review standards and Procedures, and Transparency in Taiwan and Indonesia: Capacity Building for Mutual Recognition at Joint/double degree Programs” sharing the experience gained during this process.

The European Approach to Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes and the ImpEA project

The European Approach provides a set of standards based on the agreed tools of the European Higher Education Area:

- Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the EHEA (ESG 2015),
- Qualifications Framework - EHEA,
- European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS).

Based on these tools it proposes a review methodology, which is in compliance with the ESG 2015. It facilitates an integrated approach that can genuinely reflect the joint character of the programmes, taking them as a whole, and addressing quality issues typical and often specific for joint programmes (e.g. consortium agreements, student support for mobility etc.). Consequently, the European Approach is intended to allow a programme consortium to engage in one single quality assurance or accreditation procedure, based on one set of standards, without consideration of additional national standards. The programme consortium should be able to choose any available agency (from one of the participating countries or from a third country) registered in the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR) to carry out the procedure. When properly implemented and recognised across the EHEA, the use of the European Approach is expected to significantly reduce the administrative burden for external quality assurance of joint programmes making them thus a more interesting and manageable form of international cooperation for European higher education institutions.

The European Approach is composed of a set of standards and related guidelines covering the following areas:

- eligibility;
- learning outcomes;
- study programme;
- admission and recognition;
- learning, teaching and assessment;
- student support; resources;
- transparency and documentation;
- quality assurance.

The European Approach document also outlines a procedure for the external evaluation of joint programmes. The model follows a typical external quality assurance process, as also described in the ESG, composed of a

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6 https://enqa.eu/index.php/home/egs/
self-assessment; a peer-review (with a site visit); a report and its publication; and adequate follow-up. It also covers possible decision making procedures and a system of appeals.

“Facilitating implementation of the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes (ImpEA)” is the Erasmus+ funded project aimed to support efficient implementation of the European Approach.

The project is carried out by the consortium of the following partners:

- Polish Accreditation Committee (PKA, Poland) – project leader
- European Consortium for Accreditation in Higher Education (ECA)
- European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)
- Agency for Quality Assurance through Accreditation of Study Programmes (AQAS, Germany)
- Agencia de Calidad del Sistema Universitario Vasco (Unibasq, Basque Country, Spain)
- Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań (Poland)
- The University of Deusto (Basque Country, Spain)
- Warsaw School of Tourism and Hospitality Management (Poland)
- The Carl von Ossietzky University of Oldenburg (Germany)
- European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR)

In order to obtain a better view of the situation in relation to the use of the European Approach, including real and perceived main challenges and difficulties in its use, the ImpEA project launched a survey in early 2018, addressing principally higher education institutions (and joint programmes), as well as quality assurance agencies. The survey gathered 46 responses from quality assurance agencies and 198 responses from higher education institutions.

Most of the participants from the higher education institutions are currently either a coordinator or a partner in at least one joint programme consortium. It is also worth noticing, that almost 20% of the respondents are not currently providing any joint programmes, but they do consider developing or joining them in the future.

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Added value of the European Approach

The European Approach was adopted based on a number of benefits it was expected to bring. Among these, specifically the ability of the Approach to evaluate the “jointness” of the programme and thus its specific character and added value; and to facilitate and rationalise the quality assurance processes making them less laboursome for higher education institutions. This latter was expected to encourage institutions to engage in more joint programmes by reducing the “red tape” attached.

To get a better understanding whether these expectations have been realised in practice, the survey asked the respondents to indicate what they saw as the main benefits of the European Approach. The most important ones are:

- The European Approach facilitates **integrated approaches** to QA of joint programmes
- External QA of joint programmes according to the European Approach **reflects their joint character**
- The European Approach **eases development of joint programmes** by setting agreed standards and tools
- The European Approach is **useful for internal QA** of joint programmes (respondents from HEIs only)
Quality assurance of joint programmes is useful for internal quality assurance of joint programmes.

European Approach eases development of joint programmes by setting agreed standards and tools.

External quality assurance of joint programmes according to the European Approach reflects their joint character.

European Approach facilitates integrated approaches to quality assurance of joint programmes.

Full implementation of the European Approach would significantly reduce my administrative burden related to external quality assurance.

European Approach definition of a joint programme is consistent with the official one used in my higher education system.

European Approach definition of a joint programme is consistent with my understanding of joint programme.

European Approach should replace existing external quality assurance procedure for joint programmes (if not happening already).

European Approach is more suitable for external quality assurance of joint programmes than currently used criteria.

The ImpEA project includes four accreditation procedures based on the European Approach framework. On the current stage of project implementation, two of them have been successfully completed and two are in the final phase.

During the process of preparations for those procedures, some key issues were identified which require extensive cooperation and trust between higher education institutions and quality assurance agencies. These are:

- Joint decision on the accreditation agency’s selection
- Synchronized planning and timing of the accreditation procedure, in particular regarding self-evaluation report development, site visit organization and recognition of the final decision
- Focus on the jointness aspects of the programme – the European Approach focuses mainly on the added value coming from the joint design, delivery and internal quality assurance of the programme
- Recognising and highlighting the role and added value of each of the programme consortium partners and its impact on the quality of the programme
- Cooperating prior and during the site visit – which includes timely delivery of all necessary students’ and programme documents, availability of the faculty, staff and students during the site visit for physical and online meetings and overall support in the process

Moreover, the ImpEA project procedures show also important lessons learnt for the trust building among quality assurance agencies in the following areas:

- Joint training of the panel experts – including development of the training methodology and deliver a training in a multinational and multicultural environment

Figure 4. ImpEA project survey results – perception of the added value of the European Approach
Selecting and working in a multinational panel of experts – inviting and cooperating with foreign experts, representing perspective of at least one other country from the programme consortium

Information exchange – from the very beginning of the accreditation process, the leading agency needs to be in touch with the partner agencies from other countries of the programme consortium as the open flow of information is of utmost importance for the effectiveness of the procedure

Recognition of the decision – according to the European Approach, the accreditation decision should be recognized by all involved EHEA countries without any additional requirements or criteria; this level of trust is possible based on the accountability and credibility of the agencies achieved through the EQAR registration procedure.

The experience gained through the ImpEA project indicates that there is a clear potential for scaling up of the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes. It is based on the very generic and shared values and principles of external quality assurance and thus, can be used globally. The practical implementation of the European Approach to Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes requires however a significant amount of trust. It is necessary not only for successful completion of a single accreditation procedure, which then eases and strengthens the cooperation among higher education institutions. But it also requires the strong policy-level support on the national and international levels, to overcome natural barriers coming from different cultures, legal frameworks, habits and practise. Nevertheless, the successful implementation of the European Approach through the ImpEA project show that this is an effort worth taking as it brings very tangible added value for all the parties directly involved in delivery of joint programmes.

Discussion and ways forward

ECA’s MULTRA has proven to be an effective methodology for cooperation among quality assurance agencies on recognition of their decision regarding joint programmes. Additionally, there are some lessons learnt – even if currently we know that there is a need to review the MULTRA agreement to adapt it to the new circumstances in Europe as it is the implementation of the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes. These lessons can be summarized as:

- Trust building process has increased mutual understanding among ECA members and was perceived to be a valuable learning experience;
- It is important to acknowledge and accept the existence of different legal prerequisites for accreditation; and
- The combination of formal agreements and practical co-operation projects has been particularly useful.

Current and early-stage results of the ImpEA project show a significant potential of the European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes. Full implementation of the latter brings closer not only the involved quality assurance agencies but also higher education institutions. Therefore, internal and external quality assurance can work in synergy based on the joint framework and methodology widely recognized in the European Higher Education Area.

Nevertheless, as it was indicated in the introduction to this paper, the joint programmes know no country or continental boundaries and become more and more global. Therefore, the need for more global cooperation on quality assurance of joint programmes becomes a necessity.

Based on the experience of the ECA MULTRA initiative and the ImpEA project we can draw some ways forward for further consideration. These could be:

- Continuing in the mutual recognition of quality assurance results/decisions using MULTRA methodology as an initial stage of the global cooperation for facing the global challenge of joint programmes;
- Exchange of information on changes in accreditation systems via structured quality assurance and accreditation networks;
- Stimulate higher education institutions and recognition authorities to make use of mutual recognition;
Quality assurance, Qualifications and Recognition: Fostering Trust in a Globalised World

Theme 3. Ensuring and promoting trust in a globalized context

- cooperation/integration of professional “quality labels”; and
- the development of intercontinental mutual recognition based on scaled-up European Approach for Quality Assurance of Joint Programmes and the experience and outcomes of the ImpEA project.

These ways forward might become a starting point for global discussion on the quality assurance of joint programmes, fostering global trust among key stakeholders. However, the next steps should also take into consideration the new challenges, coming from the much more complexity of the global higher education and quality assurance landscape.

References


Online sources:

https://www.eqar.eu/kb/joint-programmes/definitions/
http://ecahe.eu/w/index.php/JOQAR_2010-2013
www.impea.online
Dynamics of quality assurance in higher education in India: Issues and concern

Ganesh Hegde, Deputy Adviser, NAAC

ABSTRACT

During the last twenty years Higher Education and its institutions have been evolving in the fast changing socio-economic context. With this changing context appropriateness of the existing mechanism at quality assessment and issues concerning quality parameters also has been revisited. The UGC of India established the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) to assess and accredit Higher Education Institutions in India and ensure maintenance and improvement of quality in Higher Education.

The journeys of NAAC for the last twenty four years divulge that many initiatives and decisions of the central; state has been linked to the NAAC grading and outcome. Many schemes of MHRD, and UGC like Universities with Potential for Excellence (UPE) Universities of Excellence (UoE), Open and Distance Learning, Deemed to be University and finally majority of foreign Universities admit students from accredited institutions. Accreditation and Mutual recognition thereof plays a vital role in global level.

The Context:

During the last twenty years Higher Education and its institutions have been evolving in the fast changing socio-economic context. Transformation has been basically through technological, pedagogical, communication, market driven changes and also due to dynamics of higher education itself. Another key factor has been the progressive increase in enrolments and opening at Institute of Higher Learning both in private and public sector. This increase has been phenomenon and numbers must commensurate with quality. Consequently there is an urgent in assessing institutions quality parameters of this growth. Growth needs be quantity in numbers must not compromise on Quality.

With this changing context appropriateness of the existing mechanism at quality assessment and issues concerning quality parameters needs to be revisited to facilitate a deeper insight.

Present competitive world demands quality education. It means good academic environment, teaching-learning process, robust research; active campus life, smart classrooms, efficient, support services, infrastructure and ICT enabled library service and facility, its updation of books, journals and learning with reference materials etc. Emoluments of academic and support staff do matter. Today, improving the quality of education and campus life is the major concern of the higher education. Retention of the qualified and competent manpower both in Public and Private Education sector is a challenging task.

It is also true for the Govt. College, aided Colleges and even in private colleges to retain the staff is a challenging task for the managements. Employment generation and employability of the students are much spoken about.

The greater challenge on the part at institutions is to change the attitude of the students and their parents towards entrepreneurship. Starting start-up dreams and encouraging few students to job creaters instead of job seekers.

Moulding the students set of mind in group is the challenge of the faculty in the area of unknown like incubation centre as well innovating the new design, product and service. Institutions need to engage with different schemes of Government of India such as Stand Up India, Start up India, Skill India, Atal Innovation Mission
Quality Assurance, Qualifications and Recognition: Fostering Trust in a Globalised World
Theme 3. Ensuring and promoting trust in a globalized context

(AIM), Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojna (PMKVY), Computer Literacy, short term courses within the Institutions like Laptop Maintenance and Servicing, Mobile Servicing, Beauty Parlour, Computerized Financial Accounting, Digital Designing and Publication, Basic Photography and Videography and Dress Designing etc., The institutions can also run some of the programme in collaboration with reputed corporate houses like WIPRO, INFOSYS, TATA Consultancy, Intel, Microsoft, CISCO, bodies and Chamber of Commerce institutes like ASSOCHAM, CII, FICCI, well known institutions, TISS, TIFR, IUCAA, NCL, NCBS, NCB or with some linkages for research institutions, internship and student exchange etc., All facilities may not be available in the institution. In such cases offering the courses at a lower cost with collaboration would lead some students to learn required job skills in a short period while studying or after the study. Short term courses on foreign languages are increasing in metro cities and tier 2 cities. As everyone knows quality of a nation depends upon the quality of its citizen and the quality of the citizens in turn depends upon the quality of their education. In order to compete with the world economy, India needs to develop quality manpower with modern outlook with value education. There is a need to strengthen the Indian traditional educational system in fine arts, history, political science, philosophy, museology, music, Sanskrit education, yoga, yogic science, naturopathy, Ayurveda and siddha etc.,

Roots of our heritage and culture needs to be strengthened. We need not promote revert attitude yet we must not loose our roots. Ethical and moral values are relevant for modern age also.

India is country with various culture. Each and every state of Bharat is rich in its heritage. It is necessary to pay further attention to strengthen teaching and learning process. In past knowledge prospered in India through Guru – Shishya Parampara and today this is possible only through quality teaching learning process and environment ambience. Good governance of the higher education institutions is one such measure to assess their performance. Good performance of the institution helps them to attract more research projects, good students, parental support, and impeccable social image. Good governance is required to perform better in the competitive environment.

Size of the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)

During the last few years number of Higher Education Institutions has increased substantially. Many new Colleges and Universities of various kinds have come into existence. The chart below shows the increase in number of institutions from 2011 to 2017

Chart – I: Number of Universities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of University level (HEIs)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2011 - 2012</td>
<td>642</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012 - 2013</td>
<td>667</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013 - 2014</td>
<td>723</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014 - 2015</td>
<td>760</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015 - 2016</td>
<td>799</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016 - 2017</td>
<td>864</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source : AISHE data as on 31-03-018.
Today higher education system has seen radical changes in terms of employability. Today students are expected to have knowledge, skills and communication as a basic foundation. The stakeholders and employers seek at student among for team work, sincerity and above all the right attitude towards work in any organization. The globalised scenario demands all round improvement of quality and quantity assessment, identification at quality gap and strategy for quality improvement.
Thus the present paper looks into the dynamics of approach involved in the process of Quality Assurance agencies while assessing the Higher Education Institutions.

**NAAC as Process of Quality Improvement through Assessment:**

The University Grants Commission (UGC) established the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) in 1994 head quartered at Bangalore. The mandate given to NAAC is to assess and accredit Higher Education Institutions in India and ensure maintenance and improvement of quality in Higher Education.

NAAC has been actively engaged in the performance, evaluation and implementation of quality sustenance procedures in Universities and Colleges. NAAC vision and mission statements specify its functioning highlighting quality assurance mechanism in higher education institutions with the combination of self and external quality evaluation, promotion and sustenance activities and initiatives.

