QUALITY ASSURANCE FOR HIGHER EDUCATION TRANSFORMATION IN A POST-SOVIET CONTEXT: THE CASE OF ARMENIA

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OUTLINE

• The context
• QA approaches in Armenia
• Key concepts explored
• Main findings
• Major implications
ARMENIA:
GENERAL INFORMATION ON TERTIARY EDUCATION

Population: 2,967,004 (July 2009 est.)

18 public universities and 13 branches
3 intergovernmental universities
48 private universities
37 private accredited universities
5 branches of international and non-state universities
3 branches of international public universities
83 public colleges
34 vocational institutions
12 private accredited colleges
11 private licensed colleges
POST-SOVET ISSUES

- Management styles: centrally controlled vs. independent
- Curriculum: “blank” and “black” aspects
- Modernization:
  - Teaching and learning approaches
  - Lack of diversity of sources and resources
- Student demand
  - Explosion in demand for higher education
  - Diversification of provisions (emergence of private sector)
  - Diversification of sources (private funding in public sector)
QUALITY ASSURANCE IN ARMENIA

• Two major phases
  • First phase: 2000-2008
    • Administering body: Ministry of Education and Science
    • Accreditation of programmes
    • In case of 65% of accredited programmes the whole university was accredited
    • Participation of only private sector, although the public sector was obliged to do so by law
  • Second phase: 2008 – up to now
    • Administering body: ANQA
    • QA Framework:
      • institutional audit – development
      • Programme accreditation – recognition
    • Transitional period to allow for establishment of the necessary mechanisms for sustainable management.
QUESTIONS EXPLORED

• What is the effect of the new quality assurance approaches on the higher education system in Armenia?

• What is the best approach to quality assurance for the universities in a post-Soviet country?
QA PREREQUISITES

PDCA Analytical Framework

VALUES
- Meaning of change
- Process of change

Change knowledge

First order change
Second order change

Organizational culture change
ANQA QA APPROACH

• Development and enhancement vs. control

• Ongoing workshops aimed at preaching the philosophy and values of change

• Elaboration on the ESGs to develop own standards and guidelines to be understood by the stakeholders and meet the needs

• Involvement of the teachers and administrators in the development of QA standards, policies and procedures

• A series of pilots at both private and public universities

• Creating favorable background for promoting transformation
  • Ongoing discussions with the Ministry of Education and Science and RA Government to revise approaches to QA
• (1) the extent of quality management (here we used PDCA cycle to analyse the quality management approaches),

• (2) the extent of change knowledge of the actual implementers,

• (3) needs to re-culture the system to meet the demands,

• (4) the extent to which ANQA quality assurance approaches impact the performance of the universities in the sphere of quality assurance, and

• (5) the perceptions of the direct implementers about the quality assurance approach that best fits the post-Soviet context.
ANQA PILOTS

• Sample
  • 4 institutional audits - 3 public and 1 private university
  • 6 programme accreditations – 3 public universities, 2 private universities and 1 college

• Data sources
  • Desk-reviews
  • Focus groups – self-assessment team, teachers, students, administrators
  • Questionnaires – on the needs and effects of ANQA approaches
FINDINGS:
QUALITY MANAGEMENT

PLAN
DO
CHECK
ACT

6/03/2011
FINDINGS: CHANGE KNOWLEDGE

- Poor: 60%
- Less than adequate: 20%
- Adequate: 10%
- More than adequate: 0%
- Substantial: 0%
FINDINGS:
NEED TO RE-CULTURE
FINDINGS: ANQA’S IMPACT

- ANQA's impact on learning:
  - **no impact**: 0%
  - **some impact**: 5%
  - **facilitate**: 10%
  - **guide**: 20%
  - **provide for learning**: 35%
FINDINGS: ANQA’S IMPACT

• **Administrator:** *It has been a very productive process… we have come to understand the mechanisms underlying HEI management… Throughout the process we developed almost 50% of our documents workable in real life.*

• **QA Officer:** *This is a challenging process, but it does make you learn a lot.*
FINDINGS: PERCEPTIONS ON THE BEST APPROACH TO QA

• Strategies aimed at supporting universities and promoting development seem to be a priority
  • 77% of the respondents stated their readiness and need to undergo a transitional preparatory phase.
  • 61% of the respondents found institutional audits providing for necessary guidance and training aimed at development of an internal quality assurance system and enhancement to be a necessary element
87% of the respondents found voluntary programme accreditation leading to credit recognition, state funding and internationalization to be appropriate only after some preparatory work during institutional audits has been done.

Only 23% of the respondents considered their institutions to be ready to undergo programme accreditation and institutional audits without any preparatory phase.
MAJOR IMPLICATIONS

• Fitness for purpose vs. transformation

• Role of a QA agency: advising (stimulation and facilitation of reforms) vs. accrediting

• Professionalization: enhancement vs. control

• Depth: teaching and learning level vs. mere procedures

• Role of international organizations: promoting
  • Comparability across diversity of systems –targeting teaching and learning level
  • Qualifications recognition

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