Quality Information Systems as response to Rankings- An innovative strategy of Asia Pacific Quality Network.

Subtheme 2

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Abstract-

This paper advocates setting up of robust Quality Information systems at institutional , national and international level in the wake of growing clout of rankings . Findings in the paper are based on the project of Asia Pacific Quality Network supported by UNESCO GIQAC.

Gaps and disparities exist in different parts of world in terms of quality information. Well-established national and regional systems and networks in Europe and north America. Relatively unorganised systems in other part of world with some exceptions like Australia, Japan. This gap is supposedly being filled by so called national and global Rankings. UNESCO Portal on Higher Education Institutions offers access to on-line information on higher education institutions recognized or otherwise.It provides students, employers and other interested parties with access to authoritative and up-to-date information on the status of higher education institutions and quality assurance in participating countries . The problem is that a very few countries have joined this vital initiative of sharing authentic information on higher education. Situation in Asia Pacific is more critical as only 7 countries have joined this initiative.

This Project aimed to map practices of Quality Assurance Agencies and other bodies in spreading quality information among stakeholders in general and students in particular. It also tried to map as to how UNESCO Portal on higher education is being received by QAAs in APQN region. Main objective is to promote this initiative among QA community by providing a toolkit based on mapping of good practices and useful templates such as UNESCO Portal.

As a result of the survey and analysis of the responses the project group strongly recommended the setting up Asia-Pacific Educational Quality Information Portal- APEQUIP on lines of ENIC NARIC. Study on various international information networks has provided a way for the toolkit development. Approach should be to fill the gaps and provide connections to existing information networks.

It is argued that if QA Network succeeds in setting up Quality information systems in the region, it will not only provide good alternative to Rankings but also it will be an unique service to students and other stakeholders across Asia Pacific as well as globally.

Context of Student mobility, QA and Rankings-

Student Mobility is on rise both at national and regional level. More than 2.5 million students studying outside their home countries. Figure estimated to rise to 7 million international students by 2020.

Many underlying trends exist . The major one is abou students from Asia moving to North America, Western Europe, and Australia, etc. Quality information is vital for student mobility

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The main claim of rankings is to provide interpretable information about the institutions to different stake holders .

 Some of the Ranking bodies also claim that rankings can also serve as part of a framework for national assessment, accountability and quality assurance in the higher education system and arguably can provide some of the rationale for allocation of funds.

The critiques have time and again pointed out serious lacunas with rankings regarding methodology, reliability and even challenged motives of some rankings.

Harvey (2008) stresses that, 'rankings provide a real threat to quality processes. The simplistic measurement….. league tables appear to have more popular appeal and even credibility….., than the meticulous hard work of quality agencies.'

In fact these concerns are more acute in developing countries like India where Access and equity are equally important as quality. Onslaught of rankings backed by powerful media are causing confusions among stakeholders. While the QA is still voluntary, the HEIs have found easy option of obtaining quality tag by opting to media rankings. (Patil, 2010)

'the challenge is to ensure that global rankings are effectively displaced by alternative instruments that serve important   educational and social purposes,'[Saleem]

Student body in Europe has called (ESU, 2008) for information systems to be set up that acknowledge 'the diversity and multiple purposes..and 'can become a useful tool for student choice'.

UNESCO portal on higher education and other initiatives.

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About the QIS Project

With this backdrop APQN decided to embark on Quality Information Systems Project

UNESCO GIQAC approved Project Proposal of APQN on Toolkit for Quality Information system (QIS) with Dr Jagannath Patil as Principal investigator.

This Project aims to -

- Map practices of Quality Assurance Agencies and other bodies in spreading quality information among stakeholders in general and students in particular.
- Tries to map as to how UNESCO Portal on higher education is being received by QAAs in APQN region.
- Promote this initiative among QA community by providing a toolkit based on mapping of good practices and useful templates such as UNESCO Portal.

APQN conducted a preliminary workshop to identify good practices in the APQN annual conference held in **1 March**, 2012, Siem Reap Angkor, Kingdom of Cambodia.

The participants were invited to share policies and practices in respective QAAs and / or HEIs in terms of spreading quality information such as accreditation status of institutions and programmes. The workshop was lead by APQN president, Dr. Jagannath Patil, with Vice President, Prof. Angela Yung Chi Hou as co-facilitator

APQN conducted a survey targeting all APQN members including full, intermediate, institutional and observer types, for their views on the QA information in regards to the developing QIS system.Data compilation and analyses was greatly supported by Chung lin Chiang, Darren Lin, Yung Yung Chang and DJ Savitha. Survey was followed up by Fang Le.