The prime agenda of NAAC is to assess and accredit institutions of higher learning with an objective of helping them to work continuously to improve the quality of education. Assessment is the performance evaluation of an institution and/or its units and is accomplished through a process based on self-study report and peer review using defined criteria. Accreditation refers to the certification given by NAAC which is valid for a period of five years. The philosophy of NAAC is “ameliorative and enabling rather than punitive or judgmental, so that all constituencies of institutions of higher learning are empowered to maximize their resources, opportunities and capabilities.”

**Accreditation so far:**

National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) has done more than 11,964 onsite visits (including first cycle: 320 Universities and 7452 Colleges; Second Cycle: 157 Universities and 3288 Colleges; Third Cycle: 63 Universities and 675 Colleges and 09 Colleges in Fourth cycle) in the country as on 03 July, 2018. (Cycle means – Accreditation validity of Five years). The graph given below shows the assessment done during the last six to seven years.

![No of Institutions Accredited by NAAC](image)

(Financial years)

Accreditation from first to fourth cycle of the Universities and Colleges the status as on Nov 2018 is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>First Cycle</th>
<th>Second Cycle</th>
<th>Third Cycle</th>
<th>Fourth Cycle</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Universities</td>
<td>320</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>541</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Mandatory Assessment and Accreditation of Higher Educational Institutions:

During the first phase accreditation was voluntary. However since 2013, UGC vide Gazette Notification January 19, 2013 has made accreditation through NAAC and such other agencies. It has stated that All Institutions of Higher Learning will have to compulsorily undergo the accreditation from an accrediting agency. Many Institutions are applying to NAAC for the purpose of Accreditation. Let us see the status of the institutions who applied for the Accreditation with State –wise.

National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) has done more than 11,964 onsite visits (including first cycle: 320 Universities and 7452 Colleges; Second Cycle: 157 Universities and 3288 Colleges; Third Cycle: 63 Universities and 675 Colleges and 09 Colleges in Fourth cycle) in the country as on 03 July, 2018. (Cycle means – Accreditation validity of Five years). The graph given below shows the assessment done during the last six to seven years.

NAAC Accredited status with respect to UGC 2(f) and 12B recognized College

(UGC data as on 31-05-2018, NAAC Data as on 16th August 2018)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S. No.</th>
<th>State /Union Territory</th>
<th>Number of 2(f) and 12B Colleges</th>
<th>No. of 2(f) and 12 (B) Colleges Accredited by NAAC</th>
<th>No. of 2(f) and 12 (B) Colleges to be Accredited by NAAC</th>
<th>Percentage of 2(f) and 12B Colleges Accredited by NAAC</th>
<th>Percentage of 2(f) and 12B Colleges to be Accredited by NAAC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Andaman and Nicobar Islands</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Andhra Pradesh</td>
<td>377</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Arunachal Pradesh</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Assam</td>
<td>302</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Bihar</td>
<td>408</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>329</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Chandigarh</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Chhattisgarh</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Daman &amp; Diu</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Delhi</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Goa</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Gujarat</td>
<td>457</td>
<td>333</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Haryana</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Himachal Pradesh</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Jammu &amp; Kashmir</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The data illustrates that only 46% of the colleges recognized under section 12B at UGC are accredited. The NAAC needs to look in to those institutions which are due for accreditation. Assessing 54% (around 4977) colleges is a huge task. Accrediting agency need to evolve a different strategy to complete the Accreditation. Identifying an institution which would like to go for accreditation and hand holding need to be done at NAAC level. Most of the institutions are covered under the 12B of UGC act and are receiving financial assistance from Central Government. As per the mandatory accreditation gazette notification 2013 every institution need undergo the process of accreditation. The UGC has recently has brought out the Quality Mandate (2018) which states that the Assessment and Accreditation should be conducted by the College before 2022. As every year around 2% increase in the number of colleges, opting for accreditation also will increase for Accreditation. The issue is that more than 50% of the colleges are yet to be accredited by NAAC as per the 12B of UGC.

So far NAAC has accredited **320 Universities** and **7542 Colleges**. Out of these many institutions have undergone second, third and even for fourth cycle. The journeys of NAAC for the last twenty years divulge that

* Dadar and Nagar Haveli, Lakshadweep doesn’t have Higher Education Institute recognized under 2 (f) and 12B of UGC act.1956)
many initiatives and decisions of the central; state has been linked to the NAAC grading and outcome. some of the issues and outcomes can be flagged as under :

- The gazette notification by MHRD on February 12, 2018 University Grants Commission (Conferment of Autonomous Status upon Colleges and Measures for Maintenance of Standards in Autonomous Colleges) Regulations, 2018 has now mandated that without A and higher grade can alone retain autonomous status.

- Quest for excellence is a continuous process of enhancing the competencies and potential of the Institutions to the highest level of standards. For applying for the UGC schemes like the please receive UGC guidelines (2007-2012) for Universities with Potential for Excellence and quote suitably. “Universities with Potential for Excellence” (UPE) Universities of Excellence (UoE) Status, applying institutions should have Accreditation by NAAC with Grade “A”. Some of the recent decisions are based on the CGPA which the institution has obtained from NAAC

- Further Colleges with Potential for Excellence” (CPE) will also be decided by the UGC with respect to the NAAC Accreditation status either “B” or “A”. Only such of the colleges which are accredited with ‘A’ grade with more than 3.51 CGPA will be eligible for consideration as College of Excellence (CE) under the Scheme.

- Mandatory Assessment and Accreditation of Higher Educational Institutions Regulations (2012): All Institution of Higher Learning will have to compulsorily undergo the accreditation from an accrediting agency. Many Institutions are applying to NAAC for accreditation.

- As per the UGC – Commission meeting held on 24 May 2018, approved the objectives set for improving the quality in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). All HEIs shall strive to achieve the following Objectives by 2022.

- The regulation by the University Grants Commission (Open and Distance Learning) Second Amendment Regulations, 2018 states that University Grants Commission (Open and Distance Learning) Regulations, 2017 (hereinafter referred to as the said regulations),- (a) in regulation 3, in sub-regulation 1, for clause (viii), the following clause shall be substituted, namely:-

  “(viii) The Higher Educational Institution has valid accreditation from National Assessment and Accreditation Council with minimum Cumulative Grade Point Average of 3.26 on a 4 point scale and has completed five years of existence:

  provided further, that the Higher Educational Institutes falling in the above category but currently not accredited with National Assessment and Accreditation Council shall apply for National Assessment and Accreditation Council accreditation within three months from the date of issue of this regulation.

  Provided further, that this clause shall not be applicable to Open Universities till the time they become eligible for National Assessment and Accreditation Council accreditation and it shall be mandatory for Open Universities to get National Assessment and Accreditation Council accreditation within one year of their becoming eligible for the same. More pressure will be built on the NAAC to prepare the ODL manual as well assessment of such institutions.

- One of the major considerations for applying for the status of “Deemed to be University” Status or for the Deemed University to open new campus also depends upon NAAC Accreditation as well as the CGPA which it has obtained from NAAC.

- IQAC funds from UGC: Quality is primarily the responsibility of higher education institutions as such. Each institution should develop an efficient Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC) to ensure quality culture at the institutional level. Annual Quality Assurance Report (AQAR) is to be submitted to NAAC. UGC is funding the College for establishment of IQAC with rupees three (3.00) lakhs and Universities with rupees five (5.00) lakhs.
More than 7000 accredited Institutions have established Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC): Quality enhancement needs to be encouraged and Quality must be embedded in the institutional culture. The Academic Audit, needs to be a periodic process in the HEIs. IQAC has to operate as an internal mechanism of an institution which would work 365 days for qualitative improvement in all activities of the institution. Institutionalization of IQAC after accreditation is very important which will contribute significantly to sustain quality enrichment. IQAC helps in performance improvement and enhancement. It also integrates various activities and many best healthy practices take shape in the institution.

More than 26 states which have established State Level Quality Assurance Cells (SLQAC), have conducted more than 400 workshops, 2500 seminars/conferences across in their jurisdiction on quality related issues like use of Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC), use of ICT for quality enhancement, best practices in higher education, students participation for quality enhancement, teaching, learning and evaluation, academic and administration audit, curriculum design and development. Submission of year wise AQAR is a mandatory in the NAAC process to keep the institute abreast with the process of quality improvement in HEIs.

Accreditation has become a powerful consideration for job placements, advertising for the colleges and universities, drawing of good staff, attracting good students, management taking interest to improve the infrastructure, support services, wi-fi campus, library automation, disabled friendly campus, motivating staff and students, alumni hunt, support, and resource mobilization, etc., are happening on the side lines of Accreditation.

Rising significance of the Accreditation is reflected in competition among HEIs and student enrolment on the campuses. The societal recognition, competitive market forces on employability and its acceptability has risen in the recent years.

Many Universities are taking cognizance of the NAAC accreditation status for granting permanent affiliation etc. and to apply of UGC Act of 1956, 12B status.

The Department of Science and Technology under its scheme Faculty improvement in Science and Technology (FIST) utilizes the NAAC accreditation. Presently, UGC, RUSA, NCTE are considering accreditation grades for funding, projects and other purposes. Even some of the Foreign Research Institutes are also asking for NAAC accreditation.

Many affiliating Universities are insisting on the institutions to go for accreditation before their permanent affiliation is granted to them. It makes the institutions not only to go for the accreditation but also to apply to the UGC for the 12B status so that they can get the funding from the UGC.

The private agencies, software companies, FMCG companies, marketing, service sector companies are looking at the NAAC accreditation for their suitable candidates.

Accreditation motivates faculty to participate actively in academic and related Institutional / departmental activities. The career schemes has implemented by the colleges and universities facilitate the improvements at the individual level initially and further it enhances the involvement of the faculty for institutional growth.

Accreditation promotes a sound and challenging academic environment in the institutions, and adds value to the overall performance of the institution and contributes to socio-economic development of the country by producing high quality technical manpower.

Accreditation promotes intra-institutional and inter institutional initiatives. Communication Channels are established for bottom-up approach in many institutions. Relationships and papers written by faculty have been increased in the recent years. Inter institutional collaborations, research work, faculty exchange, students exchange has been invented for mutual benefits.

Many publications have been brought out within NAAC and in collaboration with UNESCO, APQN, COL Training Programmes for Teacher Educators etc., More details can be obtained from the NAAC website.

Many parents, students, employers, Government Agencies, funding agencies, Foreign Universities, Collaborating agencies, are looking at NAAC website for information about status of the Institutions.
Quality Assurance, Qualifications and Recognition: Fostering Trust in a Globalised World

Theme 3. Ensuring and promoting trust in a globalized context

- NAAC has got international fame/recognition through the participation of its experts directly in the process of evaluation as an international assessor and by facilitating the process of accreditation in countries in Asia Pacific Region, by providing training and by playing a proactive role in international collaboration, and/or by participation in global perspectives to form an organisation.

- Recently the Maharashtra state Government has taken a decision that the institutions must be accredited by NAAC before the session 2019-20 failing which the students scholarships will not be disbursed.

International Scenario on NAAC Accreditation:

- NAAC is a full member of The International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) since 1995-96 and also the founder member of The Asia-Pacific Quality Network (APQN). NAAC has an active MoU with leading Accreditation agencies throughout the world. Some of them are COL- Canada, HEEACT-Taiwan, IEEE- USA, HEQC-South Africa, NQA-Nepal, MQA Malaysia, ENQA, and other countries.

Foreign Universities seek information on one accreditation status at different embassies. From which the perspective students has graduated. If the applicant is not from accredited institution the application may not be considered.

- Many foreign universities do not admit students from non-accredited institutes Accreditation and Mutual recognition thereof plays a vital role in continuing their studies abroad.

- NAAC also keeps on sending its officials as well as academic experts to foreign of universities and colleges as a part of its exercise to enrich mutual experience and expertise.

- NAAC has also helped many countries in the Asia Pacific region to set up good quality assurance agencies for example in Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Mauritius etc.

- Mutual recognition and helping the neighboring countries for enhancing the quality in education is taken as mentoring. This activity has resulted in bi-lateral improvements in many areas of mutual academic and cultural enrichment. Students study at Indian Universities and colleges. On many occasions foreign expert groups have also interacted and participated in one training programme of evaluators.

Conclusion:

For the last 24 years the NAAC has assessed and accredited large number of many colleges and Universities. Many institutions are yet to seek accreditation. Hence awareness on the New Accreditation Process which has been popularly known as Revised Accreditation Framework (RAF) need to done in all parts of the Country. The accreditation plays a vital role at present for obtaining the funds from the funding agencies. The time will also come when the students will also look in to the NAAC rating, grading before taking the admission. Days are not too far. When the stakeholders, employers and employees are looking for the brand of “Accredited Status” before offering the job or being employed in a particular institution or service sector institutions are to be more consciousness about quality and its outcome of graduates.

While addressing the present scenario and meeting the challenges, institution need to be more critically and carefully the institutional improvement. Institution needs to identify its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, challenges and identify internal areas of planning and resource allocation. The purpose of assessment needs to enhance interpersonal relationships and collegiality on the campus. Institutions need to update the curriculum and initiate innovative and modern methods of pedagogy for the benefit of students. Accreditation gives the institution a new sense of direction and identity with greater sense of accountability and enhanced credibility.

NAAC need to look to the various aspects for evaluating the institutions in a proper way with the objective of improving the quality of education in India. The policies and procedures of the NAAC need to undergo the periodical academic audit and systematic review. Academic, administrative and financial policies and procedures should be continuously improved. Such activities would further strengthen the NAAC with the
objective of improving the quality at Education in India and the public perception about NAAC and accredited institutes. The net desired outcome is qualitative improvement of higher education in India. NAAC should be a major catalyst and also helping hand for the HEIs going for accreditation.

(The views expressed in the article are personal; author thank Mr Kiran Jere Sr. Statistician for writing the paper)

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Australia’s higher-education sector: Quality, conflict, and outcomes
Chris Wright, Daley Mok, and Samanthala Hettihewa

ABSTRACT
Over the last few decades, Australia’s government has increasingly tasked Australian-higher-education providers (HEPs) with raising domestic-higher-education participation. This study, after considering the socio-economic trends driving such policies, contrasts their costs and consequences with expectations. While increasing higher-education participation is a lofty goal, ability-distributions within populations suggest that reaching out to ever-larger-numbers of students means educating less-able parts of the ability distribution, which leads to soaring-higher-education costs and outcomes-quality issues. The Australian government tried cross-subsidizing Australian HEPs by encouraging a foreign-education-export industry. Competing for foreign-student largess, Public-Universities helped found teaching-focused For-Profit-HEPs, which proliferated (often as independents) into competitors. Rising higher-education-sector financial-and-outcomes stress encourage: grade inflation, dumbed-down-program content, and sweatshop tactics. A contribution of this study is its mitigation of multi-collinearity by combining highly-correlated student numbers, student academic quality, and learning-culture quality into a single variable.

Introduction
Australia’s higher-education sector is diverse and vibrant, with higher-education providers (HEPs) ranging from Public-Universities to For-Profit HEPs (FPHEPs) to Charitable HEPs offering formal and informal qualifications across a wide array of disciplines. Over the last decade, competition in the HEP sector appears to have responded to government efforts to spur a low-cost, rapid expansion of domestic-higher-education participation by intensifying competition far beyond a healthy Pareto-Optimal level. Figure 1 shows why higher-education is seen as a cost-effective driver of prosperity, competitiveness, enhanced well-being, and social change (Allen 1999; Bradley et al. 2008; Wilton 2008; Taylor and Pick 2008; Berger and Parkin 2009).

Figure 1: Estimates of cost and salary premium vs. years of education

Source of Data: Berger, 2009, p.11.
A common notion of higher-education is that raising participation reduces *ne'er-do-wells* by shifting them and their dependents into more productive, happier, and healthier lives. Gillard (2009), as Minister for Education, contrasted Australian-higher-education aspirations with those of other developed nations by asserting:

“For Germany the target is 40 percent. For Sweden and the UK it is 50 percent. For the Irish, it’s 72 percent.... [In response, Australia’s Government intends] that by 2025, 40 percent of all [Australian] 25-34 year-olds will have a qualification at bachelor level or above. Not just to have enrolled in higher education, but to have completed an undergraduate degree. Today that figure stands at 32 percent.”

Gillard’s (2009) target is drawn almost verbatim from an Australian Government (2009) report that responded to the Bradley (2008) review of Australian higher education. In a subsequent *backgrounder* report, the Australian *Group of Eight* (Go8, 2010) universities concluded that, based on linear extrapolation of (then) extant trends, “…it is probable that the Government’s 40 percent target could be reached naturally, well before 2025... [and will likely be] exceeded by 2015”. This optimism has subsequently been proven naive. Edwards (2011) asserted that in 2008 and 2009, respectively, 31.9 and 34.6 percent of 25-34-year-olds held a Bachelor degree or higher; and that simple (*ceteris paribus*) extrapolation of a then extant trend suggests that the 40 percent target is likely to be attained.

In counter-point to the foregoing discussion, Edwards (2011) voiced concerns about the trends being extrapolated:

1) While the number of persons aged 25-34 holding a higher-education degree increased by 54 percent over the decade prior to 2011, during that time:
   - Participation rates by (domestic) 20-24-year-olds were relatively flat and below that needed to sustain degree attainments as the cohort ages into 25-34-year-olds, and
   - Degree completions by domestic students only grew by 15 percent,

2) Foreign student higher-education-degree completions more than doubled (21,000 to 43,000) from 2001 to 2009, and

3) Skilled migration represents an ever-larger share of higher-education-degree attainments in Australia.

Edwards (2011) concerns are affirmed in other studies. The ABS (2013) notes that, from 2002-2012, 25-34-year-olds holding higher-education degrees increased from 25 to 37 percent—indicating that the goal of *40 percent of 25-34-year-olds with a higher-education degree* was likely attainable. In counter-point, the ABS (2013, p.2) also notes that in “…2012, 4 out of 10 people aged 25-34 with a university degree were adult migrants...., compared with 2 out of 10 people in 2002...” Also, the ABS (2013) notes the share of adult migrants with university degrees increased by 17 percentage-points (38 to 56 percent) from 2002-2012, compared with a modest 8 percentage-point increase for Australian-born adults. Norton, et al. (2018, p.3) observe that: “In 2016, 41 percent of Australian 19-year-olds were enrolled in higher education institutions...” That participation looks impressive, but the target is that “…40 percent will have a qualification at bachelor level or above...” (Gillard, 2009). If the 2016, 19-year-old cohort experiences the typical anytime-completion rates of earlier cohorts, then only 19.1 percent (=41.0 x 0.467; Table 1, below) of that cohort will complete a higher-education degree. Thus, when compared to the 32 percent higher-education graduates Gillard noted in 2009, Australia is losing ground. The perception that Australia is losing ground in higher-education-degree completions is further affirmed in Table 1 and Figure 2. It is interesting that from 2005-2011 degree-completion rates of domestic students declined by 2.3 percentage points, whereas, those of foreign students grew by 5.9 percentage points (Table 1). Further, degree-completion rates of foreign students are much higher than those of domestic students (60 percent ≈ (70.8/45.0) - 1.00).
Table 1: Average Completion Rates for University Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Start Year</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Avg. four-year-completion</td>
<td>47.4%</td>
<td>46.8%</td>
<td>46.0%</td>
<td>46.8%</td>
<td>46.2%</td>
<td>45.3%</td>
<td>45.1%</td>
<td>44.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avg. six-year-completion</td>
<td>67.0%</td>
<td>66.8%</td>
<td>66.6%</td>
<td>67.2%</td>
<td>66.8%</td>
<td>66.0%</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed anytime – Domestic students</td>
<td>47.3%</td>
<td>46.7%</td>
<td>45.9%</td>
<td>46.7%</td>
<td>46.1%</td>
<td>45.1%</td>
<td>45.0%</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed anytime – Foreign students</td>
<td>64.9%</td>
<td>67.5%</td>
<td>68.4%</td>
<td>70.0%</td>
<td>71.3%</td>
<td>71.2%</td>
<td>70.8%</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Figure 2: Average Four-year Completion Rates for University Students

What is going wrong with Australian-higher-education completions and why are the completions domestic students weaker than those of foreign students educated in Australia? While Gillard’s (2009) goal is based on a ceteris-paribus-liner extrapolation of (then) extant trends, non-linear effects appear to be making that target prohibitively costly and profoundly difficult to attain.

The egalitarian intent behind raising higher-education-participation is laudable, but the equality-of-outcome focus of that policy appears to have serious unintended consequences. Specifically, an ability gradient in populations (typically shown as being normally-distributed; Kanaya, 2003; Allen, 2011; Haier, 2016; Yager, 2018) means that increasing domestic-higher-education participation appears to elicit two competing sets of outcomes: 1) higher-attrition rates and/or higher-per-student-education costs; and 2) grade inflation and/or dumbed-down-program content. The last set of possible outcomes are particularly worrying, because the value of a degree does not reside in the degree, but in the learning, processes, knowledge, and abilities acquired by its graduates. Watering-down programs with grade inflation and/or dumbed-down-content reduces attrition and cuts costs, but also debases the real value of degrees. While perceived value takes time to react, once faith is lost, a rising sense of betrayal leads to a rapid-and-profound value loss that can rapidly loop-back into a vicious cycle afflicting confidence in all degrees.
The Perceived Benefits of Higher Education

Working from a common view that more education is always better, Levin (2009) asserts that:

“…more educated people are on average more productive workers and earn higher salaries. Their lifetime earnings are significantly higher than high school graduates, even taking into account the years of foregone income associated with more education, which means they pay more taxes. More…education is also associated with just about every other imaginable social benefit, such as better health, greater longevity, and less criminality.”

While claims on the value of education are well supported by research (Figure 1), that research focuses on average benefits (AB). Specifically, the incomes, health, longevity, and criminality of people are correlated with their highest-educational attainment. Such attribution ignores the controversy on causal direction (i.e. do higher levels of education promote the attributed virtues or do such virtues increase the likelihood of higher levels of education). In any event, a fundamental economics dictum is that a no good/service should be expanded if its marginal cost (MC) exceeds its marginal benefit (MB). Most studies focus on AB because it is easy to gather and validate. In contrast, those seeking to quantify the MB of higher education quickly run afoul of a socio-political minefield tangled in a quagmire of moral issues, assumptions, causal-direction issues, and political and/or academic self-interest. Those issues are transcended in this study by using common economic assumptions to craft a simplified higher-education revenue-cost model—traits which are necessary-and-sufficient to explain HEP behaviour.

As noted previously, populations are often portrayed with a normally-distributed gradient in their ability to learn and transform learning into value. This means the marginal-social-benefit of education varies inversely with participation. This study simplifies the complex math of normal-distributions by representing student-potential as a double-equilateral-square pyramid (Weisstein, 2018a) with the base-to-peak height is synonymous with student potential and actual ability. The distribution created by that approach (Figure 3) reasonably approximates a normal distribution, with the most-able half of the modelled population defined by:

\[ \eta = \frac{(HA^2)}{3} \]

Where:  
\( \eta \) = number of students  
= scaling variable  
\( H \) = base-to-peak pyramid height  
\( A \) = length of the pyramid base side

The lower-ability-half of the population is represented with a mirror image of the distribution of values generated by eqn (1). The upper and lower pyramids approximate a normal distribution (Figure 3). Geometry (Weisstein, 2018a) indicates that the “A” in eqn(1) can be replaced with:

\[ A = H^{2.5} \]

Which allows eqn(1) to be simplified to:

\[ \eta = 2H^3/3 \]

The incremental increase in the most-able half of the population is represented by

\[ \frac{\partial \eta}{\partial H} = 2H^2 \]

The less-able half of the distribution is a mirror image of eqn(5) and both are combined in Figure 3 to represent a population distribution of ability.
It is assumed that higher-education participation flows from best-to-worst candidates (consistent with similar flow assumptions in market models in economics). Thus, as shown in Figure 3, as higher-education participation increases (left to right, X-axis), an ever-greater number of ever-less-able students are included until the mid-point (50 percent participation at an ability of 25) is reached. After the mid-point, an ever-smaller number of ever-less-able students are included. Thus, moving past the mid-point of the student-ability range, suffers a double whammy of rising per-student costs of teaching ever-less-competent students, combined with ever-shrinking incremental revenues (i.e., costs increase across all students, but incremental revenue accrues only from added students).

The higher-education-participation rate is given by dividing eqn(4) by the national population, which might be defined as the (post-education) 25-34 year-olds in the country (Gillard 2009). However, the age of higher-education participants has been spreading into older and younger groups over the last few decades. This study (for illustration purposes) uses the national population as the denominator. Participation in Australian higher education is defined by dividing eqn(4) by the national population:

$$\rho = \eta/N = \frac{2H^3}{3N}$$

Where: \( \rho \) = domestic higher-ed. participation

\( N \) = population of Australia

As noted previously, ability distributions within populations mean that increasing higher-education participation tends to decrease the observed marginal ability of students but what effect does declining ability have on educational outcomes. As previously noted, teaching tends to adapt to reach the most marginal students, that adaptation drives up the per-student-teaching costs and, if potentially better students get bored, they may not attain their potential (e.g., changing teaching strategy and cohort make-up tend to make the learning culture less nurturing to better students). The correlation between the Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR; the main entry criterion for Australian-university-undergraduate programs) and completion of undergraduate degrees suggests the ATAR is an excellent predictor of academic potential (Figure 4 has an \( R^2 \to 1.00 \equiv \text{an identity} \)). The ATAR predictor suggests that the participation of large numbers of students with lower ATAR scores will significantly reduce and likely defer completions. However, a watering-down of the degree content (e.g., dumbing-down program content and/or grade inflation) may offset or even reverse this effect.
Quality Assurance, Qualifications and Recognition: Fostering Trust in a Globalised World
Theme 3. Ensuring and promoting trust in a globalized context

Figure 4: Bachelor Degree Completion vs. ATAR Scores

Given the tight positive correlation of ATAR ranking with undergraduate-degree completions, it seems astounding that some Public Universities accept entrants with ATAR ranks as low as 17.9 and 22.1 (The Guardian, 2017; Khalil, 2018). In counterpoint, low ATARS may be justifiable (e.g. based on age, experience, and/or other factors). It should also be noted that ATAR scores (Cherastidtham, 2018) tend to understate the quality differences in the tails (i.e. 0-20 and 80-99.9) and overstate the differences in the middle (i.e. 40-60).

The Higher-Education Revenue

The higher-education revenue function is relatively simple:

\[ R = T \eta \]  
\[ \text{eqn}(7) \]

Where: \( T = \) tuition fees

When the right-hand side of eqn(4) is substituted into eqn(7) the result is:

\[ R = TH^3(2/3) \]  
\[ \text{eqn}(8) \]

When eqn(8) is differentiated with respect to student ability, the result is:

\[ \frac{\partial R}{\partial H} = 2TH^2 \]  
\[ \text{eqn}(9) \]

The Higher-Education Cost Function

The cost of the marginal product (i.e. the last student added, in the least efficient HEP) is assumed to drive teaching costs. Thus, marginal costs (MC) set the education-supply function (other assumptions will likely add petty complexities, e.g. producer surplus). In Figure 1, the public cost of higher education is relatively flat; the rapid rise in the private cost of education is driven by opportunity costs (e.g. lost wages) rising with educational attainment. However, cost in Figure 1 is an average-cost/student, per highest-year-of-schooling attained. What is needed in this model is an understanding of the cost of increasing higher-education participation. A general function for the total cost of education is:
\[ C = f(\rho, q, n, \Psi, \zeta, Q, S) \]

(eqn 10)

Where:
- \( q \) = marginal quality of students
- \( n \) = learning culture
- \( \Psi \) = administration structure
- \( \zeta \) = scope structure.
- \( Q \) = average quality of the education
- \( S \) = number of students per classroom

This paper assumes the first three variables (\( \rho, q, n \)) in the right-hand side of eqn(10) vary with higher-education participation (\( \rho \)) and the last four (\( \Psi, \zeta, Q, S \)) are set by institutional policy or by lecturer choice. Studies on education tend to look at cost in terms of student numbers, with an implicit assumption of a constant average quality of students. However, as previously noted, quality of marginal students and learning culture vary inversely with participation and are key drivers of education costs. Those effects and student numbers are highly correlated—multicollinearity issues are reduced by combining them into one variable, via a double-equilateral-square pyramid with height/(depth) being synonymous with potential-and-actual ability. The higher-education costs as a function of student numbers is given by:

\[ C = \alpha H^{\beta}(\eta) \]

(eqn 11)

Where:
- \( \alpha \) = admin. & support cost parameter
- \( \beta \) = slope parameter

When the right-hand side of eqn(4) is substituted into eqn(11) the result is:

\[ C = \alpha H^{\beta}(2H^3)/3 = \alpha(2/3)H^{3+\beta} \]

(eqn 12)

The MC of higher education as a function of student numbers is described by:

\[ MC = \delta C/(\delta H) = \alpha2(1+\beta/3)H^{2+\beta} \]

(eqn 13)

The Higher-Education Revenue and Costs Model

The model uses eqns(7) to (15) to model higher-education revenues and costs as a function of the marginal ability of students served. The profit-maximizing quality of students is defined by setting the right-hand sides of eqns(6) and (13) equal and solving for “\( H^* \)” to produce:

\[ H^* = (T/[\alpha(1+ \beta/3)])^{1/\beta} \]

(eqn 14)

The profit exhausting marginal quality of students is defined by setting the right-hand sides of eqns(7) and (11) equal and solving for “\( H^\Omega \)” to produce:

\[ H^\Omega = (T/\alpha)^{1/\beta} \]

(eqn 15)

The parameter values in Table 2 are for illustrative purposes. When Table 2 values are substituted into eqns(14) and (15), the resulting profit-maximizing \( H^* \) (17.92) and profit-exhausting \( H^\Omega \) (23.00) define the viable range of the marginal-student quality. When \( H^* \) and \( H^\Omega \) are substituted into eqn(6), the results (18.42, 38.93) define the viable higher-education-participation range in terms of marginal-student ability. Please note: these are participation rates; after attrition, the associated degree completions will be significantly lower.
Table 2: Assumed parameter values for eqns(2) through (12)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Descriptor</th>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Height of the pyramid</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>Variable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Scaling parameter</td>
<td>1,200</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Number of students participating</td>
<td>η</td>
<td>2H³/3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• National population of Australia</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>25,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Participation in Higher Education</td>
<td>ρ</td>
<td>2H³/(3N)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education Revenue:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Tuition fees @ 4 subjects/semester</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>$10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Revenues to HEPs</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>Tη</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education Cost:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scaling parameter</td>
<td>α</td>
<td>10.09715</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slope parameter</td>
<td>β</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HEP structure, scope, quality, and classroom size</td>
<td>Ψ, ζ, Q, S</td>
<td>in α and β</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of the pyramid’s base</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>2(0.9)H</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If the HEPs operate as a monopoly or oligopoly, they will want to operate at the profit-maximizing point (Figures 5 and 6). However, given the near-perfect-free-market in which FPHEPs operate, higher-education markets tend to drift to the profit-exhausting point. Operating the market to the left of that point requires regulated limits on HEP numbers and size; operating to the right of that point requires one, or a combination, of: higher tuition fees, subsidies, or reduced teaching costs. The model revenues and costs are shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Higher-Education Revenues and Costs vs Student Quality

![Figure 5: Higher-Education Revenues and Costs vs Student Quality](image-url)
The model marginal revenues (MR), marginal costs (MC), and Profit are shown in Figure 6.