Key Findings of survey-

1. Growing awareness of QA information transparency but lack of coordination at national and regional level to offer information at single source

2. More attention to students' concern but limited focus on international students

3. Low level of knowledge and usage of UNESCO portal

4. Mixed response toward rankings

5. Degree mills are mostly unnoticed

6. Evidence of Good practices of Quality information system in some QAAs

7. Need for national and regional information centres with great degree of coordination

Based on findings of survey APQN embarked on mission of developing QIS toolkit by learning from UNESCO Portal, ENQA NARIC and other initiatives.

Roadmap for Asia-Pacific Educational Quality Information Portal- APEQUIP

Following is the outcome of survey of Asia Pacific region on quality information system, its analyses and suggestions emerged from deliberations of the workshop held in Quezon City, Philippines on 9th July 2012.

APQN will dedicate a webpage or a portal that will provide listing and links to all QAAs and national information centres [Ministries or other bodies responsible in respective country to provide information on higher education systems] in Asia Pacific region. This will be on lines ENIC NARIC. This portal will also provide links to other international and regional databases websites such as UNESCO portal, ENIC NARIC, etc.

The draft toolkit containing the template at 3 levels is proposed below:

International/ Regional level	National Level	Institutional Level
Basic Information		
1.About Asia Pacific region	1.Competent authorities to recognize/ permit operations of HEIs	1.Approved name of institution and the sponsoring trust/society
2.Contact details of QAAs and competent authorities concerning higher education in countries/ territories in the Asia Pacific region	2. HEIs recognized by competent authorities	2. Competent authority which permitted/ recognised HEI
3.Contact details of National Information Centres in the Asia pacific region	3.Higher education programmes recognized by competent authorities	3. Period of validity of registration and/or recognition
4.Link to UNESCO Portal on higher education	4. Information for students planning to study in the country • Visa requirements • Living costs	4. Registration / recognition/ certification numbers, if applicable

	• Language requirements	
5.Link to ENIC-NARIC network and other related recognition networks and international databases	5.Information on the higher education system • Description of the education system • Progression chart • Competent bodies • Ministries/departments responsible for education • Quality assurance mechanisms/bodies • Types of institutions • List of accredited/ quality assured HEIs and programmes	5. List of constituent units and programmes offered
6.Link to INQAAHE and other regional QA networks	6. Cross-border higher education- regulations, authorities, facilitating organisations and lists of offerings.	6. Faculty members list
	7. National Information Centre contact details	7. Admission policy, procedures, dates and fees
	8. Information on degree mills / alerts on fake institutions	8. Status of quality assurance / accreditation
	9. Links to UNESCO portal, APQN portal and other national / international information sources	9. Contact details of relevant QA body and state authorities
		10. Other information as required by national laws/regulations
Advanced Information		
1..Link to CHEA portal	1. Information on foreign credential assessment and recognition • Description (procedures) • Competent bodies	1. History
2.Links to alerts on degree mills and accreditation mills	3. National Qualifications framework including credit systems and learning outcomes etc.	2. Location and Infrastructure
	4. Definition of key terms	3. Accommodation facilities and costs
		4. Student Services and Support
		5. Scholarships, Free-ships and Loans
		6. Government Grants
		7. Faculty Quality
		8. Grievance redressal mechanisms for students
		9. Financial resources

		10. Library acquisions
		11. Research output
		12. Teaching assessment
		13. Learning outcomes
		14.Information point for international students
		15. Graduation rates
		16. Employment rates
		17. Visa requirements

[Source- Patil and Angela et al, unpublished APQN Project Report]

As a result of the survey and analysis of the responses the project group strongly recommended the setting up Asia-Pacific Educational Quality Information Portal- APEQUIP on lines of ENIC NARIC. Study on various international information networks has provided a way for the toolkit development. Approach should be to fill the gaps and provide connections to existing information networks.

Based on the project group recommendations APQN has planned following measures to be initiated .

- Advocacy to QAAs for joining UNESCO Portal
- Dissemination of good practices in Quality information
- Supporting QAAs to develop national information systems
- Further consultations and Pilot implementation of Toolkit and templates before launching of portal
- Supporting HEIs to develop information systems at institutional level.
- Regional portal to act as single point resource of information on quality of HEIs to stakeholders like students, HEIs and employers.

It is believed that if APQN succeeds in setting up Quality information systems in the region, it will not only provide good alternative to Ranking but also it will be an unique service to students and other stakeholders across Asia Pacific as well as globally.

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