**Figure 6: Marginal Revenue, Marginal Cost, and Higher-Ed. Industry Profit**

The forgoing higher-education revenue-and-cost model suggests that the Australian Government goal of 40 percent of the populace having a higher-education degree (Gillard, 2009) may be far beyond what higher-education markets can deliver. As noted previously, for 40 percent of a cohort to earn a higher-education degree requires either a rise in the nine-year-completion rate from 66.8 to 97.6 percent or an enrolment of 60 percent. Raising the nine-year-completion rate is made even more difficult if the higher-education participation rate rises, because the marginal quality of students tends to vary inversely with the participation rate. The effect of 60 percent participation on the marginal quality of students ("H") can be evaluated by reorganizing eqn(5) to define “H” as a function of participation ("p"):

\[ H = \left(1.5pN\right)^{1/3} \]  

\text{eqn}(16)

The relevant range for eqn(16) is for “p” values of 0.0-50.0 percent. The range of 50.0-100.0 percent of “p” values is described by a transposition of the 0-50 percent curve. Based on Figure 7, the 60-percent-participation rate needed to attain 40 percent of a cohort having a higher education degree is associated with a student marginal ability of around 27. In Figure 3, a marginal student ability of 27 is to the right of the profit-exhausting level (23) and imposes higher-education losses of many tens-of-billions of dollars. The profit-exhausting level of 23 is at a 40 percent participation rate, that (given nine-year-completion rates) leads to 26.7 percent (=40 x 0.668) of a cohort having higher-education degrees. While the number values in this model are for illustrative purposes only, rising stress in the Australian-higher-education sector suggests that the target of 40 percent of cohorts having degrees is beyond what is attainable in the absence of mass subsidies or attrition being lowered (e.g. by: dumbing-down degree program content (and/or testing) or grade inflation).
Even after several elections and multiple changes in Prime Minister, the Australian Government appears to be sustaining its egalitarian goal of 40 percent of the higher-education-age cohort having university degrees. Possible ways-and-means to drive HEPs to increase degree production include: a) monetary approaches (e.g. raising tuition fees, subsidies, cutting education costs); and b) productivity tactics (e.g. grade inflation, dumbing-down-degree-program content). The blow-back risks associated with such approaches cause cost-and-performance-conscious governments to shy away from directly implementing them. Instead, governments may seek to retain plausible deniability by creating conditions that inspiring HEPs to use the approaches to attain ever-tightening budgets. Grade inflation is a phenomenon that is becoming globally endemic (Goldman, 1985; Masfield, 2001; Gunn and Kapade, 2018). Figure 8 suggests that grade inflation is so severe in the USA that “A” is now the most common grade (up from 15 to 45 percent in, respectively, 1940 and 2012) and the less-desirable-grade range “C-to-D-to-F” fell from 53 to 28 percent in, respectively, 2012 and 1940). Are rising-participation rates in many countries (Gillard, 2009) a key driver of grade inflation?
Foreign Student Fees as a Cross-subsidy

The ongoing rapid expansion of the number of foreign students being educated by Australian HEPs must be seen by governments and HEPs as an all-around win-win situation. The HEPs receive higher fees from foreign students to cross-subsidize the uneconomic expansion of domestic participation and because foreign students are not as far down in their participation pyramids, their marginal quality is higher than that of domestic students (Figure 9; Table 1; SPREE, 2008 and 2017b).

Australian HEPs educating foreign students serves at least six Australian key policy goals by:

• Cross-subsidising expansion of domestic-higher-education participation by foreign-student fees which are higher than those of domestic students and they have little or no access to government funding/loans,
Quality Assurance, Qualifications and Recognition: Fostering Trust in a Globalised World

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- Supporting Australia’s aging population with a pool of young, ambitious, well-qualified immigrants to offset Australia’s low-birth rate (Australian Treasury, 2004),
- Significantly topping-up domestic higher-education-degree production to attain the 40 percent target of 25-34-year-olds having degrees,
- Becoming Australia’s largest service export (Universities Australia, 2017) and third-largest-export industry (Dodd, 2017),
- Creating a favourable attitude to Australia in the two-thirds of foreign graduates educated by Australian HEPs who return to their countries, and
- Greatly expanding current and future tourism; Australia’s second largest industry

Competing for foreign-student-fee largess and (possibly) to act as a reputation firewall, many Public-Universities helped with and/or encouraged the founding of FPHEPs. The Australian Government, also, encouraged (or did not dissuade) FPHEPs from establishing credentials to supply Australian-certified-higher-education programs to domestic and foreign students, both in Australia (onshore) and in other countries (offshore).

While the FPHEPs were initially convenient for Public-Universities, many became independent and others were founded independently. Key scope, focus, cost structures, and admin differences helped FPHEPs to provide very competitive prices and to grow much faster than Public-Universities and the competitive pressure arising from those differences will likely fuel conflict.

Table 3: Student Numbers by Student Type in 2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Type</th>
<th>Numbers in 2016</th>
<th>% of 2016 Numbers</th>
<th>% of All Foreign</th>
<th>3 year Growth (2013-16)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Universities—Domestic</td>
<td>703,683</td>
<td>69.1%</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Universities—Foreign</td>
<td>261,652</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
<td>89.4%</td>
<td>16.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public-Universities subtotal</td>
<td>965,334</td>
<td>94.7%</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FPHEPs—Domestic</td>
<td>23,281</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>24.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FPHEPs—Foreign</td>
<td>30,894</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
<td>10.6%</td>
<td>62.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FPHEPs Subtotal</td>
<td>53,957</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>42.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Total</td>
<td>1,019,291</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>10.16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: TEQSA, 2017, p.11.

 Universities = Public-Universities and the bold numbers are cross-referenced in text.

Table 3 shows that Public-Universities serve 94.7 percent of higher-education students but have a mere 2.8 percent annual growth in student numbers. In contrast, FPHEPs serve only 5.3 percent of students, but their 12.6 percent student growth is over six-times higher. The Public-University behemoths with nearly 95 percent of the market can afford to be tolerant of the smaller FPHEPs. However, the rapid growth of FPHEPs (i.e. 12.6 vs. 2.8 percent) is a profound intermediate-to-long-term issue for Public-Universities. The Rule of 72 (Weisstein, 2018b) dictates that about every 5.7 years, FPHEPs will double in size (72/12.6), whereas, Public-Universities will need roughly 25.7 years to double (72/2.8). A more precise look at the issue is given by eqn(17):

\[ S = B \times (1+g)^n \]  

eqn(17)
Figure 10 uses eqns(17) and (18) to show how Public-University and FPHEP market penetration will change, if their relative growth rates remain constant. In 10 years, FPHEPs will have 10 percent of the market, in 22 years 20 percent, and will control half-the-market in 43.2 years. The rising importance of FPHEPs will magnify their sway with authorities like TEQSA. If Public-Universities decide to nullify the rising influence of FPHEPs, they must seek to damage FPHEP prospects while that part of the sector is still relatively small (i.e. strangle them in the crib).

Figure 10: Universities and FPHEP Market Share, if Current Growth Rates Persist

Given that the Figure 10 issues are relatively slow moving, it will likely be at least a decade before Public-Universities see them as a clear-and-present danger. Thus, the issues in Figure 10 are serious but sufficiently slow as to be unlikely to spark an immediate Public-Universities/FPHEPs conflict.

A more likely flash-point for short-to-intermediate-run conflict are the relative revenue growth rates of Public-Universities and FPHEPs (Table 4). Specifically, growth in Public-University revenue is nearly triple their growth in students. Given that their revenue is rising faster than their student numbers, Public-Universities may be solving cost issues by raising tuition fees. Also, the best growth prospect for Public-Universities (in student numbers and revenues) is in foreign students taught in Australia. Unfortunately for Public-Universities, that arena is a major and growing FPHEP strength. A further complicating issue is that FPHEPS operate in near-perfectly-competitive markets with their course quality regulated by TEQSA and other government bodies. As a result, FPHEPs compete mostly on the basis of price and their revenue growth appears to be mostly due to growing student numbers. As shown in Table 4 (last column), the change in FPHEP revenues from 2014 to 2017 is a fraction of the change in student numbers from Table 3, suggesting that FPHEP tuition fees are falling in nominal terms and falling precipitously in (inflation-adjusted) real terms. Even though Public-University and FPHEP education are imperfect substitutes, falling FPHEP fees limit the ability of Public-Universities to raise prices or increase foreign-student numbers. These effects are likely seen by Public-Universities as a clear-and-present danger.
present danger to their capacity to use foreign-student fees to cross-subsidise research, increase domestic-student participation, and build their University brand—quelling such a risk is a worthy fight. Given the significant declines in real terms of FPHEP revenues, there will also be pressure on FPHEPS to water-down the quality of their degree programs and to engage in sweat-shop tactics.

Table 4: Revenue ($ 000,000) by Student Type in 2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Type</th>
<th>Revenue In 2017</th>
<th>% of Total</th>
<th>% of All Overseas</th>
<th>Growth 2014-17</th>
<th>2014-17</th>
<th>Δ</th>
<th>Rev/Δ #s</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• University—Domestic</td>
<td>$7,397.6</td>
<td>50.4%</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>15.6%</td>
<td>3.69%</td>
<td>2.43:1.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• University—Overseas</td>
<td>6,261.4</td>
<td>42.6%</td>
<td>91.6%</td>
<td>44.2%</td>
<td>9.58%</td>
<td>2.48:1.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subtotal</td>
<td>$13,659.0</td>
<td>93.0%</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>27.2%</td>
<td>6.20%</td>
<td>2.91:1.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• FPHEP—Domestic</td>
<td>$450.3</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>30.0%</td>
<td>6.78%</td>
<td>1.22:1.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• FPHEP—Overseas</td>
<td>570.9</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
<td>8.4%</td>
<td>48.5%</td>
<td>10.39%</td>
<td>0.80:1.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subtotal</td>
<td>$1,021.2</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>39.7%</td>
<td>8.72%</td>
<td>0.94:1.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Total</td>
<td>$14,680.3</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>17.3%</td>
<td>5.46%</td>
<td>1.59:1.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In Table 5 the relative growth rates of Public Universities and FPHEPs are compared.

Table 5: Revenue and Student Numbers Growth and Comparison (2014-2017)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• University—Domestic</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>7.70%</td>
<td>3.76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• University—Overseas</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>9.37%</td>
<td>12.40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subtotal</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>8.37%</td>
<td>7.24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• FPHEP—Domestic</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>3.92%</td>
<td>9.84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• FPHEP—Overseas</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>31.92%</td>
<td>2.03%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subtotal</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>24.02%</td>
<td>5.47%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Type</th>
<th>Annual Growth of Student Numbers</th>
<th>Total Growth 2016/2014</th>
<th>Avg. Growth p.a. 2014-16</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• University—Domestic</td>
<td>3.42%</td>
<td>1.35%</td>
<td>1.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• University—Overseas</td>
<td>3.73%</td>
<td>4.06%</td>
<td>7.83%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Quality Assurance, Qualifications and Recognition: Fostering Trust in a Globalised World

Theme 3. Ensuring and promoting trust in a globalized context

Australia’s Higher Education Sector: Quality, Conflict, and Outcomes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Type</th>
<th>(Δ Revenues)/(Δ Student #s)</th>
<th>Total Ratio 2016/2014</th>
<th>Avg. Ratio. 2015 to 2016</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>2016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University—Domestic</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University—Overseas</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subtotal</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FPHEP—Domestic</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FPHEP—Overseas</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subtotal</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


As FPHEP market penetration rises, their cost-and-competitive structures will cause Public-Universities increasing grief. FPHEPs should anticipate that groups of Public-Universities will seek to use their substantial (but eroding influence) to pressure government agencies to quell the FPHEP ability to compete in Australia’s higher-education market. Government should be cautious of such overtures. Specifically, Public interest may best be served if the relatively small, naissance FPHEP sector acts as a restraint on Public-University rapacity toward students and academics. As discussed previously, rising per-student-teaching costs associated with increasing higher-education participation (i.e. declining marginal-student quality) along with the added costs of scope, administration, and cost structures, are compelling Public-Universities to squeeze ever more funding from wherever, whatever, and whomever it can be wrung.

Conclusions

The Australian-higher-education sector was tasked by the government with increasing higher-education participation of domestic-university-age cohorts to a level which will result in 40 percent of Australians having higher-education degrees. This study suggests Australia’s higher-education sector is in difficulty. Specifically, average-four-year-undergraduate-completion rates fell from 47.4 to 44.2 percent (2005-to-2012) and the 2016-participation rate of 41 percent of 19-year-olds suggests a graduate outcome for that cohort of 19.1 percent—12.9 percentage points below the 32 percent noted by Gillard in 2009 and nearly 21 percentage points below the Government target of 40 percent.

While the Australian policy that by 2025, 40 percent of all [Australian] 25-34-year-olds will have a qualification at bachelor level or above is a desirable, egalitarian goal, it may exceed the maximum practical domestic participation. Given ability-distributions within populations, as higher-education participation rises, an ever-greater-number of ever-less-able students are included until the ability-distribution mid-point is reached, after which, an ever-smaller-number of ever-less-able students are added. Including ever-less-able students causes per-student-education costs to soar and eventually all HEP profits are exhausted. It is the nature of near-perfect markets to move to the profit-exhausting point—forcing the sector beyond the profit-exhausting point requires drastic-and-unpalatable actions, such as cost-cutting (via dumbing-down course content, grade inflation, sweatshop-teaching loads, etc.) or increasing per-student revenue (via fee increases, proliferating service fees, subsidies, cross-subsidies, etc.). Fee increase are likely (ceteris paribus) to decrease the disability of higher
education, make the Australian government’s goal of increase participation more difficult to attain (especially for domestic students), and may have to be hidden in more generous student loan terms.

Cross-subsidizing domestic-higher-education participation with higher foreign-student fees created a temporary windfall for HEPs. Many Public-Universities, seeking more windfall, encouraged and supported the founding of FPHEPs as partner providers, but many FPHEPs are now independently competing for students (especially high-fee-foreign students). Key scope, focus, and cost-structure differences enable FPHEPs to offer degree programs at much lower costs than Public-Universities and that competitive advantage is likely to fuel conflict. Specifically, student-numbers growth at FPHEPs is nearly six-times that of the Public-Universities. The Public-Universities currently serve 95 percent of all students, but FPHEPs are proliferating and making inroads into the foreign-student fees that were expected to fund the expansion of domestic-higher-education participation.

Rising stress in the Australian-higher-education sector suggests that the Australian Government goal of 40 percent of the populace having a higher-education degree is likely beyond what HEPs can deliver. Forcing through to that goal may require subsidies of many tens-of-billions-of-dollars and/or inspire the debasing of degrees via dumbing-down degree-program content (and/or testing) or grade inflation. Another worry is that the student victims of graduating with debased degrees may either victimise future generations of students and/or clients (if they think their debased degrees are the norm), or may find their degrees inspire little or no confidence/relevance in a society that is losing faith in higher-education, or may sue the HEP providers of their debased degree for breach of duty of care.

Rising numbers of adult immigrants with higher-education degrees are enabling the attainment of the government goal of 40 percent of Australians having higher-education degrees, without the bother of achieving the implied intent of the graduates being Australian born.

Future research should look at whether large, high-status Public-Universities can generate producer surplus by using ATAR scores and scholarships to segment potential students—see Copes, 1972 for a discussion of producer surplus in a near-perfect market. It may also be useful to explore how Australian-higher education went from 1960s-1970s participation of a 6.1 percent (Le and Miller, 2002; Abbott and Doucouliagos, 2003) with a 50-percent attrition to the current 41 percent participation (ABS, 2013) with a 26.4-percent attrition. Nearly halving attrition with far-weaker students is an extraordinary accomplishment, especially given that government funding per equivalent-full-time student in 2001 was (in real terms) under half of what it was in 1977 (Abbott and Doucouliagos, 2003). Also, future research might review the effects increasing participation has had on higher-education in other countries.

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Revisit to the role of professional bodies to enhance life-long learning universities

Bassam Alhamad,
University of Bahrain

ABSTRACT

Popular stakeholders in higher education are students, alumni, employers and faculty members. When referring to key stakeholders, the professional bodies frequently are missed out. Up to date programs, transparency, independency can be maintained through the involvement of professional bodies. Challenges in the market, ethical practices, codes of conduct, knowledge with practical knowledge, new trends in the profession, new market, required skills is observed by the professions and the professional bodies. There should be a pro-active stakeholder engagement to the market and its needs. Professional bodies had been included in one or more stages in the review or accreditation process in various countries, including US, Australia, UK, India, Pakistan, Malaysia, etc. The involvement could be through the providers or the regulators. In the context of Bahrain, this issue will be discussed. Extending the role of professional bodies to contribute to higher education is the main aim of this paper.

Introduction

Stakeholders involvement are key to the success of any institution, including universities, (de la Torre, Rossi et al. 2018), (Marshall 2018). Out of date universities simply should leave the market, because they are out of competition. The universities should meet the needs of the stakeholders, whether internal or external, (Marshall 2018). The university will need to work on satisfying the needs of all its stakeholders, including students, alumni and employers (Amaral and Magalhães 2002). The university should prioritize the stakeholders’ engagement based on their strategies and resources, (de la Torre, Rossi et al. 2018). This is also driven by the university’s mission. The most popular tools used by most universities are employers’ surveys, alumni surveys, faculty surveys, students’ surveys and meeting with advisory boards and focus groups of professions, (Alhamad and Aladwan 2017). Job market need analysis is one popular tool implemented by universities but is expensive and needs a lot of hard-work; so is avoided or done every 5 or more years. The internal and external quality mechanisms support and improve the quality of recognition with higher education institutes, (European-Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2018). The key stakeholder, which are the professional bodies’ (PB) or professional societies’ representatives may be consulted in the market needs or referred to in advice in the advisory committees. The professional bodies are defined as “an organisation formally recognised by charter or statute as having jurisdiction over a profession or a section of a profession. Criteria for full membership comprise professional examinations and a minimum period of assessed professional practice”. The PB’s contribution as a key stakeholder in higher education in Bahrain is not effective. Indeed, in several countries, the role of professional bodies is regulated to become part of the quality assurance system. The PB role extends to control the profession, specifies the code of practice and the code of ethics. This role in UK and US for instance sets examination for practicing this profession in the market, (Harvey, Mason et al. [1995] 2014). However, this is not applicable for every profession, and being a member within the PB is not always compulsory to practice the profession, (Harvey, Mason et al. [1995] 2014). PBs influence the nature of the education, training, competence and values required for entry to the profession, (Harvey, Mason et al. [1995] 2014). In terms of power and interest, these will not be discussed in this paper, however some issues related to the factors that would affect the role of the professional body with higher education sector will be discussed. The professional body are revolving between different roles, which could be safeguarding the interest of the members, as a learned society or a trade union. The interest could be for the public, professional practitioners or the professional body itself.
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This paper would present an example of understanding stakeholders’ involvement in Bahrain. Comparisons with other models would also be reflected. The question is that if the professional bodies are practicing their educational function. The aim of this paper is to include one of the main stakeholders that had been unintentionally excluded or not involved by the providers or the regulators. The objective of this paper is to extend the role of the professional bodies in improving program delivery at the universities and to raise the quality of the graduates, hence their employability. Data of public and private universities covering about 80% of the total student population will be used in this research paper.

Background

The integrated role of professional bodies in developing standards hand in hand with higher education regulatory and review bodies is limited in Bahrain. There are considerable differences in style and approach across countries in relation to the constitution of oversight bodies including higher education regulatory bodies, the degree of delegation of competences to professional bodies and the involvement of the profession in regulatory design and implementation, (Marock 2000, Amaral and Magalhães 2002, CECCAR 2012, Balbachevsky 2015, Benomran 2016, Marock November, 2000). In other words, the working relationship between the Higher Education Council (HEC), Bahrain Quality Assurance Authority for Education and Training (BOA) and professional bodies could be improved by a better understanding of the public interest role that professional bodies carry out or could carry out. On the other hand, without clear evidence that the professional bodies are effectively discharging their regulatory activities in the public interest, it is likely that the delegation of responsibilities from oversight authorities will ultimately be discontinued.

Referring to best practices, key stakeholders (Marock 2000, Amaral and Magalhães 2002, Balbachevsky 2015) had been identified by popular international accreditation bodies including mainly employers, students, faculty members and alumni. In the reference by (ENQA, ESU et al. May, 2015), stakeholders in higher education are referred to as “actors within an institution, including students and staff, as well as external stakeholders such as employers and external partners of an institution”. In the EUA publication for stakeholders and trends reports, stakeholders are referred to as “national authorities, funders, students, etc.”. ABET defines stakeholders, mainly as employers, alumni, students and faculty members, (Felder and Brent 2003). In the Bologna Process implementation report by (European-Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2018), the stakeholders mainly focus on students, alumni and employers. AACSB covering business related areas and NAAB covering architecture related areas, deal with professionals due to the nature of the profession. In health sectors, the non-governmental societies and the professional bodies due to the reacting nature of the profession with the society. Besides, AACSB and NAAB do not emphasize on having partnerships or even considering professional bodies as key stakeholders to contribute to the programs within the university. WHO supports accrediting programs that are very much linked with the society and the health sector. There are other bodies that are not included. The reasons could be related to the role of those professional bodies that differ from one country to another. It is also related to the role of the regulators in that regards. For example, regulators could integrate the role of the professional bodies to provide data reflecting market needs for quantity and quality of graduates, internships and apprenticeships, or providing needed skills for up-to-date programs or could participate in accrediting programs as well. As quality assurance models differ from country to another, the role of professional bodies also do differ. The professional bodies may not be well developed, or not well regulated. The professional bodies may also not cover all professions within the country. The problem arises when one of the main stakeholders is excluded or not considered in the process of higher education. There is always a need for an independent oversight for the market, who involve the direct professionals of the field.

There needs to be an answer to this question “How can professional bodies continue to attract high quality students who are critical to the profession’s future?”, (CECCAR 2012). The discussion addresses that there should be an appropriate balance between practical experience and knowledge, and the assessment of these particulars; as well as the importance of ethics, and the relationship between professional bodies’ requirements and university curricula. Looking forward, professional bodies could contribute in various areas, such as considering financial reward for the profession; the risk of having low or high entry to a certain profession related to areas to the profession or to the quality of the students; notably concerning the balance between theoretical knowledge and practical application which could be solved through implementing internships or apprenticeships;
identifying the additional skills required by the qualification such as soft skills including communication, IT or so-called transferrable skills; and providing the standards of the profession, and updating with the new requirements. That could be developed through strategic collaboration between professional bodies and universities, accrediting or reviewing the academic programs within the universities, development of joint degree programs and greater interaction with academic, balancing technical knowledge and broader skills within a syllabus, for example through the use of case studies to assess the capacity to implement technical knowledge, adopting a broader strategic approach to education and training, which could be at a national level. Besides the university having the autonomy to develop and run its programs, the attachment with the professional bodies tend will ensure the alignment of the curriculum to the content of the professional. The professional bodies do not incorporate themselves to the initial education, though the content and skills for the professions should be satisfied to be effective professionals.

On scanning the quality assurance review reports in Bahrain since 2009 to 2018, including 12 universities both public and private sectors, and covering more than 30 programs, professional bodies were not considered as part of the stakeholders. In some universities, professions were approached for improvements in the curricula or in developing new programs, but the continuous and systematic contribution to the professional bodies to the programs was not considered.

Through National Qualification Frameworks (Al-Sindi and Jaffar 2018), programs delivered by the universities are recognized by the market. This recognition is based on the fact that these programs satisfy the national qualification descriptors. However, in many countries including Bahrain, these descriptors are generic to all qualifications on the same level. In Bahrain, the qualifications are validated and reviewed through the review panels assigned by BQA. The programs are also reviewed by the BQA, where detailed review reports are published with judgement. In reference to NQF, the sectoral part is not defined/implemented yet. Developing the sectoral outcomes and performance expectations for the vocational sector is part of a current project called the National Occupational Standards (NOS) Project, where it is expected to develop 125 new National Occupational Standards (NOS) for skilled work in Bahrain. This is not implemented yet. The sectoral descriptors for professional qualifications are not defined.

On reviewing the Program Advisory Boards/Committees (PAC) policies, alumni and employers are suggested to be part of the PAC to contribute to the program in terms of advice in teaching and learning practices, internship opportunities, joint research studies, updates in the profession, etc. However, with this good role, scrutinizing the minutes of meetings showed limited discussions about the market’s future trends, or about the required skills needed in the market, or about the new trends or emerging needs within the profession.

Methodology and Discussion of Interview Results

The input for the analysis of this paper was based on three main inputs. First, a literature review covering the role of professional bodies at different countries was considered. Then the results from the Quality Assurance Authority at Bahrain was studied. An interview had been performed with key roles that could reflect on their opinion on the role of professional bodies.

The actor groups that were included in the interview sessions were:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actor to be interviewed</th>
<th>Type of interview</th>
<th>No.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>President, University</td>
<td>Individual interview</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member of the National Vocational Committee in Bahrain</td>
<td>Individual interview</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Member of a committee in the Bahrain Chambers of Commerce (BCCI)</td>
<td>Individual interview</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Member of the Board of Directors of BCCI</td>
<td>Individual interview</td>
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The interviews were carried out with key persons: President University, Member of the National Vocational Committee in Bahrain, Member of a committee in the Bahrain Chambers of Commerce (BCCI), Member of the Board of Directors of BCCI, Director or Higher, BQA, Owner of Private Training and Consultancy Business Enterprise, Director or Higher, Ministry of Labor, Quality Director, University, Board Member of INQAAHE, Members of INQAAHE with positions of Director or Higher, Member of Bahrain Society of Engineers, Member of a Management and Business Professional Society, Director or Higher at EDB, Key Staff member at HEC.

The objective of the interviews was to discuss their opinions and experiences with regard to the role of professional bodies on the quality and employability of the graduates. Questions will be related to teaching and learning, curriculum activities, facilities and laboratories, currency, marketability and employability, and their understanding of the conditioning factors for the effectiveness of their role.

More detailed objectives are:

(i) to consider the involvement of the professional bodies as one of the main stakeholders.
(ii) to extend the role of the professional bodies in improving program delivery at the universities and
(iii) to raise the quality of the graduates, hence their employability.

The following areas are used to manage the discussions in the interviews:

- Strategic direction
- Regulatory role
  - Rules and regulations
  - Evolution of the role
- Education and training
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- Teaching and Learning
- Curriculum: being current and having to up to date programs
- Knowledge and practical skills
- Facilities, Software, Laboratories, Technical services
- Effects on employability of graduates

- Challenges to Professional bodies
  - Internal Factors
  - External Factors

- Recommendations to extend the role of the professional bodies

Interview and focus group results

On meeting with the Presidents of the three different universities, all of them agreed on the point that the professional bodies are not very active with universities. Their inputs would add value to the universities, specifically to the curriculum and the quality of the graduates. President A stated that they gained a lot from the presence of the professions in the advisory committees, however, those professions should be selected very carefully. He also stated that there are cases in which the professions mislead the program to their interest based on opinions and not on market studies. President B stated that the strategic views are obtained from key members in the advisory or higher boards at the university, however general guides of a strategic nature are provided by such members, with no emphasis or details related to teaching and learning, quality of the graduate, or new trends within the market. President B and C mentioned that there are links to professional bodies such as IEEE, AACSB, ACCA, and other well-known entities, however within the discussion, it was noted that these links were mainly used for benchmarking activities. President C stated that the standards of ACCA was used in their curriculum, which raised the quality of their graduates, and reflected higher satisfaction of the market to their graduates. All presidents mentioned that they have a career day that brings on many professionals including some of the professional bodies, who get to link and talk to students, however they stated that this link is not tied with the curriculum or any education matters. A Board member at INQAAHE stated that in countries such as Pakistan, India and Bangladesh, professional bodies would participate in the review process of programs. The professional bodies have a big say on the quality of the programs, including faculty members, student intake to the program, quality of the labs, type or learning and experience that reflects real market applications. Member “A” at the Bahrain Society of Engineers mentioned that they have concerns on the quality of graduates of some universities, where they can see that that are performing poorly in the market. He stated that they have no official route to affect those curricula. He also stated that it is not a mandate in their strategy to advice universities on curriculum, even though that those matters had been discussed in their meetings. Member “B” at the Bahrain Society of Engineers mentioned that such contribution should be supported with the rules and regulations at the HEC. He also mentioned that this could add a lot of duties on the Society who may not be able to satisfy the needs from all universities. A Member of the National Vocational Committee in Bahrain and the Director or Higher, Ministry of Labor, and a member from BCCI, mentioned that the professional bodies supported them in the NQF project to develop the occupational standards. Their input was considered crucial to know the needs of the market, and to identify the knowledge and skills needed for the market.

The officials interviewed at BQA and HEC stated common opinions that the standards for institutional review or institutional accreditation guide the universities to have links with the professions, however not the professional bodies. They emphasized that there is no prevention to have such links, and in fact they see that the standards recommend such links and connections. HEC official mentioned that it is recommended to be internationally recognized by a professional body, refer to Institutional Accreditation Handbook mentioned indicator 5.1. He/she indicated that HEC requires the involvement of renowned academics and professionals, refer to Institutional Accreditation Handbook mentioned indicator. HEC official also stated that the curricula should satisfy the requirements of the professional bodies, however he highlighted that they are not required to be part of any process related to the university. It was a consensus that the professional bodies would support in producing
high quality graduates. The Presidents agreed that professional bodies would help in having an appropriate balance between practical experience and knowledge, as well as the importance of ethics, and the relationship between professional bodies’ requirements and university curricula. The member of the BSE mentioned that the assessment of the required competencies could be embedded in the curricula. The changes in the trends in the profession can be spotted by the professional bodies who have their eyes continuously on the market. A Quality Director at one of the universities have stated that they gained a lot from the professions, but once they sat with the ACCA, they supported them in identifying the quality of students’ entry to the program. With national professional bodies, the member of the BSE and the member of one of the business professional bodies supported the idea that the quality of student’s input definitely will influence the quality of the graduates. This was supported by President B and President C, who stated that the links with the international bodies helped them to modify the admission criteria for few programs. The member of BES stated that there is risk of having low or high entry to a certain profession related to areas to the profession. For example, the university would have suffered accepting large number of Architects that would have no place in market. The member of the business professional body mentioned that they could also support in providing internships or apprenticeships. They could forecast the additional skills required by the qualification such as soft skills including communication, IT or so-called transferrable skills. Members at the Bahrain Chambers of Commerce (BCCI) mentioned that the market is selecting today who is better and more competent, whether Bahraini or not.

On asking about the role of the professional bodies, the first statement by the Presidents and the professional bodies was up to date programs. The interviewees from BQA and HEC stated that knowledge, practical knowledge, required skills observed by the professions and the professional bodies would provide a pro-active role to the market and its needs. The official at EDB mentioned that new trends in the profession or new market can be created at any moment, however one of the first to know are the professional bodies. A quality director at one of the universities stated that the ethical practices and codes of conduct are updated nationally or internationally, and that should be reflected in the curricula. An owner of a Private Training and Consultancy Business Enterprise emphasized that one of the current universities are graduating high calibers of graduates, due to the reason that there is a direct link to the professions. However, he added that there are areas the challenges in the market could not be predicted. Members at the Bahrain Chambers of Commerce (BCCI) stated the in addition to the links to the market, that link creates a transparency that can be maintained through the involvement of professional bodies.

A focus group was conducted with members of INQAAHE with positions of Director or Higher, an analysis of international practices was presented. They stated that professional bodies could support in one or more stages. They could support in the review or accreditation process, such as in US, Australia, UK, India, Pakistan and Malaysia. The professional bodies could have power that influence the regulators decisions. Medical schools and Engineering schools are reviewed by professional bodies. They review the quality of the faculty, labs requirements, training and support, teaching and assessment alignment to the market needs. The officials at the Ministry of Labor, BQA and one of the Owners of Private Training and Consultancy Business Enterprise agreed to the role of professional bodies, and they stated that this was one of the reasons to form the NQF with detailed descriptors and developing the occupational standards.
On asking about the employability of the graduates, there was an agreement that the professional bodies would improve the quality of the graduates. The issues stated by the Presidents were how to make this link possible. The two interviewees from the professional societies said that they should add to their mandate that responsibility, as this would influence the profession by maintaining the right entry and the right graduates for the market. The BQA and HEC emphasized on the point that the advisory boards or involvement of professional bodies are one of the best practices and are part of quality assurance standards. These standards were included to maintain the currency of the program to the market. Those interviewees sitting on the side of the market, such as the members of the BCCI, National Vocational Committee, or Owner of Private Training and Consultancy Business Enterprise state the enterprises want qualified graduates that have all of the required knowledge and skills. They stated that professional bodies would provide the new requirements of the profession to the universities to include it in the curriculum.

From the discussion with the group of interviews and the focus group, the areas of contribution by professional bodies to the providers (universities) can be summarized in the following:

• Learning Program: The PB is concerned with the nature of the education and training for the entry to the profession. This includes the contribution towards the development of the curriculum, the delivery and evaluation, nature of teaching and learning, attachment to professional councils, satisfaction with sectoral national or international standards, etc.

• The PBs could contribute to evaluate the assessment approaches and its effectiveness towards the profession’s practice.

• Assessing the knowledge, competence and values of the professionals: The PBs could work in evaluating the university’s capabilities in producing professionals, which could be part of collaboration, or could be part of the quality assurance practice. The nature is recommended to be beyond the universities’ autonomy in developing and implementing their curriculum delivery, which means collaboration rather than control on the university.

• Ensuring that the universities are capable of producing the required professionals, and that could cover the faculty, students, curriculum, training, etc.

The key observations from the interviews could be summarized as follows:

• The professional bodies oversee the profession nationally and internationally hence its inputs are essential to keep the programs up to date and current with the latest needs in terms of knowledge,
skills, technology, values, facilities, laws and regulations. This pro-active role ensures the alignment of the graduates with the market needs.

• The link between the universities, professional bodies, and the quality assurance and management/oversighting authorities should be established and utilized. Standards are in place in the HEC institutional handbook. Key interviewees at the professional bodies expressed their will to extend their role to work with the universities.

• The PBs could support in the decision to maintain the right entry into the profession. Entry to the professions could mean student entry to the program, however the PBs are more concerned about the readiness of the graduates to practice the profession. Licensure to practice a profession would drive the universities to align their curriculum. This would require investment in syllabuses, new technology, facilities, etc.

• In some cases, there are majors that have lot of divisions which makes it difficult to separate the exact needs for the profession. However, the dialogue between the PBs and the universities brings the curriculum and market together.

• In many cases, the qualification requirements of the profession require key skills required in the workplace, such as presentation or IT skills. These can be overlooked by the PB.

• Strategic collaboration between professional bodies and universities would ensure more efficient and effective entry to the profession.

• The universities will have the advantage of being aligned to the market and updated with the latest needs by being connected to the professional bodies. However, the professional bodies should also be capable in delivering such need by the universities. It is a joint beneficiary win-win situation where professions of better quality in the market is delivered.

• Balancing technical knowledge and broader skills within a syllabus, for example using case studies to assess the capability to implement technical knowledge, can enhance the applicability and relevance of the professional qualification.

On asking about the challenges to the Professional Bodies, most challenges were stated by the professional societies themselves. There are internal factors that the professional bodies need to work on such as promoting and maintaining high quality of service by the membership in both statutory and non-statutory areas. The professional bodies should also have high quality monitoring, reporting and communication with the authorities and build the confidence. The professional bodies should have the broad expertise on monitoring and regulating across borders that would reflect on the development of regulation in the country itself. The professional bodies for all the professions may not be available in every country. The relationship between university courses and the qualification requirements of professional bodies are not as efficient as they could be, with excessive divergences in the profession. The role of the professional body towards the balance between theoretical and practical training would need the built up of expertise.

Externally, the national legislation could play a role in restricting or increasing the role of the professional bodies, to encourage discussion with governments and management authorities on reviewing legislation with potential benefits to markets and the broader public interest, or in the involvement with the universities. The professional bodies could take the role of regulating the profession, however with no control on universities. Such autonomy given to the university is favored by both the university and the professional body in Bahrain. But the high pressure (Berman and Paradeise) on universities to deliver the future workforce could involve external agencies other than the regulatory and quality assurance authorities. Extending the role of the professional body within the universities would drive or suppress the benefits of linking the professional bodies to the universities.

Conclusions

The main aim of this paper is to extend the role of professional bodies to contribute to higher education. It aims at generating discussion on the strategies which professional bodies can contribute to the teaching and education performance for better skilled graduates at universities. The paper aimed to produce universities that
are learning organizations in their programs and current in targeting market needs. The contribution of professional bodies could be summarized in the following areas: strategic direction, integrating with the regulatory bodies, its contribution towards education and training. The professional bodies would need to overcome internal and external factors in order to deliver and maximize its role towards the universities.

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UNESCO Global Convention and establishment of an NIC in Japan
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ABSTRACT
This presentation considers demands for official information provision to assist in international recognition of higher education qualifications and possible measures that can be provided as a public service in Japan and other states in the Asia-Pacific region. Based on a research implemented in Japan and other states, this presentation clarifies roles that the planned National Information Center in Japan is expected to play in solving challenges of international recognition of higher education qualifications in both Japan and other states. It also suggests possible international cooperation among such centers to help admissions offices in their daily operations of foreign credential evaluation.

Background
The Asia-Pacific Regional Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications for Higher Education, which was agreed on in November 2011, took effect in February 2018, based on consent to be bound by it, by a total of five UNESCO Member States. The purpose of this Convention, also known as the Tokyo Convention, is to promote the recognition of qualifications in higher education among UNESCO member states and thus facilitate international mobility of students and academics. In the framework of this Convention, each member state must provide sufficient information on both institutions and quality assurance systems of higher education. The Japanese central government completed accession to the Convention in November 2017, the fourth state to do so: This means that the Japanese higher education system must have an organization to provide information to assist international qualification recognition by domestic and foreign higher education institutions.

To make such an organization functional, we need to ask ourselves what type of information is in demand for international qualification recognitions in daily operation at higher education institutions. Thus, the Japanese government needs to acknowledge the current status of international admission and information demand. This is why the government entrusted NIAD-QE (nee, NIAD-UE) with the research project.

Research
As part of such a study, NIAD-QE ran a project, Research on Development of an Appropriate Information-Provision System for Domestic and Foreign Higher Education Institutions to Support Student Mobility from 2013 through 2015. This project aimed to implement 1) a national survey to determine the need for the Foreign
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Credential Evaluation (FCE), 2) an international survey to determine the needs of National Information Center (NIC) and 3) Assessment of need for the unified institution with FCE and NIC functions. To accomplish this project, NIAD-QE surveyed undergraduate and graduate admissions offices at all 4-year institutions in Japan in order to clearly understand domestic practices in evaluation of foreign credentials. NIAD-QE also surveyed 57 NICs in states that had ratified the Lisbon Recognition Convention (ENIC/NARICs) to understand foreign practices in evaluation of credentials issued by Japanese higher education institutions.

Survey Results

In the domestic survey, it was found that only 9% of respondents have questioned the authenticity of documents submitted by prospective international students at the level of undergraduate admission. This percentage was only 7% at the level of graduate admission. Does this mean that Japanese higher education institutions have only few applicants with credentials issued by unaccredited institutions? The survey also found that, at both the undergraduate and graduate levels, 23% of responding admission offices had a prescribed process to determine the authenticity of submitted documents, and 77% did not have such a process. In actual practice, only 35% of undergraduate admissions offices and 40% of graduate admissions offices had checked the the accreditation status of all applicants’ home institutions when there was no institutional credit-transfer contract.

Based on these results, it can be said that Japan needs to establish an organization that can give comprehensive assistance for international qualification recognition in Japan. This organization should provide not only information on individual higher education institutions in other states or abridging different higher education systems, but it should also train admissions officers to ensure fair and legitimate international admission process at Japanese higher education institutions.

In the survey of foreign NICs, on the other hand, it was found that the most difficult aspect in assessing Japanese credentials was interpretation of Japanese language (61% of respondents agreed). And it was pointed out that documents in Japanese and English do not always correspond. The most important implication from this foreign survey is: There is a need for common frameworks of documents that explain the contents and schemes of individual credentials, including diplomas and transcripts.

Interpretation and Conclusion

Through the project, which was implemented in preparation for the development of an integrated information service for international qualification evaluation in Japan that will fulfill the provisions of the Tokyo Convention, several lessons have been learned.

One lesson is that, in addition to providing adequate and up-to-date information to domestic and foreign higher education institutions, such an organization needs to be equipped with functions for training and guidance of admission officers. Doing so will aid the efficient use of information it provides in order to ensure both the legitimacy and flexibility of foreign credential evaluation. These services are needed, considering the current opportunistic treatment of international qualifications at Japanese higher education institutions.

Another lesson is: proposing the development of document frameworks that clarify the significance of individual credentials for common use by higher education institutions in Japan. Since European states already provide diploma supplements, states in the Asia-Pacific region should be able to make collective efforts to develop an Asia-Pacific version of diploma supplements: This version should examine the needs of higher education systems in the region, and also be compatible with the European version. In both cases, what is vital is to respect the autonomy of individual institutions in designing diplomas themselves, and to remember that supplements should always be supplemental.

Given these needs and aspirations, tasks for planned integrated information service for international qualification evaluation are not limited to information provision: Though information provision is a basic and inevitable function, protecting the rights of prospective international students is essential and vital for responsible institutions. In order to establish and maintain such an organization, securing personal and financial resources will be the most fundamental issue on the stage of planning.
Collaborative cross-border joint quality assurance: Good practices and challenges

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ABSTRACT
This paper aims to share with the international quality assurance community the successful experience of the UK’s Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) and the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) in conducting a joint quality assurance exercise of UK higher education delivered in Hong Kong, which resulted in QAA’s recognition of HKCAAVQ’s accreditation decisions for UK provision in Hong Kong. The intention of the paper is therefore that of contributing to promote recognition of quality assurance outcomes internationally by looking at a concrete example of inter-agency cooperation, discussing challenges and best practices, and identifying prerequisite elements and factors for recognition. This case study in inter-agency cooperation will be set in the context of recent international initiatives aimed at strengthening cross-border cooperation in the quality assurance of transnational education (TNE).

Introduction
Quality assurance bodies have little choice today but to work together to address the challenges and size the opportunities associated with the internationalisation of higher education and growing cross-border higher education. A number of recent international initiatives have called for and tried to facilitate strengthened cross-border cooperation in the quality assurance of transnational education (TNE). These include the Toolkit for quality assurance agencies ‘Cooperation in Cross-Border Education’, developed as part of the European Union funded project Quality Assurance of Cross-Border Higher Education (QACHE), as well as the QACHE follow-up study carried out by the QAA with INQAAHE funding aimed at looking at the obstacles and facilitating factors for cross-border cooperation. The 2005 UNESCO/OECD Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-Border Higher Education already stressed how a coordinated effort among quality assurance bodies is needed to tackle the challenges brought about by the growth of TNE. Two recent networks have also been created to focus specifically on facilitating inter-agency cooperation, the Cross-Border Quality Assurance Network (CBQAN) and the Quality Beyond Boundaries Group (QBBG).

This paper aims at illustrating the recent successful experience of the UK’s Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) and the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) in carrying out joint quality assurance of UK higher education provision in Hong Kong in the spirit of these recent initiatives. Significantly, this joint exercise has allowed QAA to recognise HKCAAVQ accreditation decisions for the purpose of UK quality assurance, thus avoiding unnecessary duplication of regulation whilst ensuring that learning experience of UK TNE students is safeguarded.

Background
HKCAAVQ and QAA have a long history of cooperation underpinned by a bilateral Memorandum of Understanding, which has been recently renewed in 2016, as well as by participation in international networks such as INQAAHE and APQN, as well as CBQAN and QBBG. Both agencies are committed to establishing a strategic alliance to enhance external quality assurance in both jurisdictions and improve the quality of higher education in the United Kingdom and Hong Kong. This commitment includes seeking to strengthen cooperation in the quality assurance of UK TNE in Hong Kong. To this end, QAA and HKCAAVQ conducted two joint quality assurance exercises.
assurance exercises as part of QAA’s 2018 review of UK TNE in Hong Kong, and HKCAAVQ’s planned accreditation of a number of UK programmes delivered in Hong Kong.

**Approach to joint review**

HKCAAVQ and QAA set up a joint panel, with QAA TNE reviewers also acting as full members of the HKCAAVQ accreditation panel. In this way, playing a dual role, the joint reviewers were able to use information collected as part of the HKCAAVQ accreditation process to inform the QAA TNE Review. This allowed the two agencies to reduce information collection burden, and to avoid carrying out two separate site visits. The following outlines the key aspects of the approach taken by QAA and HKCAAVQ for the joint exercises for the benefit of all stakeholders involved:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Panel formation</th>
<th>The HKCAAVQ accreditation panel included two QAA reviewers who acted as both HKCAAVQ panel members (including acting as Chair) and QAA reviewers.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Information submission before the site visit</td>
<td>The information set submitted for the HKCAAVQ accreditation exercise was also received by QAA to ensure it can be used to inform its TNE Review. Additional information had been submitted to QAA exclusively for the purpose of the QAA TNE Review.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collection of evidence during site visit meetings</td>
<td>The HKCAAVQ accreditation panel undertook a standard HKCAAVQ accreditation visit, asking providers’ representatives a set of questions with reference to HKCAAVQ standards and criteria. Some of these questions might replicate questions that the QAA reviewers would plan to ask to inform the TNE Review. In this case the QAA reviewers were able to use relevant information collected during the HKCAAVQ accreditation exercise meetings to inform the QAA TNE Review. This allowed them to avoid unnecessary duplication of meetings and questions. QAA reviewers did require some additional information for the QAA TNE Review. This additional information was collected in a range of ways: a) at the end of each HKCAAVQ accreditation exercise meeting, by asking additional questions to participants at the meeting, the responses of which were used only for the QAA TNE Review. b) by setting up an additional meeting at the end of the HKCAAVQ accreditation visit programme to explore with stakeholders not already included in planned HKCAAVQ accreditation exercise meetings any further questions not already asked by the HKCAAVQ accreditation panel. This additional meeting (if required) was only for the QAA TNE Review and did not form part of the formal HKCAAVQ accreditation exercise. NOTE: During HKCAAVQ accreditation meetings, it was made clear to participants which questions were only for the HKCAAVQ accreditation exercise, which questions were asked for both HKCAAVQ accreditation and the QAA TNE Review, and which for QAA TNE Review only.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcomes</td>
<td>Separate reports were issued by individual agencies with reference to the relevant standards and criteria.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Challenges and Good Practices**

The successful realisation of the joint quality assurance exercises was built on a number of steps aimed at overcoming the challenges associated with the different approaches adopted by QAA and HKCAAVQ.

Quality assurance agencies differ greatly in purpose and scope from one country to another. A particular challenge was represented by the difference in focus and intended outcomes of the two agencies’ processes, with HKCAAVQ’s processes aimed at programme level accreditation while QAA’s TNE review processes being enhancement oriented and looking at a broader institutional and strategic level. Engaging in proactive dialogues and communications to share information becomes critical. QAA and HKCAAVQ started sharing from the very beginning information to enhance mutual understanding of the respective quality assurance processes and standards for transnational education. Data and intelligence about UK TNE in Hong Kong was shared from the start to facilitate the identification of the sample of UK provision to be looked at as part of QAA TNE Review and the provision which could fall under the scope of the joint review exercise. This formed a critical foundation of the joint quality assurance exercises.
Another challenge was to prepare staff and reviewers involved in the joint exercises to ensure they were familiar with quality assurance policies and standards adopted by both agencies. Briefing sessions were conducted to help staff and review panel members in the two quality assurance agencies understand the key features of the respective operating frameworks. For example, HKCAAVQ shared its experiences and observations in non-local programme accreditations with the QAA TNE Review team, while QAA staff shared TNE Review processes and practices with HKCAAVQ colleagues. Inter-agency cooperation provides staff and reviewers an opportunity to expand their range of quality assurance knowledge and experiences. It also enables them to contribute to the development of best practices in other jurisdictions.

Each quality assurance body has its own standards that providers are required to meet. HKCAAVQ conducts an accreditation exercise, in which providers must meet the standards required by HKCAAVQ to gain or maintain its accreditation status. The purpose of the QAA TNE Review is to identify good practices to enhance the quality of transnational education operated outside the UK. A preliminary desk-based comparability study was conducted to benchmark the standards and reference points underpinning the HKCAAVQ accreditation process and QAA TNE Review. It was found that there were a number of common standards used by both quality assurance agencies, such as staffing, resources as well as quality assurance systems. Identifying similarities in standards and processes through conducting desk-based study is useful to gain common grounds in the joint exercises.

Having providers embrace the joint exercise was another challenge as this was a new way of conducting an exercise. When liaising with the providers involved, some raised concerns about how different standards would be applied by the two agencies and how one agency standard would apply vis-a-vis another. So different parties may be uncertain about how it works. Different forms of briefing activity were also carried out to help UK providers understand the process and approach of the joint quality assurance exercises. Guidelines for all stakeholders involved were developed for all parties to ensure the same understanding of the process and the eventual outcomes.

Outcomes

The joint exercise conducted by QAA and HKCAAVQ is a good example showing how two quality assurance agencies worked collaboratively to support the developments in the global quality assurance community.

The first significant outcome of QAA/HKCAVQ joint exercise was to gain a deeper understanding of differences and commonalities of each other quality assurance systems and processes. A key difference between the two processes run by HKCAAVQ and QAA is that HKCAAVQ runs a programme accreditation process while QAA TNE Review is an enhancement-oriented review which includes a focus on broader institutional and strategic aspects. In addition, while HKCAAVQ accreditation has a definite outcome, which affects the programme recognition under the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework, QAA TNE Review aims to identity best practices and offer constructive recommendations for improvement. In terms of similarities, the two agencies work under very similar principles and processes. Similar principles included fitness for purpose, peer review and an evidence-based approach while the process consisted of the review of the documents and on-site visits to collect data. Similar standards were employed in regards to staffing and quality assurance norms. Key to the success of the joint review exercise was to seek common ground while retaining the respective fundamental differences in processes As a result, reciprocal trust in each other’s quality assurance system was strengthened.

Perhaps the most significant outcome of these joint quality assurance exercises has been that the participation of QAA reviewers in HKCAAVQ accreditation panels acting on behalf of both agencies facilitated the benchmarking of standards and processes through their practical implementation. On this basis, it was possible to conclude that HKCAAVQ accreditation decisions can be relied upon by QAA for UK quality assurance purposes as a guarantee of robust quality assurance of UK TNE in Hong Kong. This means that QAA can recognise HKCAAVQ accreditation decisions, avoiding the need of future review of UK TNE provision already accredited by HKCAAVQ. This is a big step toward enhancing the efficiency of the quality assurance of cross-border provision, avoiding unnecessary duplication of regulatory efforts.
Conclusion

More generally the successful example of cooperation between QAA and HKCAAVQ required flexibility, innovative thinking, regular communication, and understanding each other’s specific operating environment. The two agencies cooperated closely through all the stages of the QAA TNE Review process. Cooperation between the two agencies has also extended to the dissemination of the findings of the joint quality assurance exercise. The two agencies have co-organised a conference on cooperation in quality assurance event in Hong Kong, contributing also to a broader seminar looking at the issue of cooperation in the quality assurance of cross-border higher education in the East Asia context. Such close cooperation allowed both agencies to deepen reciprocal understanding, and to strengthen reciprocal trust in each other’s quality assurance systems. The joint quality assurance exercises conducted in Hong Kong can serve as a starting point to illustrate how two agencies can work in a collaborative and complementary fashion to develop an innovative approach to reduce duplication of efforts and achieve mutual recognition. More inter-agency collaboration is needed to further improve the quality of transnational education and tackle the challenges in the borderless world.
Quality assurance works hand-in-hand with qualifications framework to promote recognition

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ABSTRACT

The development of National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs) provides significant opportunities for Quality Assurance (QA) agencies to contribute solutions to the challenges of qualification recognition. The Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF) is underpinned by a robust quality assurance mechanism to ensure all HKQF-recognised qualifications are of good quality and standard. With the launch of HKQF, the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic & Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) plays an important role in facilitating recognition of tertiary education locally and internationally by implementing various innovative initiatives, including use of the HKQF in its qualifications assessment, the implementation of non-local programme accreditation, use of comparability studies on the HKQF and overseas QF, and participation in joint quality assurance exercises with other national QA agencies. These initiatives demonstrate how a quality assurance agency can support QF, and promote trust and enhance mutual recognition in a globalised world. This paper also describes challenges and solutions which can become the basis for further promotion of recognition of qualifications at the national and global levels.

Introduction

National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs) have become an increasingly important policy instrument to improve access and participation in lifelong learning. More than 150 countries and territories are involved in the development and implementation of NQFs (Education Bureau and European Commission 2016). Along with the growth of NQFs, regional qualifications frameworks have also been developed which enable promotion of international and global communication and cooperation and comparability of qualifications. Hong Kong established its Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF) in 2008, which is underpinned by a robust quality assurance mechanism to ensure all QF-recognised qualifications are of good quality and standard (HKQF 2018a). This paper will show how quality assurance undertakings by the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic & Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) works with the HKQF to facilitate recognition of local and international tertiary education.

Development of Qualifications Framework in Hong Kong

With the advent of globalisation and the transformation into a knowledge-based economy, the Hong Kong Government stressed the importance of enhancing capability and competitiveness of its workforce. In 2004, the Executive Council of Hong Kong endorsed the development of the HKQF to encourage and promote lifelong learning (Young 2008) and the HKQF was officially launched on 5 May 2008 upon the enactment of the Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications Ordinance (AAVQO) (Cap 592). The key objective of establishing the HKQF is to provide a platform to facilitate lifelong learning with a view to continuously enhancing the quality, professionalism and competitiveness of the workforce in an increasingly globalised and knowledge-based economy (HKQF 2018a).

The HKQF is a typical enabling framework which is a voluntary system and applicable to all sectors to facilitate an interface between academic, vocational and continuing education. There are three key features of the HKQF: QF levels, credits and award titles. The HKQF is a seven-level hierarchy of qualifications. Each level is
characterised by outcome-based generic level descriptors, describing the common features of qualifications (HKQF 2018a). A QF credit, expressed in notional learning hours, measures the volume or size of learning of a qualification. A QF award title distinguishes programmes according to their levels and credit sizes (QFS 2018). The Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT) system is another key function of the HKQF. Individuals are provided with flexibility while duplication in learning is minimised.

Since the launch of the HKQF, the HKCAAVQ, formerly the Hong Kong Council for Academic Accreditation (HKCAA), has statutory powers under the AAVQO (Cap 592) to act as the Accreditation Authority and Qualifications Register (QR) Authority. All qualifications have to be accredited by the HKCAAVQ, except for those accredited by self-accrediting institutions (QFS 2018). The Accreditation Authority is responsible for developing and implementing the standards and mechanism for academic and vocational accreditations and determining whether a qualification from a programme offered by a non-self-accrediting operator can meet a certain HKQF standard.

The public face of the HKQF is the QR, which is a centralised online database of qualifications. All qualifications listed on the QR are quality-assured and recognised under the HKQF (HKQF 2018b). In its role as the QR Authority, the HKCAAVQ is responsible for determining the entry of a qualification onto, and removal of such qualification from, the QR and monitoring advertisements relating to the HKQF to prevent misrepresentation (Education Bureau and European Commission 2016). As of December 2018, there are 8187 qualifications published on the QR offered by 237 operators (HKQF 2018b).

The development of the NQF is not necessarily limited to being a national policy, but one with global reach. Mrs. Carrie Lam, Chief Executive of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region also states that Hong Kong has been progressively raising its profile internationally and facilitating recognition of qualifications among counterparts in Mainland China and overseas (Education Bureau and HKQF 2018). With the advent of globalisation and rapid development of national and transnational qualifications frameworks, the Hong Kong Government strives to internationalise the HKQF to support Hong Kong to become a regional educational hub and provide a basis for referencing, alignment, or recognition of qualifications under the HKQF by overseas counterparts (QFS 2018).

HKCAAVQ’s Initiatives in Promoting Recognition under the HKQF

The integrity of the HKQF is underpinned by a robust quality assurance mechanism. The HKCAAVQ as the Accreditation Authority of HKQF in Hong Kong strives to work within the HKQF to enhance recognition of qualifications locally and internationally since its launch through the following initiatives:

1. **Use of Comparability Studies as Evidence in Accreditation and Assessment**

To further internationalise the HKQF and promote recognition, the Hong Kong Government conducted four comparability studies on the HKQF and overseas Qualifications Frameworks, including the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework, the New Zealand Qualifications Framework (NZQF) and the Irish National Framework of Qualifications. These four comparability studies not only facilitate recognition of qualifications, but also enhance the quality of education. The HKCAAVQ as the Accreditation Authority of the HKQF makes reference to such findings in its accreditation to safeguard the quality of education. For example, in a Learning Programme Accreditation exercise, the provider is required by the HKCAAVQ panel to review the HKQF levels of the individual modules of the non-local programmes it offers in Hong Kong to align with the outcomes of HKQF and EQF referencing exercises. In addition, the HKCAAVQ uses the findings in its assessment services. With reference to the comparative analysis of the NZQF and the HKQF, the HKCAAVQ updates its Country/Area Profile for New Zealand to enhance its assessment of New Zealand qualifications (Education Bureau, HKQF and NZQA 2018).

2. **Indication of HKQF Level in Qualifications Assessment**

Hong Kong is a top territory for sending students abroad and also a transnational education hot spot, alongside Australia and the UK (Ilieva et al. 2017). It is critical that the qualifications awarded by cross-border providers are legitimate and recognised for employment or further studies both a home and aboard (Knight 2007). However, in reality, non-local qualifications may not be recognised locally. Students with non-local qualifications...
sometimes are required to provide evidence to ascertain that their non-local qualifications are comparable in standard to the entry qualification requirements stipulated by employers or institutions. The HKCAAVQ provides qualifications assessment services to assess whether the totality of students’ local and non-local educational qualifications (obtained from senior second onwards) meets the standard of one particular level of qualifications in Hong Kong. The totality of the educational qualifications is assessed and compared to the level of the HKQF. In view of the development of national and transnational QFs, the qualifications with indications of the HKQF can facilitate cross-border mutual recognition of qualifications and the mobility of labour. NQFs act as translation devices and enable people to draw some initial conclusions when comparing qualifications across borders (Education Bureau, HKQF and NZQA 2018).

3. Non-local Programme Accreditation Recognised under HKQF

The credibility of higher education programmes and qualifications is important for students, their employers and the academic community (Knight 2007). The HKCAAVQ conducted a pilot exercise of non-local programme accreditation in 2009. After this successful pilot exercise, non-local programmes became eligible to undertake the same accreditation tests as local programmes in Hong Kong and if successful, be included on the QR. The number of accredited non-local providers of transnational education has increased. The result may be due to various incentives provided by the Hong Kong Government. Hong Kong is one of the few regions which provide bursaries to students on non-local programmes (Ilieva et al. 2017). For example, students of full-time non-local programmes are eligible to apply for financial assistance if such programmes have been accredited by the HKCAAVQ. In addition, such qualifications attained by students are recognised under the HKQF as meeting the same standard of comparable qualifications at the approved HKQF level(s) obtained in Hong Kong. As a result, students of accredited non-local programmes are provided with the same benefits and therefore equal opportunities are given to those students with accredited local qualifications (Kristoffersen and Chong 2015).

4. Use of NQFs to Facilitate International Cooperation and Recognition

It is becoming increasingly popular to use NQFs for international cooperation and recognition purposes (Education Bureau, HKQF and NZQA 2018). The HKCAAVQ and the UK’s Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) have developed a model for cross-border collaboration, having conducted two pilot joint quality assurance exercises involving two partnerships between a UK degree-awarding body and a Hong Kong provider in April and May 2018. NQF is an important tool for such an inter-agency collaboration. The HKQF and the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ) share common features, including the outcome-based approach, the naming of bachelor’s, master’s and doctoral award and measure of credits (QAA 2018). HKQF credits are also aligned with higher education credit framework for England in which a single credit represents 10 notional hours of learning. Credit is a tool for describing the comparability of learning achieved in terms of its volume and intellectual demand (QAA 2008). Through these joint initiatives, QAA concluded that it can confidently rely on HKCAAVQ’s accreditation decisions for UK Transnational Education (TNE) provision in Hong Kong with HKCAAVQ’s peer review panels and the use of the HKQF which shares similar features as the ones in the UK, such as levels and credits (QAA 2018).

Reflections: Challenges and Solutions

The HKQF helps define the standards of qualifications, assure quality, develop an articulation ladder and promote mobility of learners and labour (Education Bureau, HKQF and NZQA 2018). NQFs not only provide benefits, but also bring with them challenges for implementing the initiatives to promote recognition of tertiary education outcomes.

Different Purposes for NQFs

NQFs are mostly designed to clarify and map the qualifications in a country or territory for its citizens – the hierarchy, the links between them and pathways for learners (Education Bureau, HKQF and NZQA 2018). Each jurisdiction’s context is unique and has its own purposes and design for NQF. For example, the differences between the HKQF and the EQF derive principally from their individual fundamental purposes. The HKQF is a local framework with qualifications registered at a particular level of the HKQF while the EQF is a regional
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framework to allow comparison between qualifications on different national frameworks. No qualifications are registered on the EQF (Education Bureau and European Commission 2016). Therefore, it is important to understand the differences and limitations of comparability studies when using the findings in quality assurance processes. The comparability studies between the HKQF and overseas QFs are still important in providing common reference frameworks that enable comparisons and understanding of qualifications across participating countries (Education Bureau and HKQF 2018).

Diverse Education Systems

There is a need to develop an international system to facilitate and ensure recognition of academic and professional qualifications (Knight 2007). However, each country has its own education systems with different qualification titles and credits. When conducting qualifications assessment, both qualitative and quantitative assessment criteria are used in the assessment process. But, there are substantial differences (in terms of level, student load, quality, profile and learning outcomes) between the totality of the qualification and the targeted level of the HKQF. Therefore, it is a challenge to assess individual qualifications from one QF to another even though the qualification assessment outcome indicates an HKQF level. Reciprocal trust in each other's NQF is vital for recognition, but it takes time to build confidence. The conduct of benchmarking or comparability studies with overseas Qualification Frameworks appears as a good starting point to gain this reciprocal trust. In addition, the use of the findings by the HKCAAVQ shows core values of trust and respect among different stakeholders, including governments and quality assurance agencies.

Voluntary Quality Assurance System under the HKQF

It is a challenge to deal with the increase in cross-border education by traditional higher education and newer private commercial providers who do not participate in accreditation and quality assurance schemes (Knight 2007). Accreditation under HKQF is voluntary in Hong Kong. It is at the providers’ discretion to determine whether they use HKQF levels or credits for their programmes. Over the next decade Hong Kong will experience a substantial decline in secondary school leavers and the population of postsecondary students will drop. This increases competition among local and non-local institutions offering postsecondary programmes. Providers may not seek HKCAAVQ’s accreditation due to financial implications for accreditation fees. To support providers to undergo the accreditation under the HKQF, the Hong Kong Government has implemented incentive schemes for providers, such as the Accreditation Grant Scheme for Self-financing Programmes which covers the fees for accreditation exercises.

No Perfect Matches in NQF Collaboration

Even though the NQF is a useful tool for international collaboration, quality assurance agencies cannot expect that they are the same in detail, in terms of QF levels, credits and award titles across jurisdictions. In the joint quality assurance exercises, a difference between the FHEQ and the HKQF in the nomenclature of equivalent levels of study and awards are clearly evident (QAA 2018).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FHEQ (and EQF)</th>
<th>HKQF</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 4</td>
<td>Level 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 5</td>
<td>Level 4</td>
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<td>Level 6</td>
<td>Level 5</td>
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<td>Level 7</td>
<td>Level 6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Level 8</td>
<td>Level 7</td>
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</table>

Woodhouse (2004) says mutual recognition must take such differences into account. Therefore, differences in NQFs should not block recognition of qualifications. Furthermore, the similarities should also be taken into account. For example, the FHEQ and the HKQF are based on the achievement of learning outcomes on the basis of awards of qualifications from similar levels of education (QAA 2018). Therefore, the HKCAAVQ and QAA seek common ground while retaining differences. In addition, the two agencies cooperated closely, sharing
Quality Assurance Works Hand-in-hand with Qualifications Framework to Promote Recognition

data, information and intelligence on TNE Review and HKCAAVQ accreditation (Fearnside and Chong 2018). Such close cooperation allowed the two agencies to deepen reciprocal understanding of commonalities and differences. As a result, reciprocal trust in each other's quality assurance system has been strengthened (QAA 2018).

Conclusion

The HKQF is not only a policy to encourage lifelong learning and enhance the capability and competitiveness of the workforce in Hong Kong, but also a platform to facilitate recognition in a globalised world. To achieve this, quality assurance must work hand-in-hand with the Qualifications Framework. Recognition of quality of education is at the heart of quality assurance. The initiatives taken by HKCAAVQ can serve as examples to illustrate how a quality assurance agency can support the implementation of QF and work in a collaborative and complementary fashion with different stakeholders to achieve recognition of qualifications locally and internationally. Close communication among the jurisdictional regulatory bodies is essential in the implementation of NQFs to achieve mutual understanding and recognition.

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Quality Assurance, Qualifications and Recognition: Fostering Trust in a Globalised World

Theme 4. Challenges and solutions to recognition issues: New opportunities for QA contribution to recognition within the frames of global development – UNESCO Global Convention, and the state of affairs with regional conventions


Quality assurance practices in a very competitive higher education arena: Experiences and opportunities for Ndejje University

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Dr.Makumbi Rita, Director, Quality Assurance, Ndejje University and EAQAN President

ABSTRACT

Globally, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) must ensure competitiveness in order to win the trust and confidence of stakeholders that include students, government, employers to mention but a few. The critical strategies of innovativeness and integrity are expected to be manifest in all society dimensions.

Ndejje University, in Uganda is a religious based HEI that prides in the pursuit of integrity with innovative delivery of services. The strategic direction is owned by staff and continuously disseminated to the student body through the top management, students' guild, academic and support staff. This is not static in nature it is continuously studied and revised so as to ensure robust systems within the institution. This paper explores Ndejje University’s working experiences that support an innovative approach to ensure a conducive and stable learning environment despite the operational challenges within the delivery system.

Introduction

Worldwide today, higher education is increasingly valued given its ability to ensure linkages with the professional world which will foster economic growth and development in addition to social and cultural transformation. This high demand has equally met with considerable establishment of more HEIs. The global influx of students provides an opportunity of sharing experiences, understanding multi-cultural dynamics, learning together and encouraging staff and student mobility.

In 1992, Ndejje University (NDU) was established and championed private higher education in Uganda, based on a Christian foundation to train its graduates with an ethical fibre supported by the Christian practice and Christian integrity. In order to operationalise the innovative strategies, the consideration of value for money and continuous dissemination has enabled peers to understand and appreciate that Quality Assurance (QA) work is paramount. Institutional implementation is through built networks with key stakeholders in a particular activity.

Students as a critical stakeholder of NDU are given the opportunity to fill out forms that assist in collecting information since they are the major expression of competition and trust. Management uses this feedback to fill those gaps to students’ satisfaction; and as major recipients of services the institution ensures proper delivery of teaching and learning services, acceptable performance of lecturers and support services. In addition, the students are able to give us information on the social aspects of their stay at the institution most notable, on regular basis, the type of meals being offered, the time keeping and aspects of the quality. This information is supplemented by the physical attendance of the QA personnel who partake the students’ meals to ensure consistency. This has increased the strength of the QA department reports as evidenced by the prompt corrections made in case the need arises; thereby providing the students with higher quality service(s) resulting in a credible student experience.

Another innovation is to engage the students’ Guild and the class coordinators both formally and informally. These are invited for meetings and where it has not been possible the department encourages the use of social media platforms since students are more comfortable with them as a medium of communication. This approach has helped the institution to avert situations quickly by prioritising actions as dictated by the issues at hand.
through delicate but real time information. The QA personnel have further learnt that what the students deem very critical might not be understood by the immediate ‘in charge’, yet if not handled fast can be disruptive to the system. This practice has further helped the QA department to understand student challenges and devise innovative solutions. In addition, as a way to encourage student participation in the non academic arena, a ‘community hour’ is arranged once every week where the students meet with other stakeholders and express their satisfaction and/or grievances directly. This practice is meant to mitigate problems associated with the communication gap.

Furthermore, the opportunity to work with the graduating class allows the QA department to access critical information that these students were unable (for different reasons) to provide as regular students, they communicate their experiences while at the institution in the ‘Exit Survey’ tool which they fill without any reservations. The Exit Survey tool is blinded however the faculty name can be provided. It inquires about the different areas of student life and allows qualitative data to be provided as a way to supplement the structured questionnaire attached. These sets of students are eager to be proud alumni and give recommendations that assist in the long term improvement plan of the department and the institution as a whole.

The industry sector as another stakeholder takes up the students for industrial training and is further expected to provide employment opportunities. The uniqueness here is that the University encourages students to freely network and access the best firms for their industrial training placement and inform the University team. The student led initiative not only grounds them in practical and deeper learning of their speciality, but also presents strategic possibilities of retention (given the prevalence of high unemployment) upon completion of their course of study. However, staff too is actively involved in identifying strategic placements for the students which allows staff to be relevant in the outside world of practice. These approaches improve student learning experiences and the staff is able to further network with the aim to improve curricular and research. This continuous linkage between the industry and the institution also provides real time feedback which informs policy.

The community is another stakeholder. Students are continuously timetabled to be involved in the community around the University. Ndeje University main campus is in the heart of the war ravaged rural area. The student body is encouraged to make a difference by imparting knowledge to the local community; most notably on the basic technologies of renewable energy and water resources. The Faculties of Environment and Agricultural sciences, Engineering and Social sciences have taken the lead in training some of the locals on how to generate bio gas energy, and the conservation of the environment through production of briquettes from readily available animal waste and maize cobs respectively. The knowledge generated by these students helps the institution to gain trust from the community that it is there to improve the community in which it operates and the students are obtaining more practical skills relevant to their delivery in the future.

The involvement of professional bodies as another stakeholder enhances regular inspection and follow up on the content taught to the students and builds trust in the graduates of that discipline. These bodies are given the curricular which they improve and in some cases like for Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA) the students have benefitted. After review of the programs, and upon satisfactory delivery, the institutions’ graduates have been exempted from some course units while in the Engineering discipline, students subscribe to the Engineers’ registration Board (of Uganda) and have found easier registration process and job placements after program completion.

The Government as a stakeholder provides continuous dialogue and supervision to ensure that all University programs meet with the minimum requirements which not only enhances regional and global confidence, but also encourages recognition, competitiveness and trust of the students’ qualifications globally. This is done mainly by the regulatory body, the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) of Uganda which also supports Institutional and Program Peer review exercises. The most recent in September 2018 was pioneered and implemented with the Inter University Council for East Africa (IUCEA) in the Faculty of Engineering.

In addition, The institution involvement with other QA regulatory bodies in the region and continent which include but not limited to Ugandan Universities Quality Assurance Forum (UUQAF), East African Higher Education Quality Assurance Network (EAQAN), Association of African Universities (AAU), necessitates access and opportunity for benchmarking, capacity building, peer review of our programs which motivates national, regional and continental competition.
Ndejje University strives to produce a graduate of sound integrity who is expected to serve inclining on the ethical fibre and Christian principles inculcated in him/her during the training to avoid acts of corruption, dishonesty, embezzlement which the country grapples with. This explains the inclusion of ‘Christian ethics’ as a core course unit across all programs at the institution. The Christian character is further seen through sports; NDU is a sports power house in the country, region, and beyond. The athletes are widely accepted as disciplined as they do not involve in sports dishonesty activities such as drug abuse.

In conclusion therefore, for Ndejje University to establish and promote trust in the globalised context today, they must establish a cordial working relationship with all the stakeholders and also establish a robust quality assurance mechanism which will enhance and propel competitiveness in the academic programs, research and innovations.